



Africa - Climate Injustice



Climate change is unjust because it is future generations and those who contributed least to creating the problem that suffer most.

Climate change is a reality affecting all parts of the world. Wealthier countries experienced storms, floods and heat waves, causing damage and destruction. But their wealth allows them to cushion and to cope with the aftermath of these extreme events.

In developing countries this cushion does not exist. Climate change takes the form of encroaching deserts, unpredictable rain patterns, and rising seas. These have forced millions of people to lose their homes, land and livelihoods.

Africa is particularly vulnerable. This vulnerability is exacerbated by poor economies and a consequent low adaptive capacity. Poverty, frequent natural disasters, such as droughts and floods, make matters even worse.

“Climate change is a global problem with grave implications... It represents one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day. Its worst impact will probably be felt by developing countries in coming decades.”

Laudato Si 26

The Road to Paris

Two decades of UN COP (*Conferences of the Parties*) meetings have been ineffective. The self-interest of richer countries has prevented the establishment of binding carbon emission targets.

The Paris COP21 in December 2015 has been described as *“the last chance saloon”* to make an agreement that will limit the rise in the Earth’s temperature to two degrees so as to prevent a greater rise that would trigger irreversible and life-changing effects on our planet. To succeed, the Paris Conference will have to agree to a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions of between forty and seventy per cent over the next thirty-five years.

The other goal of COP21 is to secure financing to help developing countries adapt to climate change.

The big question is whether or not countries will set aside national interests for the common good. If they fail to do so then ocean levels will rise by almost a meter. (*UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*) This will result in the flooding of large areas of the world’s surface, forcing millions to migrate. Effects on already arid countries in Africa will also be devastating.

Effects of Climate Change

Evidence shows that Climate Change is already affecting the health, livelihoods, food productivity, water availability, and overall security of the African people.

1. Impact on weather patterns

Africa has seen rainfall decrease over large parts of the Sahel and Southern Africa, and increase in parts of Central Africa. Over the past twenty-five years the number of weather-related disasters, such as floods and droughts, have doubled, resulting in Africa having a higher mortality rate. It also results in huge economic losses.



2. Impact on Water Supply and Quality

Observable effects of climate change on water resources in Africa include: change in distribution of rainfall, drying-up of rivers, and the receding of bodies of water.

3. Impact on Agriculture and Food

Across Africa the landscape is changing. Droughts, heat stress and flooding have led to a reduction in crop yields and livestock productivity.

Rainfall has been below average with 2011 being the driest year since 1951, a serious problem for a continent almost entirely dependent on rain for its agriculture.

4. Impact on Human Health

Examples of climate related health impacts include: severe heat stress linked to sustained increases in temperature; breathing problems and respiratory diseases; malnutrition due to reduced food production; the spread of malaria. Increases in rainfall and temperature can also cause spreading of dengue fever.

5. Impacts on Shelter

Severe flooding and intense droughts have led to the destruction of many villages and homes. Conflicts over resources also exacerbate these impacts and in turn, contribute to the ongoing migration within and between countries in Africa. Extreme events displace large numbers of people, especially those who are unable to respond and rebuild after disasters due to lack of resources.

6. Impact on Vulnerable Populations

Women, children and the elderly are more vulnerable to climate change impacts. Women often experience additional duties as caregivers. Water scarcity places an additional burden on African women, who often walk for hours, and sometimes, even for days to fetch it.

Children and the elderly face graver risks due to susceptibility to infectious diseases. Children often die from starvation, malnutrition or diarrheal diseases. (IPCC, 2014)

7. Impact on National Security

Climate change impacts have the potential to exacerbate national security issues and increase the number of internal and international conflicts. Conflicts often occur over the use of already limited natural resources, fertile ground, and water. Changes in the timing and intensity of rainfall have threatened water availability, and are causing conflicts over this limited resource. (IPCC, 2014)

The changes in precipitation and temperature are already affecting crop yields in Sub-Saharan Africa. This has resulted in food shortages that have triggered cross border migration and intra-regional conflicts.

8. Impact on Ecosystems

Climate change has already led to changes in ecosystems in southern and western Africa. The migration patterns, geographic range and seasonal activity of many terrestrial and marine species have shifted in response to climate change. (IPCC, 2014).

Source: www.350africa.org - adapted from article by Bhavna Deonarain



COP21



The previous article described the status quo and shows the already serious impacts of climate change being experienced in Africa. If the UN's Paris Conference does not succeed in setting effective limits on carbon emissions and in providing funds for mitigation, then world-wide, the effects of climate change will become worse.

How quickly and to what extent we do not know for certain, but what is absolutely certain is that it will be the poorest in low-lying countries and in Africa who suffer first and most.

Climate Change Vulnerability Index 2015

According to this index seven of the the ten countries most at risk from climate change are in Africa. The Index evaluates the sensitivity of populations, the physical exposure of countries, and governmental capacity to adapt to climate change over the next thirty years.

Bangladesh (first and most at risk), Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Nigeria, Chad, Haiti, Ethiopia, Philippines, Central African Republic and Eritrea are the ten countries facing the highest levels of risk.

Climate Change, Faith and Justice



Any harm done to the environment is harm done to humanity"

Pope Francis, UN General Assembly 2015

mon good", belonging to all (Par. 23) and that Christians must ***"realize that their responsibility within creation, and their duty towards nature and the Creator, are an essential part of their faith.*** Par 64.

The Encyclical's call for *"an integral ecology"* inseparable from the the common good is a development in Catholic Social Teaching. It connects care of the natural world (which is no longer secondary and has its own intrinsic value) with justice for the poorest and most vulnerable people.

This is a theme Pope Francis developed in his address to the UN General Assembly. *"The misuse and destruction of the environment are also accompanied by a relentless process of exclusion. In effect, a selfish and boundless thirst for power and material prosperity leads both to the misuse of available natural resources and to the exclusion of the weak and disadvantaged....Economic and social exclusion is a complete denial of human fraternity and a grave offense against human rights and the environment. The poorest are those who suffer most... they are cast off by society, forced to live off what is discarded and suffer unjustly from the abuse of the environment. They are part of today's widespread and quietly growing "culture of waste".*

Climate Change is unjust and its impact on Africans and the developing world is unjust. Making a Christian response to it demands both an individual and collective action that is an essential part of faith.

Over the last three decades human misuse of the created world and its consequent impact on the environment and the poorest has become a matter of particular concern for the Church.

Pope St John Paul II called for an *"ecological conversion"* and for *"changes in established life-styles, in order to limit the waste of environmental and human resources, thus enabling every individual and all the people of the earth to have a sufficient share of these resources."*

(Centissimus Annus).

His successor Pope Benedict XVI described the *"ecological crisis"* as an urgent issue demanding solidarity: *"The protection of the environment, of resources and of the climate obliges all international leaders to act jointly and to show a readiness to work in good faith, respecting the law and promoting solidarity with the weakest regions of the planet."* (*Caritas in Veritate* 50)

In *Laudato Si* Pope Francis both sums up and goes beyond what was said before. He asserts that the climate is *"a com-*