

Why are the Poor the Most Vulnerable?

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Fact Sheet

People depending on farming, fishing and forestry might see their livelihoods destroyed by lower rainfall, degraded soils, impoverished forests and depleted fishing grounds.

Climate Change

Changing natural resources

The predicted impacts of climate change could increase hunger and poverty worldwide, as changing weather patterns could adversely affect economic activity, particularly in natural resources. People depending on farming, fishing and forestry might see their livelihoods destroyed by lower rainfall, degraded soils, impoverished forests and depleted fishing grounds.

The poor would suffer most with climate change. They will find it difficult to change to new crops that need less water, to extend arable land and to adopt new intensive fishing methods needing expensive machinery and energy from fossil fuels. The urban poor would also find food supplies disrupted and their shelters and urban services affected by more extreme weather conditions such as cyclones.

Special groups

Women and children will be most vulnerable among the poor, as seen in the African droughts of 1980s. Here, three quarters of the 150 million victims were woman and children.

If temperatures rise and if the ozone layer continues to thin allowing more ultraviolet radiation to reach the Earth, the human immunity responses will weaken and there will be more health risks to threaten young and malnourished children, the ill, the old, the women and the unsheltered.

Increased migration

Climate change might increase mass migrations from the most affected regions to those less vulnerable. People will be move within national borders, and from the poor to the richer countries.

These migrations will inevitably cause social and political tensions. Atoll countries may be even more heavily affected with entire populations displaced by rising sea levels and more severe climatic conditions. The richer countries of the Pacific rim are the likely places for these environmental refugees to initially settle.

Cultural costs

The victims of climate change in the displaced and impoverished populations will lose their cultural identity as living in constant emergency would force them to adopt ecologically and socially unsustainable ways in their new societies. The cultural disruption can ultimately create social and political problems which are just as serious as the environment problems that caused them in the first place.

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