



# FACTSHEET

## GLOBAL WARMING AND POVERTY

Global warming is already happening. Its impact is being felt most by the world's poorest people. Food production, water supplies, public health, and people's livelihoods are all being damaged and undermined.

Global warming threatens to reverse human progress, making the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for poverty reduction unachievable.

Industrialized countries must lead the switch from polluting fossil-fuel based energy systems to clean energy – they have the biggest historical and present share of emissions, the best investment possibilities, and a large, highly skilled workforce. The new models for energy development must apply in industrialized countries as well as in less-developed countries.

Today, humanity faces the intertwined challenges of horrific levels of poverty and a rapidly warming global climate. There is no "either/or" approach possible; the world must meet both its commitments to achieve the MDGs and tackle climate change. The two are inextricably linked.

### *A world spinning out of control*

Climate change has started to affect weather patterns, sea levels, seasons, and both glacial and polar ice. The global weather system is threatening to spin out of control.

For people this means that seasons become unpredictable, farming becomes riskier, freshwater supplies become unreliable, storms and rising sea levels threaten to take away whole islands and coastal areas. Survival under such conditions becomes ever more difficult – in the last few years, there have been more environmental refugees than at any other time. Climate change, if left unchecked, will drive these incidents out of control.

### *Development models*

Already in 2002, the Red Cross's World Disasters Report called for a new development model in the face of the challenges of global warming, in which risks are proactively assessed, prioritized, and reduced. In the face of global warming, new models of development and nature conservation will be needed which are



Kabara village on a small island in Fiji. More violent storms, drought and sea level rise are starting to make life in this village difficult.  
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climate resistant and climate friendly. Every policy decision at every level must pass the test of whether it will increase or decrease damage to the Earth's climate system, as well as whether or not it is vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Communities at risk must be at the centre of this planning process if it is to succeed.

### Task list for wealthier countries

To stop climate change from running out of control, the world needs to keep global average warming well below 2°C in comparison to pre-industrial levels. Emissions of CO<sub>2</sub> and other greenhouse gases by industrialized countries must be cut on the order of 60–80 per cent (relative to 1990 levels) by the middle of this century. Industrialized countries have an obligation to take a lead in climate change mitigation and adaptation, and to bear an equitable burden of the associated costs.

The industrialized countries have to:

- Commit themselves to the deep emissions reductions making it more likely that global average temperature does not exceed 2°C
- Fulfill their obligations for emissions reduction under the Kyoto Protocol, the world's only legal multilateral base for action to contain climate change.
- The two key signatories which failed to ratify the Kyoto Protocol – the US and Australia – need to upscale their domestic efforts to reduce emissions, and re-join the multilateral effort at the earliest opportunity.
- Renewable energy and energy efficiency are the options of choice for new energy development in all countries and should be implemented on a large scale. Zero-emission strategies need to be developed with serious commitment.
- Carbon markets need to be developed and extended to industrializing countries, to ensure that investments in low-carbon technologies become more competitive, and that markets can drive the process from coal to clean energy.

### Action in developing countries<sup>1</sup>

Governments in developing countries must facilitate grassroots, community-based approaches to reducing harm from extreme weather events, like storms, droughts, floods and changing seasons. In our experience, these practical examples – including water management, disaster relief, storm and flood protection, seed banks, and conservation of forests and other ecosystems – represent effective ways for threatened communities to adapt to at least to some global warming.

### Clean energy!

If they are replicated and scaled-up, small-scale renewable energy projects promoted by governments and community groups can help both to tackle poverty

and reduce climate change. This will require political commitment and new funds from governments in all countries, a major shift in priorities by development bodies, as well as re-directing private investment.

### How to help the poorest countries

Priorities to help developing countries to prepare for climate change impacts include:

- A global risk assessment of the likely costs of adaptation to climate change in poor countries at predicted temperature thresholds.
- Ensure favorable legal and economic conditions for clean energy alternatives.
- Ensure that investment from aid agencies such as the World Bank and the EU supports clean energy alternatives.
- Channel private investment towards clean energy alternatives.
- Commensurate new funds and other resources made available by industrialized countries for poor country adaptation, bearing in mind that rich-country subsidies to their domestic, fossil-fuel industries stood at \$73 billion per year in the late 1990s.
- Effective and efficient arrangements to respond to the increasing burden of climate-related disaster relief. Disaster awareness campaigns are needed, supported by materials produced at the community level and made available in local languages.
- Coordinated plans, from local to international levels, for relocating threatened communities with appropriate political, legal, and financial resources.



Dingboche village, Nepal, threatened by outburst floods from glacier lakes. The threat grows daily as glaciers melt rapidly because of global warming. Once the glaciers are gone, a crucial freshwater reserve for up to 2 billion people will have disappeared.  
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<sup>1</sup> For more information, see 'Up in Smoke? Threats from, and responses to the impact of global warming on human development' by leading environmental and development organisations.  
<http://www.panda.org/climate/upinsmoke>