

Global Warming and the Poor

A Fact Sheet by the Evangelical Environmental Network

A consensus of the world's leading scientists as represented by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate change has concluded that human-induced climate change is real and that we need to take action now.

Impacts are already starting to occur. Global warming is projected to hit the poor the hardest.

- Agricultural output in many poorer countries could be significantly reduced. An additional 80-90 million poor people could be at risk of hunger and malnutrition in this century.
- Hurricane Katrina demonstrated that even in the U.S. the poor are the most vulnerable to extreme weather events. Poorer countries are much less able to withstand the devastation caused by extreme weather events, and climate change is likely to increase such events. For example, global warming could increase the number of people impacted by flooding by 20-50 million.
- Hundreds of millions of people will be at increased risk of malaria, dengue fever, yellow fever, encephalitis, and other infectious diseases because of global warming.
- Each of these stressors increases the likelihood of environmental refugees and violent conflicts.
- A heat wave in Europe in 2003 due primarily to global warming killed at least 20,000, mainly the poor and elderly. Such summers are projected to be the average by the middle of this century.
- Although the U.S. will likely have the resources to adapt to the impacts of global warming, the poor in the U.S. will also suffer disproportionately. For example, large cities in the U.S. may experience, on average, several hundred extra deaths per summer.
- In addition to impacts on human beings, up to 37% of God's land-based species could be committed to extinction by 2050, making global warming the largest single threat to biodiversity.

Because Jesus is our Lord, the evangelical community has worked in poor countries for many years and spent billions of dollars to help people meet their basic needs and to share the Good News about Jesus Christ. In the future global warming will be an insidious reversal of our long-standing efforts to help the poor.

We care about what happens to the poor because God loves them. We care about these projected impacts of global warming because they are a profound challenge to Christian justice and Jesus' call to care for "the least of these" (Mt. 25:40, 45). Pollution that causes the threat of global warming violates Jesus' Great Commandments to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength" and "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Mk. 12:30-31), and the Golden Rule to "Do to others as you would have them do to you" (Lk. 6:31). And global warming is a breach of our responsibility to care for God's other creatures (Gen. 2:15). Failure to act to reduce the impacts of global warming denies Christ's Lordship.

As Christians we are called to love and protect those with less power, such as the poor, children, the unborn, those yet to be born, and our fellow creatures. Global warming has profound implications for their welfare. Reducing this threat is part of what it must mean today to love God and our neighbor, as Jesus taught us to do.

For further information, go to www.christiansandclimate.org and www.whatwouldjesusdrive.org. To view the IPCC reports, go to www.ipcc.ch.

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