

US Leadership and Climate Change: Helping the Poor to Answer a Global Challenge



HUMAN-INDUCED CLIMATE CHANGE IS REAL.

The exponential increase in climate change research in the past decade shows overwhelming scientific agreement that climate change is already happening and has been triggered by human activities. In fact, according to the UN, climate change is happening with greater speed and intensity than initially predicted, and we may be closer to an irreversible tipping point than first thought.

As the largest historical emitter of greenhouse gases, the U.S. must act now to reduce domestic greenhouse gas emissions. U.S. leadership will help bring other countries along and strengthen the world's collective resolve to ensure that our planet does not become a very different, and much more dangerous, place. Deforestation accounts for as much as 20% of human-induced greenhouse gas emissions and must be reined in as part of climate mitigation policy. How this is done matters, however, because poor, forest-dependent communities' lives and well-being are at stake. Thus, **the inclusion of adequate social standards and safeguards in efforts to reduce emissions from deforestation is essential.**

U.S. policymakers are accountable to their domestic constituents. They therefore bear the responsibility of easing the burden of mitigation efforts on those most

affected in the U.S. and of strengthening preparedness and resilience in those parts of the country most at risk. However, **as the world's largest historic emitter, the U.S. also bears responsibility for the disproportionate impact of climate change on poor people in developing parts of the world, who are least responsible for climate change and whose levels of vulnerability are orders of magnitude greater.** Robust investments in adaptation, worldwide, are vital and already urgently needed. Investing now will cost far less than dealing with the consequences later. It will also safeguard national security and demonstrate renewed U.S. leadership.

Adaptation commitments should be based on historic responsibility and capacity to pay. Adaptation funds must be new and additional to official development assistance. New and innovative mechanisms that can raise significant funds for adaptation and create incentives for mitigation should be pursued. At the same time, **funding must reach the people who need it most.** This will require systematic identification of socio-economically vulnerable groups within high-risk countries; guaranteed meaningful participation of poor, vulnerable communities in relevant decision making, monitoring and evaluation; and prioritization of community-based adaptation.

DOMESTIC LEGISLATION CRITICAL TO GLOBAL PROGRESS

Successful global climate negotiations, culminating this December in Copenhagen may well hang on concrete U.S. action and the impact it will have in bringing all countries together around shared goals and responsibilities. It is vital that the Administration and Congress commit now to domestic legislation that:

Reduces emissions. Establishes immediate and aggressive targets to reduce domestic greenhouse gas emissions in line with scientifically sound targets to keep the average increase in global temperatures as far below 2° C as possible;

Protects rights. Supports the reduction of emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries (REDD) in a manner that protects the rights and interests of indigenous peoples and other forest-dependent communities;

Funds adaptation. Sets aside substantial revenues – new and additional to official development assistance and reflecting US commitment to funding its fair share – to support adaptation in developing countries vulnerable to climate change; and

Reaches the poorest and most vulnerable. Ensures that adaptation funding reaches and responds to the priorities of the poorest populations most vulnerable to climate change.

IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON THE U.S. AND THE WORLD'S POOREST PEOPLE

Unmitigated climate change threatens development gains and is likely to contribute to mass migration, refugee crises, and increased conflict over scarce natural resources, undermining global stability and security. Today, more than one billion people survive on less than \$1.25 a day and already live on the edge of crisis. If left unchecked, climate change may push them off that edge. Major impacts include:

Agriculture. The negative impact of unmitigated climate change on agricultural production will likely be more adverse in tropical areas and the poorest developing countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa.

Freshwater resources. Unmitigated climate change will significantly alter water supplies. Areas likely to gain water, like South and East Asia, will face more flood disasters. Arid and semi-arid regions, like southern Africa, will lose water and become even drier. In addition, as temperatures increase and glaciers retreat, river flows, particularly in the Hindu Kush-Himalaya and the South American Andes, will increase in the short term, but as glaciers melt, will gradually decrease over the next few decades.

Human health. Climate change will also increase health risks. Projected trends include increased malnutrition, increased morbidity and mortality in heat waves and weather-related disasters, and changes in the geographic range of some infectious disease vectors, e.g. malaria. These health risks will be heavily concentrated in poorer populations at low latitudes, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, and hit children, elderly, urban poor, subsistence farmers and coastal populations the hardest.

Disasters. People in extreme poverty, especially in Africa, Central and South Asia, and Southeast Asia, will face even greater risk of disaster as the frequency, intensity and duration of weather-related hazards, such as floods, cyclones and droughts, increase as a result of climate change. By late century, millions more people, particularly in low-lying coastal regions, such as the mega-deltas of Asia and Africa, and small islands, will likely experience floods every year due to sea level rise.

IMMEDIATE DOMESTIC GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSION REDUCTION TARGETS—KEY COUNTRIES MAKING COMMITMENTS

The severity of the consequences of climate change and the effort required to adapt to the consequences depend on what we do now. The UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) recommends that global greenhouse gas emissions be reduced 25-40 percent from 1990 levels by 2020 in order to improve the odds of avoiding dangerous warming of more than 2° C/3.6° F in average global temperatures. The longer we wait to act, the greater the probability that the world will exceed the 2° C/3.6° F threshold, and the greater the price all of us, especially the world's poorest, will have to pay.

The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is grounded in the principles of equity and “common but differentiated responsibilities.” Developed countries, including the U.S., have the largest historical responsibility for climate change, as well as the most resources to address the problem. Developed countries must, therefore, lead efforts to combat climate change and its impacts.

At the same time, it will be impossible to keep the global temperature rise as far below 2° C/3.6° F as possible unless the largest emitters among the developing countries do their part. Many have already expressed willingness to do so. At the 14th Conference of Parties (COP) of the UNFCCC in December 2008, key developing countries, such as Brazil, China, Mexico and South Africa, came forward with plans to reduce their own greenhouse gas emissions, demonstrating their willingness to engage at the global level. What is now needed is strong, responsible leadership from the U.S. in the form of limits on greenhouse gas emissions in line with scientifically sound targets for the world as a whole.

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SOCIAL STANDARDS AND SAFEGUARDS ESSENTIAL FOR SUCCESSFUL REDD

The inclusion of Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) in U.S. climate legislation is crucial if we are to avoid dangerous global warming. Deforestation accounts for some 20 percent of human-induced greenhouse gas emissions. However, adequate social standards and safeguards must be included in REDD activities.

While investments in REDD have the potential to offer significant benefits for indigenous peoples and other forest-dependent communities in developing countries, they can also do substantial harm. Past experience with forest conservation worldwide tells us that, without appropriate standards and safeguards, affected communities face numerous social and economic risks – to their livelihoods, their access to resources and land, and their ability to share in the benefits of REDD activities. Moreover, forest conservation efforts that marginalize local communities – failing to respect their rights or guarantee them a stake – are likely to fail.

Social standards and safeguards must include measures to ensure participation by indigenous peoples and other forest-dependent communities; prevent human rights violations; and guarantee free, prior and informed consent, equitable benefit sharing, and access to legal recourse and fair compensation for damages. These standards are essential not only to guard against risks but also to ensure environmental success, i.e. the sustainability and permanence of emission reductions.

NEW, ADDITIONAL FUNDING FOR ADAPTATION IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES NECESSARY FOR LONG-TERM SUCCESS

Even if we stopped all greenhouse gas emissions today, a certain degree of climate change is inevitable. Past emissions have set in motion longer-term changes to which people in extreme poverty will need to adapt. Yet right now, the amount of funding available to help them adapt is severely insufficient. Estimates of adaptation needs in developing countries range from \$41 billion (World Bank) to \$86 billion (UNDP) per year. Generally, consensus is growing that the need, annually, is on the order of tens of billions of dollars and will be significantly higher if greenhouse gas emissions are not reduced substantially in the near term.

Impoverished countries bear the least responsibility, are the most severely impacted, and have the least capacity to cope with climatic changes. Unfortunately, few public financing options exist to help developing countries reduce their vulnerability and adapt to climate variability and change. There are three adaptation funding mechanisms under the UNFCCC but, taken together, they offer perhaps a few hundred million dollars per year. The U.S. must do its fair share and provide substantial new and additional funding, above and beyond official development assistance, to support adaptation in developing countries vulnerable to climate change. New and innovative mechanisms that can raise significant funds for adaptation and create incentives for mitigation should be pursued, such as the auctioning of emission allowances and levying the use of international maritime and aviation transport (so called “bunker”) fuels.

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PRO-POOR ADAPTATION FUNDING TO SAFEGUARD DEVELOPMENT PROGRESS AND GLOBAL STABILITY

In order for adaptation funds to reach the people who need them most, systematic identification of vulnerable groups within countries and communities must take place. CARE's experience has shown that vulnerability to climate change varies not only between countries, but within countries, communities and even households. Vulnerability is more than exposure to climate shocks and stresses; it includes the economic, social, and political systems and structures governing people's lives. Yet countries may identify vulnerability on the basis of location-based risk and the impact of that location-based risk on key GDP sectors, like agriculture and livestock production. Without the right incentives and guidance, they may not go one step further to assess socio-economic vulnerability within high-risk geographic regions.

Furthermore, for adaptation plans and activities to meet the needs of the most vulnerable, these communities must be guaranteed a meaningful role in relevant decision-making processes. Unfortunately national governments and multilateral organizations are making critical decisions with little space provided

for the representatives of poor and marginalized groups. Well designed, top-down, scenario-driven approaches to adaptation can play a role in reducing vulnerability to climate change, yet may fail to address the particular needs and concerns of the most vulnerable communities. Existing funding mechanisms and planning processes do not currently prioritize community-based adaptation. CARE believes that the most effective approach is to empower local communities, facilitate their ownership of adaptation strategies and help lay the basis for truly sustainable change. Community-based adaptation should be people-centered. It should foster more resilient livelihoods, link people to basic services, strengthen local capacity, and support social and policy change to address underlying causes of poverty and vulnerability.

The U.S. can provide leadership in ensuring that adaptation funds reach the people who need it most by ensuring systematic identification of the most vulnerable groups; inclusive, transparent and participatory decision-making on the design and in the monitoring and evaluation of adaptation activities; and mechanisms to support community-based adaptation.

U.S. MUST ACT NOW

Effectively addressing climate change requires a global response based on a common vision, a shared sense of community, and leadership to make and implement difficult decisions. At a time when global leadership seems overwhelmed by economic challenges and national interests, the U.S. remains the critical actor that can help forge and implement an international plan to save the planet by the power of its example. That effort must start here in the U.S. with passage of legislation that underscores our commitment to addressing climate change, be it for national interests or in answer to a moral challenge of what kind of country the United States is. Whatever the motives, it is time to act...time to act now.

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