



Climate Change and the Poor

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(This editorial is based on the article “Climate Change and the Poor” which appeared in EPW for 2nd February 2019. In this editorial, we’ll see the effects of climate change on the poor all over the world.)

Recent polar vortex and unusual weather conditions in Australia are making the world realize the effects of Climate Change.

Around the world, people are experiencing both the delicate and harsh effects of climate change. Gradually rising sea levels and more extreme weather events are all clear and devastating evidence of a rapidly changing climate.

The impacts of climate change can be seen in every country on every continent. **The increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather events like hurricanes, wildfires, and droughts threaten food supplies, drive people from their homes, separate families and jeopardize livelihoods. And all of these effects increase the risk of conflict, hunger, and poverty.**

Visible evidence and climbing numbers demonstrate that climate change is not a distant or imaginary threat, but rather a growing and undeniable reality.

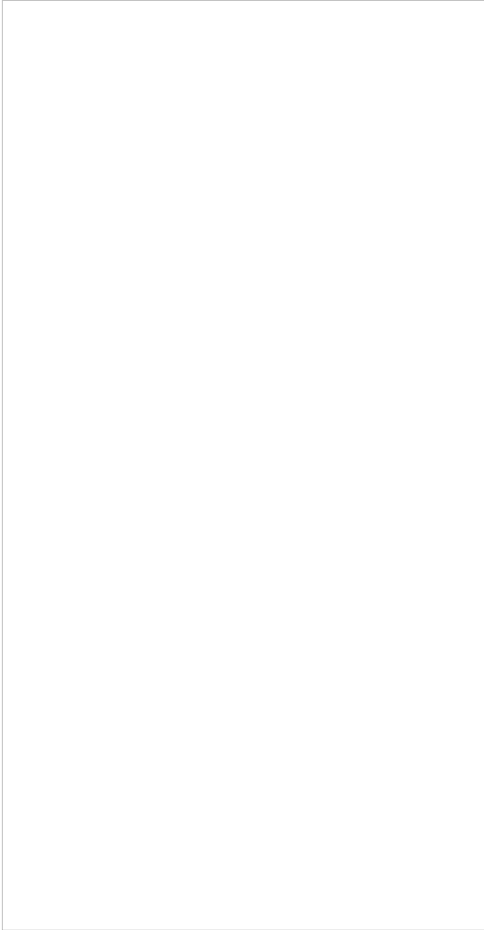
Climate change is an emergency that has been affecting the planet and its inhabitants, human, plant, and animal, in big and small ways. **However, it has had a greater impact on the poor and developing nations due to its disproportionate influence.**

How Poor is more vulnerable to Climate change?

- **2018 report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change of the United Nations** estimates that “even a 1.5-degree increase in global temperature could push tens of millions of people into poverty.”



- **According to the World Food Programme's 2018 Global Report on Food Crises,** "climate disasters triggered food crises across 23 countries, mostly in Africa, with shocks such as drought leaving more than 39 million people in need of urgent assistance."
- **According to the 2018 Global Report on Internal Displacement,** "30.6 million new internal displacements associated with conflict and natural disasters were recorded in 2017 across 143 countries and territories."
- The report identifies floods and storms (mainly, tropical cyclones) as the primary causes of displacement, leading to millions of displacements.
- Climate refugees can be found all over the world, displaced by coastal flooding in Dhaka, by hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico, or due to the desertification of Lake Chad in West Africa. **It is estimated that the number of people seeking asylum in the European Union due to climate change would see a 28% increase by 2100.**
- There is now growing pragmatic evidence on how climate change disproportionately affects the poor. With climate change, people face a shortage of water and food, resulting in increased competition to access these basic necessities.



- This increases the chances of the intensification of existing conflicts and also creates new ones. **The water crisis in Cape Town** began in 2015, and the city continues to live under the threat of becoming the first major city in the world to run out of the water.
- In the **Democratic Republic of Congo**, shifts in the timing and patterns of rainfall have led to lower food production and greater competition on arable land, increasing ethnic tensions, and conflicts in the country.

Such conflicts and incidences affect the poor the most and further lead to an increase in poverty and displacement, pushing people into a vicious trap across the globe.

In India

- **India ranks fifth globally for the losses it has experienced due to climate change.**
- Around 800 million people in the country live in villages and depend on agriculture and natural resources for their livelihoods.
- With at least 50% of the farmlands in the country being rain-fed, changes in the pattern of the monsoons will affect their livelihoods the most.
- **Empirical evidence suggests that climate change has led to a decline in wheat yields and has lowered the productivity of workers.**
- Studies reveal that small farmers are aware of the long-term changes in the weather pattern and have changed their practices to deal with the resultant socio-economic

changes.

- **Small farmers also lack access to credit and other means of insurance, which makes them more vulnerable to climate change.** Thus, climate change will make the existing problems of poverty, malnutrition, and farmer suicides worse.

Frequent floods and droughts caused by climate change lead to food shortages and a rise in food prices in many parts of India. This causes hunger and malnutrition, the effects of which are felt most strongly by the poor.

Way Forward

- At the **Katowice Climate Conference in 2018**, India called out the developed nations for renegeing on their promises to provide developing countries with the financial support to combat climate change.
- **It is the poor and developing countries that are being affected by the effects of climate change in the worst way while having contributed next to nothing in creating the crisis of climate change.**
- And, it is these very countries that are being left behind both in terms of growth and development and mitigating and adapting to the effects of climate change as they try to juggle their commitments to both.
- If steps are not taken quickly, climate change has the potential to reverse decades of growth and development globally, and particularly in India.

Some steps can be taken into consideration

- Installing household and community biogas units to power clean-burning methane stoves;
- Replacing conventional wood-burning stoves with more efficient ones;
- **Providing solar-powered lighting;**
- Promoting scientifically and economically sound climate-smart farming techniques through the use of information technology (IT) platforms like smart-phone apps.
- **Implementation of low carbon farming techniques**

The warning bells have been tolling for a while now, and the widening disparities between the developed and the developing countries, the rich and the poor, the global North and the South, are emerging clearer than ever where climate change and its effects are concerned.
