



Women, Poverty and Climate Change

What is Global Warming?

Global Warming is the increase in the average temperature of the Earth's atmosphere and oceans, at least in part as a consequence of increasing of man-made greenhouse gases. The Earth's average temperature rose about 1.1° Fahrenheit in the 20th century. As a result, sea levels are rising, arctic ice is melting, seawater is becoming more acidic, there are heavier rainfalls, and the frequency and strength of hurricanes has increased as well as the number of extreme droughts. As a direct result of these changes, the ecosystems have changed with significant negative impact on humans, animals, plants and crop productivity.

What and who is causing global warming?

The Earth's atmosphere contains gases—also called greenhouse gases—that trap heat near its surface. These are necessary to sustain life on Earth. They let the sun's rays enter and also stop some heat from escaping to outer space. This keeps the planet warm enough to allow life to thrive. People cause climate change by creating additional greenhouse gases, which increases their effect, thus more heat is trapped and the Earth's climate rises unnaturally. The main source of greenhouse gases comes from fossil fuels that have become part of our everyday use. In our everyday life we rely on fossil fuels for everything from driving our cars, to heating our homes. Manufacturing and production systems also use enormous amounts of fossil fuels.

However, not everybody is equally responsible for the production of heat-trapping gases. There is a direct correlation between wealth and the use of fossil fuels. Since the industrial revolution, the wealthiest countries have produced most of the green gasses. Likewise, in any given country, the wealthiest create the strongest impact on the environment.

Who is most affected by the climate change in the US?

The amount of greenhouse gases produced by people from poor countries is hundreds of times lower than the amount created by people from industrialized countries. At the same time, people from poor countries, especially those in rural areas, are "disproportionately affected by environmental degradation," and within any given country, the poor are more vulnerable to the effects of environmental hazards.

In the United States, people who earn less than \$10,000 per year are producing 4 times less CO₂ emissions than people who earn more than \$75,000. However the lower income are the most affected by climate change. This is known as the Climate Gap — climate change does not affect everyone equally: the wealthiest have more resources to protect themselves from the negative impacts of climate change, while those who have been historically disenfranchised, such as women, the poor, and people of color are affected the most because they are the “least able to anticipate, cope with, resist and recover from the worst effects of climate change.”

Why is there a Climate Gap in the United States?

Extreme weather events such as heat waves, droughts and floods are expected to increase in their frequency and intensity in the next hundred years. As a direct result of environmental degradation, all aspects of life will be affected. Low-income people, people of color, and immigrants are the most impacted by the severe weather events, heat waves, and increases in disease rates that characterize

Earth's changing climate. In these populations, women are more affected than men because they have less access to good paying jobs and usually have the additional role of caregiver for the family. A very clear example of the Climate Gap, which is the difference in impact between poor and wealthy people, is the disproportionate damage that Hurricane Katrina had on women, people of color and low-income communities.

BASIC NEEDS: The prices of basic necessities are expected to skyrocket as the climate continues to change: food, water, electricity and gas will increase tremendously. This increase on the cost of basic necessities will affect the poor the most, even as they already expend a high proportion of their income on these basic necessities. Different groups have different abilities to cope with climate change impacts. People who live in poverty may have a difficult time coping with changes. These people have limited financial resources to cope with heat, relocate or evacuate or respond to increases in the cost of food.

WATER: "Climate change directly affects the water cycle and the quantity and quality of water resources available to meet human and environmental demands." Water shortages will affect every aspect of life, such as health, sanitation, food production and other industries that also use water in their process. Women, who are already disadvantaged through gender inequity and higher levels of poverty, are more dependent on reliable water resources in their vicinity because of their role in food production and family responsibilities.

AIR: Climate change also threatens to intensify air pollution. Higher temperatures hasten chemical interactions between nitrogen oxide, volatile organic gases and sunlight that lead to increases in ambient ozone concentrations in urban areas. Again, the poor are more likely to live in areas with more air pollution, and have a higher level of health issues for this reason. One good example is disparities in childhood asthma prevalence and mortality, where poor children and children of color are the most impacted in the US population.

HEALTH CARE: With lack of health care access, women, children and low-income people in general will be less able to cope with health problems resulting directly or indirectly from climate change such as heat waves, droughts, and quality of water and food production. Hunger and malnutrition, respiratory conditions, vector-borne diseases. Water and food related diseases will be some of the health problems that will be increased by climate change.

HOUSING: Lack of access to safe, affordable, and adequate housing impacts many people. However, women bear the brunt of housing related poverty, discrimination, and displacement. Climate change will only exacerbate these problems. People living with the least income, who have contributed the least to climate change impacts, are the most affected but are excluded from the dialogue about it. To address the Climate Gap with equity and ecological justice, those most impacted by Climate Change must be at the table where policies and solutions are being discussed.

EDUCATION: Public education must include Climate Change and its impacts into science, social studies and other disciplines to increase awareness and prepare the population to participate in the development of policies and innovations to reverse the damaging effects of Climate Change and close the Climate Gap.