

Africa 'will be worst hit by climate change'

By Steve Bloomfield in Nairobi

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The devastating impact of climate change, mainly caused by ballooning carbon emissions from rich Western nations, will hit hardest in Africa, a United Nations report has warned.

Large African cities will be submerged under rising sea levels, more than 40 per cent of wildlife habitats could disappear, and cereal crop yields - already desperately low in a continent unable to feed itself - could fall by a further 5 per cent.

The report warned that the effect of climate change in Africa is "even more acute" than experts had feared. Up to 70 million people could be at risk from rising sea levels, while droughts, which have overwhelmed the Horn of Africa with increasing regularity, will be more common.

The effects of global warming on some of the world's poorest people must be the main focus at the climate change talks that start in Nairobi today, the report's authors said.

More than 6,000 delegates from governments and charities around the world will gather for two weeks to discuss how the world will deal with climate change after the Kyoto Protocol comes to an end in 2012. The protocol, which was supposed to cut the emissions of industrial nations, was only implemented by 35 countries. The US refused to sign up, while China and India, two of the fastest growing economies, are not party to it.

The report gives a stark assessment of what could happen on the continent if developed nations do not rein in their carbon emissions. Up to 30 per cent of Africa's coast could disappear as sea levels rise from between 15cm to 95cm in the next 100 years. Important cities such as Cape Town, Dar es Salaam and Maputo are at risk. If sea levels were to rise by one metre, part of Lagos, the economic centre of Africa's most populous country, Nigeria, would be submerged. Alexandria, a popular tourist destination in Egypt, could also suffer. The number of people at risk in Africa from coastal flooding will rise from one million in 1990 to 70 million by 2080.

Africa is particularly at risk because of its reliance on food from such a large amount of arid land - more than half of the continent's cultivable land is arid or semi-arid. Some 70 per cent of people in Africa and nearly 90 per cent of the poor work in agriculture. When rains fail, or are unpredictable, they are forced to rely on emergency food aid.

Africa, a continent of more than 800 million people, is already feeling the effects of climate change. It has warmed by 0.7C during the 20th century. Rainfall in the Sahel region, just below the Sahara, has fallen by 25 per cent in the last 30 years. Africa's tropical rainforests have also witnessed a fall in precipitation of 2.4 per cent each decade since the mid-1970s.

Droughts in the Sahel and the Horn of Africa have become more regular since the 1960s.

But while climate change is already having a significant impact on the lives of Africans, the climate and weather-monitoring systems needed to track changes on the continent are not in place, and little of Africa's historical climate and weather data is being used to further improve climate forecasting because of a lack of funds.

Marchers join worldwide call for action against global warming

* SIMON GOULD, 58, decorator, Walthamstow, east London

"Us cyclists tend to be a bit more extreme than the other marchers because we've already changed our lifestyles. I organised a ride from Lincoln's Inn Fields to Trafalgar Square today, over 500 turned up, and later with a delegation I delivered a letter to Number 10 demanding a 3 per cent reduction in emissions annually ... the UN needs to say 'you're banned from driving cars today', but we live in an addictive culture, people don't want to change their habits."

* RAGA WOODS, 65, retired, Oxford

"When people get together as they do in something like this, there is a good chance they will take the next step and do something practical. Twenty or thirty years ago nobody would have known what the word environmentalist meant. But my prognosis is very, very gloomy, I don't think the average person has taken on the sinister nature of the whole thing, I think we're disempowered ... we're not really in connection with our earth."

* RASHMI MISTRY, 34, Peckham, south London, campaign manager for Catholic Agency for Overseas Development

"The poor are the most vulnerable to climate change and we've got a responsibility to stop that ... I think this is the start of something bigger, it will start snowballing. Coming here shows the public support this, it gives the politicians a motivation to do more."

* ANDREW KNIGHTS, 26, campaign researcher for Surfers Against Sewage, Cornwall

"More increases in rainfall causes more sewer systems to overflow, polluting rivers and seas ... It's not only surfers that would be affected, this will have a huge impact on many water sports."

* PETER JONES, 41, security guard, Peterborough

"I believe if you make a stand and be counted that is what it is about, everybody doing their bit, we can't sell something if the public won't buy it."

Climate change 'hitting Africa'

Climate change is already affecting people across Africa and will wipe out efforts to tackle poverty there unless urgent action is taken, a report says.

Droughts are getting worse and climate uncertainty is growing, the research from a coalition of UK aid agencies and environmental groups says.



Droughts are becoming more frequent, the report says

Climate change is an "unprecedented" threat to food security, it says.

It calls for a "climate-proof" model of development and massive emissions cuts to avoid "possibly cataclysmic change".

The report, Up In Smoke 2, updates previous research from the organisations - Oxfam, the New Economics Foundation and the Working Group on Climate Change and Development, an umbrella group of aid and green groups.

It says that although climates across Africa have always been erratic, scientific research and the experience of the contributing groups "indicates new and dangerous extremes".

Arid or semi-arid areas in northern, western, eastern and parts of southern Africa are becoming drier, while equatorial Africa and other parts of southern Africa are getting wetter, the report says.

“ Global warming is set to make many of the problems which Africa already deals with, much, much worse ”

Andrew Simms
New Economics Foundation

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The continent is, on average, 0.5C warmer than it was 100 years ago, but temperatures have risen much higher in some areas - such as a part of Kenya which has become 3.5C hotter in the past 20 years, the agencies report.

Andrew Simms, from the New Economics Foundation, said: "Global warming is set to make many of the problems which Africa already deals with, much, much worse," he said.

"In the last year alone, 25 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa have faced food crisis.

"Global warming means that that many dry areas are going to get drier and wet areas are going to get wetter. They are going to be caught between the devil of drought and the deep blue seas of floods."

He added that the "great tragedy" was that Africa had played virtually no role in global warming, a problem he said was caused by economic activity of the rich, industrial countries.

Mr Simms said unless climate change was tackled all the "best efforts" to help Africa could come to nothing.

One of the biggest threats is growing climate unpredictability, which makes subsistence farming difficult, the report says.

The average number of food emergencies in Africa per year almost tripled since the mid 1980s, it points out.

But it says that better planning to reduce the risk from disasters, together with developing agricultural practices that can withstand changing climates, have been shown to work and could help mitigate the impact if used more widely.

'Overwhelming'

Up in Smoke 2 also laments the failure of industrialised governments to help developing countries adapt to climate change.

Between \$10bn (£5.2bn) and \$40bn is needed annually, the report says, but industrialised countries have given only \$43m - a tenth of the amount they have pledged - while rich country fossil fuel subsidies total \$73bn a year.

The agencies say that greenhouse emissions cuts of 60% - 90% will ultimately be needed - way beyond the targets set in the Kyoto agreement.

"Climate change is overwhelming the situation in Africa... unless we take genuine steps now to reduce our emissions, people in the developed world will be condemning millions to hunger, starvation and death," said Tony Juniper, executive director of Friends of the Earth.

The report comes two weeks before a key summit on climate change in Nairobi, where delegates will look at the progress made on the Kyoto agreement that requires industrial nations to cut their emissions by an average of 5.2% from 1990 levels by the period 2008-2012.

Delegates will also consider what system should be adopted when the current period ends.