

SOCIAL AND HUMANITARIAN COMMITTEE (SOCHUM)

Topic 2: The extreme climate vulnerability of communities below the poverty threshold

Research Report by Alessandra Gherardi

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1. Definition of Key Terms

Climate change: both the long-term climate change process, such as global warming or sea level rise, and climate variability, which means the increasing frequency and intensity of extreme weather events.

Poverty threshold: also referred to as poverty line, it is the minimum level of income in a specific area or country. The international poverty line is currently set at \$2.15 per person per day. According to the United Nations, 734 million people are now living below the established poverty line.

LDCs: Least developed countries (LDCs) are low-income countries confronting severe structural impediments to sustainable development. They are highly vulnerable to economic and environmental shocks and have low levels of human assets.

COP: acronym for "Conference of the Parties", the supreme body established by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 1992. Every state that is a party to the Convention is represented at the COP, which meets every year. Its main task is deciding how to act on climate change.

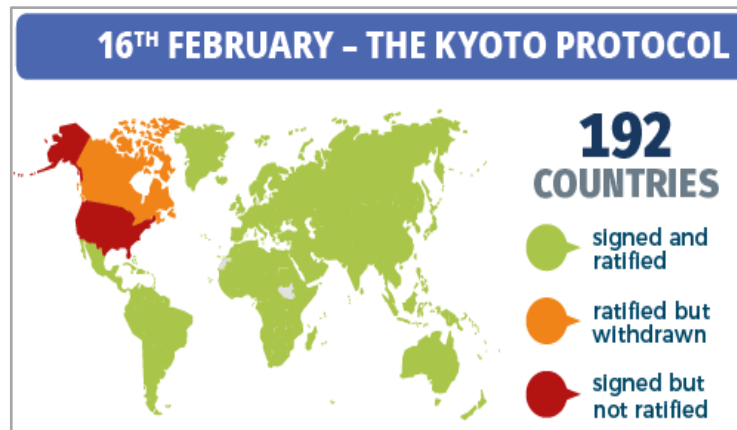
IPCC: the acronym for Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, is an intergovernmental body of the United Nations to provide its members (which are now 195 countries) with all the scientific information needed to develop climate policies and plans.

Loss and Damage: policies and plans negotiated in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which are used to address the manifestation of climate change impacts which cannot be avoided or reduced. It can result from extreme weather events and disruptive processes such as desertification or glacial retreat.

MDGs: acronym for Millennium Development Goals, indicates eight development goals which were supposed to be reached by 2015, and had the aim of improving living conditions in countries below the poverty threshold.

2. Introduction

As climate change includes both the climate change process as well as climate variability, it is strongly related to poverty in vulnerable areas, as it worsens living conditions in more than 74 countries below the poverty line, and these countries are already facing economic crisis, social problems and developmental challenges. The aforementioned countries' economy is mostly based on agriculture and farming and is deeply connected to the ecosystem's conditions. Every change in the ecosystem affects not only the whole economy but also people's lives and conditions, gradually worsening them. Extremely poor and poor people are hit harder by climate change because they have a higher exposure to its impacts, are more vulnerable and have fewer coping capacities.



3. Timeline of Events

Since **1970** climate change has been addressed as an issue affecting the entire planet and after the first large-scale environmental movements, which had the aim of pointing out the effects of climate change on communities, especially in the least developed countries, the question shifted to a point of political concern.

1972

During the UN Conference on the Human Environment (UNCHE) in Stockholm, the problem of climate change was officially discussed, and it was pointed out that states need to work cooperatively to find stable solutions.

1979

The first World Climate Conference was held in Geneva, where climate change was framed as both a political and a global problem.

1987

The Montreal Protocol was adopted; it restricted the usage of chemicals that could harm the ozone layer. An aggravation of the thinning of the ozone layer would have caused higher temperatures and more UV rays, which are extremely dangerous for humans, especially in vulnerable communities which have restricted access to protections, reaching the earth.

1990

The IPCC created its first report, which was essential for the creation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in **1992** during a meeting held in Rio de Janeiro.

1995

The COP1 conference was held in Berlin, where the basis of the Kyoto Protocol was settled. The aforementioned protocol was adopted in **1997**, it had the aim to legally bound developed countries to emission reduction targets. The US was removed from the protocol in **2001** by former president Bush.

2010

The Cancun Agreements, a complete package adopted by governments to assist developing nations in dealing with climate change, are adopted and the Green Climate Fund is established.

2011

COP17 took place in Durban, and governments committed to a new universal climate change agreement by 2015 for the period beyond 2020.

November 2013

COP19 took place in Warsaw. Parties agree on a time plan for countries to submit their intended contributions to the new global climate agreement before 2020. They set up a mechanism to address losses and damage caused by climate change in vulnerable areas such as LDCs. They also improved the implementation of measures (for instance on climate finance) and transparency of reporting on emissions.

December 2015

The Paris Agreement is adopted. The Paris Agreement on fighting climate change is the first-ever universal, legally binding global climate deal. The objective of the agreement is to maintain the increase in global temperatures below two degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, whilst making efforts to limit the increase to 1.5 degrees. The agreement aims to ensure global greenhouse gas emissions peak as soon as possible and to balance emissions and removals of greenhouse gases in the second half of this century. Furthermore, the agreement addresses issues such as climate change adaptation, financial and other support for developing countries, technology transfer and capacity building, as well as losses and damage. Thanks to the Parliament's consent, the Paris Agreement entered into force in November **2016**, after having met the necessary conditions much earlier than predicted.

June 2017

President Donald Trump announced his intent to withdraw the United States from the Paris Agreement.

2017

The World Health Organization stated that climate change is going to kill an additional 250,000 people every year between 2030 and 2050, especially in vulnerable areas such as Africa or the Middle East, due to malnutrition and health problems caused by natural disasters and pollution.

October 2018

The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released a report investigating the impact of a 1.5°C rise in temperature (above pre-industrial levels). It concluded that emissions will have to be reduced more than scientists originally estimated.

November 2019

The European Parliament declared a climate emergency in Europe and globally. They wanted the Commission to ensure that all relevant legislative and budgetary proposals are fully aligned to limit global warming to less than 1.5°C.

December 2019

The European Commission presented the Green Deal. Using the European Climate Law, it aims to make Europe climate neutral by 2050.

October 2020

The European Parliament approved its negotiating position on the Climate Law proposing that the EU and all member states reach climate neutrality by 2050. It also sets a more ambitious 2030 emissions reduction target of 60%.

November 2021

COP26 took place in Glasgow. During COP26, countries agreed to the goal of climate neutrality; increased funding for vulnerable developing countries; and less money for new fossil fuel projects. They did not reach a common response to phasing out the use of coal.

November 2022

COP27 took place in Sharm el-Sheikh. Countries agreed to create a loss and damage fund to help vulnerable countries hit by climate disasters. However, despite slow progress on phasing out fossil fuels and moving towards the Paris Agreement's 1.5-degree Celsius limit, no new measures were adopted during the aforementioned meeting.

4. Background Information

Climate change is transforming the planet's social balance. Unusually high temperatures, droughts and increasingly intense rainfall are pushing 86 % of the world's countries into poverty, deepening income inequality and making the poor even poorer. The impacts are significantly worse in countries that depend on the agricultural sector, up to 35 times greater if we compare them to a developed country. In these areas, less well-off people often work in the primary sector and their livelihoods depend on rainfall.

What is most worrying is that the economies most exposed to these climate shocks, such as those in many sub-Saharan countries, are also those that start with particularly high levels of inequality.

In the future, climate change will exacerbate income inequality. Projections indicate that 86 per cent of countries around the world will become poorer due to climate change and that income inequality will rise significantly.

Although projections of climate trends have a high level of uncertainty, the outlook is overwhelmingly negative.

For example, in Sub-Saharan Africa, the most pessimistic scenario indicates that the share of income earned by the poorest 50 per cent of the population will decrease by more than 10 per cent as a result of alterations in rainfall, while optimistic scenarios indicate very small positive effects.

In other areas of the world, such as Europe, the projected impacts are positive for some countries and negative for neighbouring economies, and this would lead to a further increase in inequality.

From this emerges the urgent need for climate change mitigation and adaptation policies combined with interventions aimed at limiting inequalities and promoting economic development, particularly in the most exposed countries.

This policy is aimed at mitigating the direct impacts of climate change, increasing people's well-being, reducing existing inequalities and gaps, and ensuring sustainable growth and development.

5. Major Countries Involved

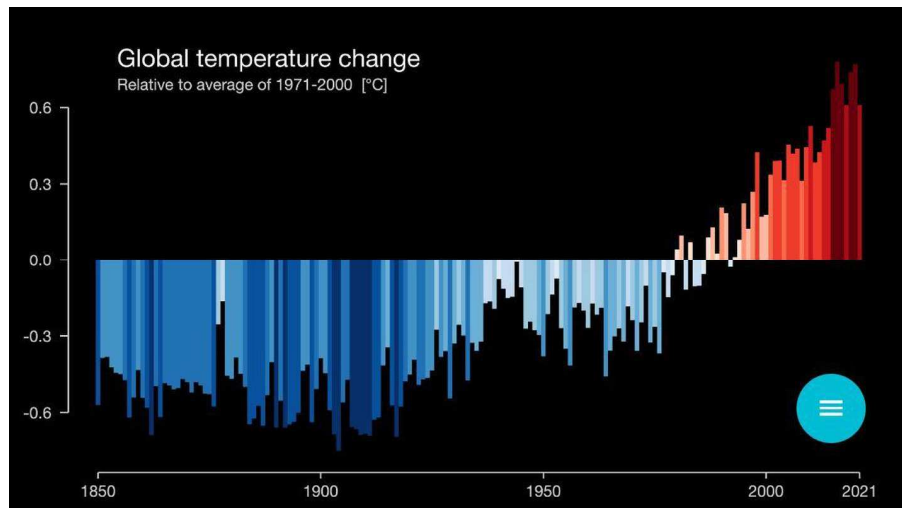
India: is currently the third biggest producer of greenhouse gases in the world and its government stated that the creation and promotion of zero-emission goals is not the actual solution to the climate change problem. After COP26, a plan was published, in which India undertakes to reach carbon neutrality by 2070. It has also been pointed out the need for international help from countries responsible for climate change. Indians are suffering from higher temperatures, such as 50 degrees Celsius in May 2022, and pollution, which caused 1.7 premature deaths in 2019.

Republic of Congo: its economy has been deeply damaged by climate change, more precisely by climate variability, which caused important changes in the timing and magnitude of rainfall. This phenomenon led to damage to food production and to increasing competition for the remaining arable land, which increased ethnic tensions.

The United States of America: currently the second highest emitter of greenhouse gases. Since 2014, coal consumption has gradually increased due to the rise of gas prices. The country being the world's leading producer of both oil and natural gas led to high economic benefits but caused tremendous effects on the ecosystem. In 2021, the country was responsible for an increase in greenhouse gases equal to 6.2%, which

exceeded even its GDP. This very high level of pollution led to temperatures reaching 48 degrees in 2021. The US population had to live with higher risks of pathologies caused by pollution, such as lung cancer, heart disease, stroke etc.

The People's Republic of China: is now the first world producer of greenhouse gases and since 1992 it has been declared a developing country by the UN. China is an enormous contributor to the worsening of climate change's effects and is severely affected by its impact.



6. UN Involvement

In June **1992**, during the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, more than 178 countries adopted Agenda 21, a wide-ranging plan of action to build a global partnership for sustainable development to improve human lives and protect the environment.

Member States unanimously adopted the Millennium Declaration at the Millennium Summit in September 2000 at UN Headquarters in New York. The Summit led to the elaboration of eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to reduce extreme poverty by 2015.

The Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development and the Plan of Implementation, adopted at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in South Africa in **2002**, strengthen the global community's commitments to poverty eradication and the environment, and were built on Agenda 21 and the Millennium Declaration to include more emphasis on multilateral partnerships.

During the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) in June **2012**, Member States adopted the outcome document "The Future We Want" in which they decided to launch a process to develop a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to build upon the MDGs and to establish the UN High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. The Rio+20 outcome also contained other measures to implement sustainable development, including mandates for future programs of work in development financing, small island developing states and more.

In **2013**, the General Assembly set up a 30-member Open Working Group to develop a proposal based on the SDGs.

In January **2015**, the General Assembly began the negotiation process for the post-2015 development agenda. The process culminated in the subsequent adoption of the **2030** Agenda for Sustainable Development, in which UN involvement can be summarized, with 17 SDGs at its core, at the UN Sustainable Development Summit in September **2015**. Inside this document, the presence of Goal 13 is actually fundamental, as it aims to reinforce development and adaptation to climate risks and natural disasters. It also states the presence of 100 billion dollars per year, which will be designated to LDCs and vulnerable communities.

2015 was a fundamental year for international policy shaping, with the adoption of several major agreements:

- Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (March 2015)
- Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development (July 2015)
- Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with its 17 SDGs was adopted at the UN Sustainable Development Summit in New York (September 2015)
- Paris Agreement on Climate Change (December 2015)

Today, the annual High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development is the central UN platform for the follow-up and review of the SDGs.

The Division for Sustainable Development Goals (DSDG) in the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) provides essential support for the SDGs and their related issues, including water, climate, urbanization, transport, energy, science and technology and the Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR).

DSDG plays a key role in the evaluation of the UN systemwide implementation of the 2030 Agenda. To make the 2030 Agenda a reality, broad ownership of the SDGs must translate into a strong commitment by all stakeholders to implement the global goals.

7. Official documents and treaties about the issue

- *United Nations: Addis Ababa Action Agenda on the Third International Conference on financing for Development* [2051AAAA Addis Abeba Action Agenda.pdf](#)
- *General Assembly- United Nations: transforming our world, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* [2030 Agenda.pdf](#)
- *Third UN World Conference in Sendai- United Nations: Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030* [43291 sendaiframeworkfordrren.pdf](#)
- *Paris Agreement- United Nations: this Agreement, in enhancing the implementation of the Convention, including its objective, aims to strengthen the global response to the threat of climate change, in the context of sustainable development and efforts to eradicate poverty* [english paris agreement.pdf](#)
- *The Millennium Development Goals- United Nations: Handout 7 - Millennium Development Goals.pdf*
- *Kyoto Protocol- United Nations: framework convention on climate change* [KYOTO PROTOCOL.pdf](#)
- *Montreal Protocol- United Nations: protocol on Substances that deplete the Ozone Layer* [MONTREAL PROTOCOL.pdf](#)
- *Global Warming of 1.5 degrees- IPCC: the most important IPCC report which states temperature's increase of 1.5 degrees per year* [SR15 SPM version stand alone HR.pdf](#)

8. Impact of the issue

Climate change is a global problem which directly affects every country in the world but has a stronger impact on least developed countries, also known as LDCs, where the population has fewer methods to cope and find solutions to the problem. Climate change can have different types of impacts on these states and their inhabitants, they can occur both directly and indirectly. The impact can be defined as direct when it directly influences the ecosystem through biophysical changes, but it's classified as indirect when these biophysical changes have consequences on factors strictly linked to the state's development and poverty

(economy, commercial market, institutional factors etc.) Different types of climate events, timing, and area can determine the severity of the impacts on the population, and it's fundamental to recall that economically and socially marginalised groups often live in vulnerable areas and are more likely to be damaged. The reduction of poverty and improvement of the aforementioned communities would certainly reduce their vulnerability; however, these countries often face very controverted economic conditions that prevent them from stopping producing greenhouse gases if they currently do, and from designing serious climate action plans.

Least developed countries (LDCs) and developing countries have to face 75% of expenses caused by climate change while producing only 10% of global CO₂ emissions. More than 1.3 billion people in LDCs live out of agriculture, working on land which is severely in danger due to the ongoing desertification and drought; this will lead to an increase of 600 million people living in Africa and suffering from malnutrition due to the impact of the climate crisis on agricultural systems. Studies state that by 2050 there will be an increase in the number of people at risk of hunger equal to 20%, the majority of them living in Africa. Low-income populations also have less access to good health services, while the worsening of climate conditions and pollution levels leads to the gradual increase of people affected by pathologies such as, for example, heart and lung disease, heat stroke or bacterial infections. Climate change has also made water access even more difficult in LDCs, where scarcity is going to force people, especially children, to travel further distances to reach places with drinking water.

Children under 18 years old are also heavily affected by the impacts of climate change because as a family's economic situation worsens, they are obliged to start working and abandon school. When families in LDCs lose their stable income after natural disasters, as it usually depends on farming and agriculture, children's education often becomes the last or lowest priority as they are needed to earn money. The loss of education will just prolong this cycle of poverty in vulnerable communities; meanwhile, climate change not only affects extremely poor people harder but also further extends the gap between rich and poor, developed countries and LDCs.

Climate change is also one of the main causes of child marriage as parents try to reduce expenses; by 2030 110 million more girls are predicted to become child brides.

Natural disasters have become more frequent and destructive due to climate change. In fact, in 2019, 396 events (more than the annual average over the previous decade) affected 95 million people all over the globe and caused \$103 billion in economic losses.

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