

# Climate Change Is a Hunger Issue

Climate change threatens not only to reverse decades of progress against global hunger but, if not slowed and then stopped, to generate hunger, malnutrition, and extreme poverty at levels not seen in generations.

Around the world, most people living with hunger and malnutrition work in agriculture, as either owners of small farms or landless farm laborers. Like all farmers, smallholder farmers rely on predictable weather patterns to plan which crops to plant and when to plant them. A disruption in these patterns can easily lead farmers to plant crops too early or late in the growing season. Climate change-induced droughts are particularly hazardous, since a large proportion of smallholder farmers rely entirely on rainfall for the water essential to their crops' survival.

Whether harvests yield enough food to feed a family also depends on other factors linked to climate change and beyond the control of farm families—such as hail, floods, and locust invasions.

Unreliable weather patterns and natural disasters linked to climate change have already caused significant environmental damage and degradation in regions that are home to hundreds of millions of people. Moreover, such climate shocks often affect people who are also threatened by other large-scale problems, such as armed conflict and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Climate change is fueling rapid increases in the numbers of people facing acute hunger and malnutrition crises. More and more individuals and families are being forced to abandon farming and leave their homes in search of ways to earn enough to feed themselves.

Climate change disrupts food production, reduces the yields and nutrient density of crops, and further complicates making a living in agriculture. The consequences include increases in hunger, malnutrition, and food insecurity, particularly as the global population continues to grow.

Climate change affects all communities, but it disproportionately impacts people who have been historically marginalized.



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## Glossary:

**Adaptation**—the process of adjusting to actual or expected changes in climate and their effects. Adaptation includes the efforts of individuals and communities to improve their responses to climate shocks. It also includes government action in areas such as strengthening public policy, implementing nationwide improvements, and supporting community-level efforts.

**Biodiversity**—the variety of life in the world or in a particular habitat or ecosystem.

**Climate Change**—Changes in global temperature, precipitation, wind patterns, and other measures of climate, caused by human activities that trap increasingly unsustainable levels of greenhouse gases in Earth's atmosphere.

**Climate Justice**—An approach to climate change that incorporates the understanding that the world can only resolve climate change sustainably by dedicating equitable efforts and resources to redressing its impacts on marginalized people and groups.

Climate justice seeks to safeguard the rights of these people and ensure that the burdens and consequences of climate change are shared equitably and fairly. Any effective response to climate change must apply a climate justice lens and fully embody a commitment to equity.

As a collective Christian voice, Bread for the World acts on God's call to participate in the work to end hunger. In order to do so, we must live out God's will for humanity in Genesis 1:26-28 to care for creation: "... let them [humankind] have dominion [stewardship] over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."<sup>1</sup> Ending hunger absolutely requires climate action and climate justice.

Bread for the World offers the following list of policy recommendations for the United States:

**Food system reforms are crucial to putting the world on a sustainable path to ending hunger in ways that are healthy for people and the planet.**

- **Equip smallholder farmers to adapt to climate change by investing in climate-smart agriculture** in all global food security and nutrition activities funded by development assistance.
- **Uphold the rights of farmworkers**, particularly their right to a healthy work environment. As climate change worsens, protect workers from the increasing exposure to climate-linked health hazards that would otherwise result.
- **Reduce food waste and food loss** throughout the food system to contain the sector's greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>2</sup> Two ways of doing so are improving food labeling to provide information about safe storage, and investing in storage, transportation, and marketing to prevent food spoilage, particularly in lower-income countries.
- **Scale up efficient water management practices in agriculture**, the sector that uses up to 80 percent of all freshwater consumed in the United States.<sup>3</sup> This will enable the U.S. population to reduce its depletion of water tables and to be more resilient even as droughts become more frequent and severe.
- **End deforestation and promote sustainable reforestation.** Forests help reduce climate change by sequestering carbon. They also help preserve biodiversity, which is critical to food systems and healthy ecosystems.

**Centering race, gender, and class equity is essential to achieving climate justice and leaving no one behind.**

- **Increase support to enable countries most affected by climate change to better adapt to its impacts.** The United States, along with other industrialized countries, is a major producer of greenhouse gas emissions. The countries where people are suffering most from climate change and have the fewest resources to respond to it are responsible for far lower emissions levels.
- **Equitably engage U.S. communities of color in disaster planning and decision-making.** Due to historical structural racism, communities of color are the most affected by climate-related disasters. People from vulnerable communities should have autonomy to lead advance planning, since they are best positioned to understand the needs of people in their local areas.
- **Protect the sovereign rights of Indigenous communities** to govern tribal lands, including by building resilience for climate change, preventing biodiversity loss, and preserving their cultures.

## Glossary Continued:

**Climate Shocks**—Natural disasters caused by climate change, such as severe floods or droughts due to disturbed rainfall patterns, or crop failure caused by prolonged periods of excessive heat.

**Equity**—A concept and practice that focuses on achieving equality for all people. Looking through an equity "lens" helps identify top priorities as well as strategies to dismantle structural inequities and redress the damage they have caused. Some types of equity are race, gender, and class.

**Greenhouse Gases (GHGs)**—When released into Earth's atmosphere, GHGs trap heat, creating a "pressure cooker" effect in the atmosphere that raises the planet's temperature. Two common GHGs are carbon dioxide and methane.

**Mitigation**—efforts to prevent or reduce the emission of greenhouse gases from human activities. Preventing catastrophic and irreversible increases in Earth's temperature will require significant, sustained progress on reducing emissions for the next two decades.

**Resilience**—the capacity of a household, community, business, or natural environment to prevent, withstand, respond to, and recover from disruptions.

- **Uphold the rights of women and girls**, who are disproportionately impacted by climate change due to systemic gender discrimination. To better prepare for climate change impacts, women need autonomy to make decisions for their own well-being, in addition to equitable access to land, education, and other resources.
- **Recognize and respond to the implications of the fact that climate change is forcing growing numbers of people to leave their homes, communities, and countries.** Identify policies that should be established or revised to respond to such volatile circumstances and begin to make those changes. It is particularly important to protect the rights of climate refugees, including the right to seek asylum, and to plan for the safety and future of U.S. communities at highest risk as climate change continues.

**Social protection systems enable people to better withstand climate shocks, whether these are sudden-onset disasters or damage that appears more gradually. Social protection can save the lives of malnourished children and prevent families from falling into hunger or extreme poverty.**

- **Prioritize vulnerable populations, as identified in each context**, for both disaster assistance and disaster preparedness efforts. These groups often include children, people with disabilities, elders, women, and groups marginalized on the basis of race, ethnicity, or religion.
- **Assist individuals and families who have lost their livelihoods due to climate-related causes.** Help individuals in dying industries transition to jobs in emerging green sectors. During a climate shock such as drought, provide financial support to people working in occupations dependent on the environment, such as farmers and farmworkers.
- **Fund global disaster response programs and U.S. emergency assistance programs** commensurate with the needs of the people affected. Ensure that U.S. support does not go to organizations that discriminate based on race, gender, class, or other identities.
- **Provide insurance to farmers, especially farmers of color, those growing more nutritious crops, and those who belong to historically marginalized groups, against loss of income due to climate change impacts.** This could be done, for example, through group crop insurance that includes participants from areas with a variety of climate conditions.

We urge our nation's leaders to follow these recommendations and adopt the principles they are based on—food system reform, equity, and social protection. This will enable the United States to respond to climate change in effective ways that will also help ensure a future without hunger in this country and around the world.

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#### Endnotes

1 Genesis 1:26-28 (NRSV).

2 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2019: Moving Forward and Food Loss and Waste Reduction. <http://www.fao.org/3/ca6030en/ca6030en.pdf>

3 USDA. "Irrigation and Water Use." <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/farm-practices-management/irrigation-water-use/>