Charity warns of climate impact on poorer nations

Lynn Eaton London

The world’s poorest people, in some of the most needy countries, are going to be hardest hit by the impact of climate change, warns a report from the charity Christian Aid. The effect could be so great that it would wipe out any attempts to build sustainable development in these countries.

“Neither single issue presents such a clear and present danger to the future welfare of the world’s poor,” states the report. It estimates that by the end of the century 182 million people in sub-Saharan Africa alone could die of disease directly attributable to climate change.

Already, it says, climate changes are fuelling violence in drought hit areas of Kenya. Nomadic herders in the north of the country have started killing each other over the right to water their cattle at a diminishing number of water holes. The recent droughts throughout east Africa are a foretaste of what is to come.

“If climate change remains unchecked, it is difficult to see how the UN’s millennium development goals, which aim to halve world poverty by 2015, can be met,” it says. Climate change will lead to more drought and flooding, with a direct impact on people’s health and lives. Poorer people are less likely to have access to early warning systems that will help them prepare for a storm; they live on land that is more likely to flood because they can afford nowhere else; and they often depend on their land for their livelihood, so are vulnerable if it is flooded or there is a drought.

Rising sea waters are likely to affect not only areas like Bangladesh, but also Vietnam, Egypt, and several islands in the Pacific and Indian oceans.

The report goes beyond merely calling for renewed efforts on climate change by the industrialised countries. Instead, it wants to see the development of solar, wind, and water power in developing countries, rather than adopting the industrialised countries’ reliance on fossil fuels.


Gap in contraceptive use between rich and poor is growing in US

Janice Tanne New York

The gap in reproductive health between poor and better-off women in the United States, in terms of abortions and unintended pregnancies and births, has been growing since 1994, a new report shows. The report says the reason seems to be lack of easy access to contraceptives and restrictions on abortion. The Guttmacher Institute, a non-profit making organisation that researches reproductive health, said in its reports that poor women’s use of contraceptives had declined since 1994, leading to more abortions and unintended pregnancies.

The institute said that women living below the poverty line were four times as likely to have an unplanned pregnancy, five times as likely to have an unplanned birth, and three times as likely to have an abortion as women whose income was more than twice that at the poverty line. The two reports are based on data from the US National Center for Health Statistics.

The federal Department of Health and Human Services defines the poverty lines in 2004 in the United States as $9310 (£4955; €7275) a year for a single individual, $12 490 for two people, and $18 850 for a family of four. In 1999, 12% of US residents lived below the poverty line. Median household income in 1999 was almost $42 000, according to the US Census Bureau.

The institute looked at the rate of intended and unintended pregnancies in women aged 15 to 44 in the five year periods ending in December 1994 and 2001. It reported different rates of unintended pregnancy in women with different incomes and in different situations (Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health 2006;38:50-6) and released a report on the role of abortion in US women’s lives.