

Climate Change's Affect on the Poor: Aid Through Development

Christine Smith, Catholic Relief Services, US Operations/Church Relations Manager; Photos by David Snyder, CRS CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICES



Climate change has a direct effect on global poverty. Climate change affects access to food and water. Food and water security issues have become the foundation of development aid. The primary vehicle that Catholic Relief Services uses to help people living in poverty around the world is aid that engenders the development of people. Aid, for development and relief work is critical to overcome poverty. In the public and in the media, one hears or reads about aid - foreign aid, disaster aid, development aid; but what is aid really? What does aid have to do with climate change and the environment?

Throughout the world, water supplies in developing countries are contaminated with a wide variety of microorganisms that cause typhoid, diarrhea, dysentery, cholera and other virulent diseases.

Disasters, such as famine and not enough water, or agricultural disease that has stricken crops, or flooding which enables diseases to thrive, are all indicators that there is something happening in the climate worldwide. When the environmental changes affect people in significant ways, aid is needed.

One such illustration of aid is in Ethiopia. For years, Mulalem Balachew's family and village have struggled with drought. Through CRS and the U.S. government's Food for Peace program, he and his village have transformed their once-eroded hillside by terracing the land to capture water, cultivating drought-resistant seeds, and building wells that make it easier to care for their farm and animals. They are less dependent on emergency food and are able to live in dignity with hope for the future.

Obviously, when one speaks of water scarcity, food scarcity is not far behind. When farming is impossible, people cannot eat properly. The resulting malnutrition leads to vulnerability to chronic disease and illness, stunted growth, and premature death. If a majority of people in a country is suffering from the agricultural affects of climate change, such as food and water scarcity, then people are not able to farm, or work, or teach, or operate the government. That country is then vulnerable to a hostile take-over from

within or from external forces, and civil war is a possible result.

There are ways that you can help poor people suffering from the effects of global climate change and help the world live in peace: learn, pray, take action, advocate. You can learn about climate change, get resources, discover what other people are doing, and join the legislative advocacy at www.catholicsandclimatechange.org/, education.crs.org/stewardship, and www.usccb.org/sdwp/ejp/. You can sign up for the Catholic Campaign Against Global Poverty which empowers you to advocate for U.S. policies that foster economic and social development for people living in poverty. The campaign focuses on Trade, Aid and Debt Elimination. Sign up for this campaign and others at actioncenter.crs.org.



Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) www.usccb.org/cchd

All Communities Have a Right to Breathe Clean Air

By Donna Toliver Grimes, CCHD Education Coordinator

I know how it feels to struggle for breath. Chronic respiratory conditions can be frightening and debilitating. Once you ran and walked as you pleased. Now, you plan every trip around inclines and stairs.

Imagine an epidemic of breathing disorders in your neighborhood. The number of old and young struggling to breathe mysteriously increases each year. Residents realize many people they know have compromised health due to the air quality. What would you do?

Climate change is part of daily national and international news. Yet, closer to home some recognize a pattern of sickness

and death in their community that corresponds to a history of unsafe levels of toxic air emissions and contaminated water from nearby industrial processing plants. In addition, these conditions occur more often in low-income neighborhoods, particularly with people of color.

However, some people who are economically disadvantaged have found an approach that works. They regularly monitor air quality in their neighborhoods to ensure corporate compliance with government environmental safety standards. Furthermore, they are

teaching their neighbors and even children to organize and act on their own behalf.

In Gainesville, GA, more than 50 years ago, the Newton Florist Club, a bereavement committee in the Newtown neighborhood, frequently delivered flowers to families of their deceased neighbors. They later learned that a major cause of illness was the toxic air emissions from the Purina Mills and Cargill processing plants bordering their community. Now, this environmental justice advocacy organization is a powerful witness and change agent. Executive Director Faye Bush says, "The Newtown Community

Bread for the World: Ending Hunger At Home and Abroad

Bread for the World (BFW) is a bit different from most social-justice organizations because we focus on both U.S. and international concerns. We are a collective Christian voice urging our nation's decision makers to end hunger at home and abroad – anywhere it affects people in God's world.

As an organization, Bread for the World focuses on public policy change. With the stroke of a pen, policies are made that redirect millions of dollars and affect millions of lives. By making our voices heard in Congress, we make our nation's laws fairer and compassionate to people in need. When everyone, including our government, does their part, we can end hunger in our time.

Each year, Bread for the World invites churches to take up a nationwide offering of letters to Congress on an issue that is important to hungry people. By writing personal letters and emails, and meeting with our representatives in Congress, we call for specific changes that will improve U.S. policy. Working through churches, campuses and other organizations, we engage more people in advocacy.

In 2007, Bread for the World sought to improve the U.S. farm bill. In mid-December the Senate passed its version of the bill. This legislation must now be reconciled with the House version through a conference. BFW President David Beckmann said, "We have shaken up traditional farm bill politics. In hundreds of churches and newspapers, the abuses of the current system have been exposed." Our message to members of Congress: farm policies should address the needs of everyone, not just a select few.

In 2008, we will push for more poverty-focused development assistance – forward-looking at investments in agriculture, education, nutrition, health and clean water. The U.S. should provide more assistance to meet the commitments our country has made in recent years. And we should provide better assistance, with resources targeted carefully to reach those in greatest need with the maximum impact.

Congress has increased funding for poverty-focused development assistance by about \$1 billion per year for the past several years, and these resources have had an impact. For example, far fewer children are dying from preventable, hunger-related diseases. But we're not yet on track to fulfill our promises, particularly that we will do our part to achieve the U.N. Millennium Development Goals.

We can and must do better, and you and your church can help. Now is the

time to begin planning an Offering of Letters for this spring! Please visit www.bread.org or call 1-800-82-BREAD for more information.

Bread for the World's New Logo

Bread for the World's logo has been refined with graphics that emphasize movement and action, as does Bread for the World itself. The new logo keeps the central imagery of the parable of the loaves and the fishes, with all the hope, Christian faith and concern for hungry people that it conveys. As the "picture" of Bread for the World, our logo makes a promise about how we work in the world: faith-based and action-oriented on a key human problem.



breadfortheworld
HAVE FAITH. END HUNGER.



is surrounded by more than a dozen industries within a two-mile radius that emit pollution into our environment. During the past three years, our people have been collecting air samples using a bucket device that traps air, then samples are sent off for analysis."

Similarly, the Louisiana Bucket Brigade in Baton Rouge and Lake Charles trains members of the community to monitor the air quality in their neighborhoods using a bucket device. Thus, when companies deny that they pollute, a local bucket brigade counters with facts gathered

by sampling the air, having the samples scientifically analyzed and reviewing the data. Bucket brigades exist in eight other States as well.

The Connecticut Coalition for Environmental Justice in Hartford, CT, was formed ten years ago to respond to community concerns about the placement of the tenth fossil fueled power generator in south Hartford following the closure of the State's nuclear power plants. This area of Hartford is 80% Black and Latino. However, in an unprecedented move, with careful planning and organized action,

the group had the new power generator removed.

People who live in poor and marginalized communities have a right to breathe clean air. CCHD is proud to share in the success of these and similar groups through the generous contributions of Catholics and others through the annual CCHD parish appeal. For more stories of hope visit www.usccb.org/cchd and www.povertyusa.org.