

# CLIMATE CHANGE Q&A



## What is climate change?

Our world's weather patterns are becoming increasingly unpredictable. The climate in which we live is changing. An increase in the global amount of greenhouse gases being released into the atmosphere is trapping more of the sun's energy and causing our planet to warm up. This effect is called 'global warming' and this is what is causing our climate to change.



## What impacts is it having?

As global temperatures rise, weather patterns are becoming more erratic and severe. Arctic sea ice and glaciers are melting, causing sea and river levels to rise, which could make flooding more common. Rainfall patterns are becoming increasingly unpredictable, with long periods of drought often being followed by flash floods. Rising temperatures can also make tornadoes, hurricanes and storms more widespread and sometimes more violent.

These changes in the global climate affect everyone but are hitting the world's poorest people first and hardest. Between 2000 and 2004, 262 million people were affected by climate-related disasters every year. 98% of these people were from developing countries.<sup>1</sup> Climate change is affecting the production of food, increasing water scarcity and leading to an increase in infection rates for some diseases. The UN has warned that climate change is seriously hampering efforts to meet the Millennium Development Goals' key commitment - to halve world poverty by 2015.<sup>2</sup>

In these, and many other ways, climate change is having a disproportionate effect on poor people and communities, making it harder for them to improve their lives and work their way out of poverty.



## Who is responsible?

Those suffering from climate change have done least to cause the problem. Developed countries have 15% of the world's population but are responsible for roughly 80% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>3</sup> Scotland is no exception to this trend. In 2005, just one of Scotland's power stations, Longannet, emitted ten times more CO<sub>2</sub> than Malawi produces in a year, and more CO<sub>2</sub> than ten sub-Saharan African countries—including Malawi, Rwanda, Burundi, Chad, Comoros, Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Gambia, Mali and the Central African Republic—combined.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> UNDP (2007) Human Development Report: Fighting Climate Change – Human Solidarity in a Divided World

<sup>2</sup> UNDP (2007) Human Development Report: Fighting Climate Change – Human Solidarity in a Divided World

<sup>3</sup> Christian Aid (2006) The Climate of Poverty: Facts, Fears and Hopes

<sup>4</sup> Scottish Environment Protection Agency (2005) SPRI Emission Data; Return Details for Scottish Power Longannet Power Station figures show that, in 2005, Longannet emitted 8,508 million kilograms of carbon dioxide or 8.5 million tonnes. Figures from the Energy Information Administration (2004) World per capita carbon dioxide emissions from the consumption and flaring of fossil fuels 1980 – 2004 show that emissions from these ten countries add up to 8.29 million tonnes.



## Why is SCIAF working on climate change?

Climate change is an issue of poverty. From increased floods and rainfall to increased droughts, climate change is already affecting poor people around the globe – and this will become more pronounced as climate change worsens. Raquel Cruz, who works for CESTA, a SCIAF-funded organisation working on environmental issues in El Salvador, notes that: “Climate change is a serious problem in my country. When there is a drought, for example, it has a serious effect on the production of food, the population experiences a lack of food, but also farmers find themselves without employment. It doesn’t only cause death and destruction, but also breaks up communities. The overall effect.... is deeper poverty”.

Climate change is also an issue of justice. Poor and vulnerable people – those who have done the least to cause the problem – are being hit hardest by its effects. Countries like Scotland, which have contributed disproportionately to climate change, have a responsibility to tackle an issue that represents one of the greatest threats to progress in the fight against global poverty.



## How much time do we have to act?

Climate change is an issue of great urgency. Scientific evidence suggests that if we are to avoid catastrophic climate change, greenhouse gas emissions must fall considerably within the next 5 to 10 years.<sup>5</sup> As such, SCIAF is part of a massive coalition of aid agencies around the world calling for dramatic cuts in carbon emissions to be agreed at a UN meeting in Copenhagen in December 2009.



Photo: Gonzalo Bell

## What can I do?

You can help people adapt and survive by donating to SCIAF. We help many poor communities develop strategies for survival. You can also support our campaign for the world’s leaders to come to an agreement on dramatic cuts in carbon emissions, and check our website for the latest developments on the Scottish Climate Change Bill.

**For more information  
see [www.sciaf.org.uk](http://www.sciaf.org.uk)**

5 Baer and Mastrandrea (2006) High Stakes (Institute of Public Policy Research)



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