

Food security

Climate change could drive 122m more people into extreme poverty by 2030

UN report warns that without measures to halt and reverse climate change, food production could become impossible in large areas of the world



A food distribution briefing in Malikopo, Chikwawa, one of the areas of Malawi most affected by this year's severe drought. Photograph: Andrew Renneisen/Getty Images

Up to 122 million more people worldwide could be living in extreme poverty by 2030 as a result of climate change and its impacts on small-scale farmers' incomes, a major UN report warned on Monday.

Climate change is "a major and growing threat to global food security", said the report, warning that it could increase the global population living in extreme poverty by between 35 and 122 million by 2030, with farming communities in sub-Saharan Africa among the hardest hit.

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The 2016 State of Food and Agriculture report, published by the Rome-based **Food and Agriculture Organisation** (FAO), calls for "deep transformations in agriculture and food systems" and for the world's half-billion small-scale farms to receive particular support.

The report warns that without "widespread adoption of sustainable land, water, fisheries and forestry practices, global poverty cannot be eradicated".

It adds that action must also be taken to reduce farming's own contributions to greenhouse gas emissions and global warming.

The 194-page report looks at the future of farming and food security under different climate change scenarios. It also looks at possible responses to what it calls "an unprecedented double challenge" to eradicate hunger and poverty and stabilise the global climate.

There is, it says, "no doubt that climate change will affect the agriculture sectors and food security and that its negative impact will become more severe as it accelerates. In some particularly vulnerable places, such as small islands or in areas affected by large-scale extreme weather and climate events, the impact could be catastrophic."

In a best-case scenario, slow-moving climate change would allow farming to adapt through relatively simple techniques, at least in the near future. But it warns that more abrupt changes would make adequate adaptation almost impossible.

Possible consequences include major declines in crop yields and increasingly high and volatile food prices, it says. "In the longer run, unless measures are put in place to halt and reverse climate change, food production could become impossible in large areas of the world."

The report cites diversifying crop production, better integration of farming with the natural habitat, agroecology and "sustainable intensification" as strategies to help small-scale farmers adapt to a warming world.

It says some current policies, including subsidies for inputs such as synthetic fertilisers and pesticides, could hinder the adoption of more sustainable techniques.

"Social protection programmes will need to play an important role - in helping smallholders better manage risk, reducing vulnerability to food price volatility, and enhancing the employment prospects of rural people who leave the land," it adds.

The report comes as delegates arrive in Rome for the 43rd **Committee on World Food Security** meetings.

On Friday, the FAO's director general, José Graziano da Silva, warned: "Higher temperatures and erratic weather patterns are already undermining the health of soils, forests and oceans on which agricultural sectors and food security depend. We have seen an increase of pest and disease outbreaks everywhere."



In a **special message on Friday**, **Pope Francis** said the world should draw on "the wisdom of rural communities" and "a style of life that can help defend us from the logic of consumerism and production at any cost, a logic that ... [is] aimed solely at the increase in profit".

Technologies including genetic modification "may give excellent results in the laboratory, may be advantageous for some, but have ruinous effects for others", he argued.

Ertharin Cousin, executive director of the **World Food Programme**, said: "Climate change is already stretching the international humanitarian system ... more than 80% of the world's hungry live in areas prone to natural disasters and environmental degradation. Climate change is not waiting - neither can we."

Until 2030, says the FAO report, climate change impacts will produce both gains and losses, with crop yields increasing in colder places, for example. After 2030, negative impacts could threaten farming and food systems in every region of the world.

In September 2015, UN member states agreed to eradicate extreme poverty and end hunger by 2030 as part of the **sustainable development goals**.

In December, world leaders signed the **Paris agreement**, which sets a framework for national action and international cooperation on climate change.

Monday's report argues that now is the time for these political commitments to be put into action.

It notes that agriculture and related land use alone accounts for at least one-fifth of global greenhouse-gas emissions - and that this must also be addressed.

Globally, about one-third of all food produced is also lost or wasted. Reducing this figure could limit farming's impact on natural resources and emissions, it says.

"'Business as usual' is not an option," stressed Graziano da Silva in a foreword to the report. "Agriculture has always been the interface between natural resources and human activity. Today it holds the key to solving the two greatest challenges facing humanity: eradicating poverty, and maintaining the stable climatic corridor in which civilisation can thrive."

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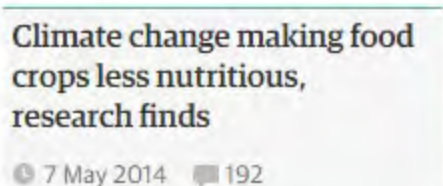
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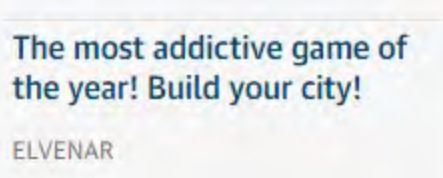
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