

*“This effort to confront climate change will be part of our strategy to alleviate poverty. Because we know that it is the world’s poor who will feel - and who may already be feeling - the affect of a warming planet. If we fail to act, famine could displace hundreds of millions, fueling competition and conflict over basic resources like food and water.”*

– President-elect Obama, September 25, 2008

## ***The Problem***

Climate change is making the lives of poor people more precarious, especially for the most vulnerable communities in developing countries. Reduced water availability and crop yields, severe weather-related disasters, exacerbated disease threats, and destabilizing risks such as sea-level rise all pose a serious and immediate threat to poverty reduction and economic development around the world.

Security experts have warned that the impacts of climate change will heighten security threats by increasing impoverishment and leading to migration and refugee crises and conflicts over scarce natural resources such as water. Moreover, our already strained capacity to respond to natural disasters and health crises around the world and in the United States is being stretched even further by the consequences of climate change.

Reductions in greenhouse gas emissions to prevent even greater harm in the future must be undertaken in tandem with strategies to address the climate challenge that vulnerable communities face today. In particular, the new administration should ensure support for the most vulnerable communities internationally and in the US to build resilience and adapt to serious and immediate climate impacts. By helping poor communities become more resilient in the face of droughts, storms, floods, and the other consequences of the climate crisis, we can save lives and money now and in the future. Both internationally and in the US, this funding will also generate new economic opportunities as communities develop innovative water technologies, build more resilient buildings, invest in infrastructure and public health, and restore natural barriers to storms and floods.

Meanwhile, it is also critical to provide clean energy sources and assistance for reducing deforestation to developing countries so that those countries can develop economically and reduce poverty, while also shifting onto low-carbon and climate-friendly pathways.

## ***Short-term Recommendations – First 100 Days***

President Obama should:

- Instruct the Secretary of State to fully and responsibly reengage in UN climate negotiations for a post-2012 global deal that provides appropriate support to developing countries for adaptation to climate impacts, assists developing countries in reducing emissions, and commits the US to substantial emissions reductions.
- Issue an Executive Order to establish an interagency task force or quasi-independent commission to assess and annually report on the adaptation and resilience needs of developing countries and to develop strategies, including necessary funding to address those needs.
- Propose a budget that includes short-term climate adaptation and resilience assistance through the UNFCCC/GEF Least Developed Countries Fund and through USAID. As an initial step, the President’s budget should request at least \$250 million for the Least Developed Countries Fund and USAID adaptation programs.

- Propose measures in an economic stimulus bill that can provide support to vulnerable communities in the US to build resilience and preparedness for climate change impacts in ways that promote economic revitalization and a green economy, such as sustainable housing and coastal restoration programs in the Gulf Coast.
- Issue an Executive Order to establish an interagency task force to assess needs and develop objectives and strategies for resilience and preparedness in low-income and other vulnerable communities in the United States.

### ***Long-term Recommendations – First Term***

President Obama should:

- Work with Congress to pass comprehensive climate and energy legislation that includes:
  - Substantial adaptation and resilience assistance for developing countries.
  - Programs to assist low-income communities and also ensure that low-income energy consumers are not hurt by rising energy costs.
  - Assist developing countries in limiting emissions by providing support for reduced deforestation and access to clean energy technology.
- Ensure that US government development assistance is aligned with climate change adaptation and preparedness strategies and efforts to help developing countries to adopt clean energy and reduce deforestation.

### ***Additional Background Information***

The *Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change* in 2006 noted that even with dramatic emission reductions today, climate change will still have major impacts for many years, particularly on developing countries. Supporting developing countries in their efforts to adapt to climate change is the only avenue to actually address the harm being experienced in the near-term.

In the United States, poor communities in vulnerable areas such as the Gulf Coast are particularly vulnerable to climate impacts such as severe weather events. Meanwhile, according to the recent *Scientific Assessment of the Effect of Climate Change in the US*, “climate change is very likely to accentuate the disparities already evident in the American health care system.”

As the new administration designs climate and energy policies to address these threats, these policies should be pursued in a fair and equitable manner both internationally and in the US. International assistance for clean energy and reduced deforestation should ensure community participation, benefits to local communities, and the protection of communities’ rights. Domestically, assistance should be provided to low-income people who may face increases in energy prices.

Meanwhile, enormous opportunities exist internationally and in the US to promote a new, global climate resilient and green economy that can benefit poor communities and promote economic revitalization. Overlaps between adaptation and resilience efforts and green economy strategies, such as green building and coastal restoration, should be pursued whenever possible.

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