

"Combating Climate Change in Africa"
Chairman Donald M. Payne
Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health
Thursday, April 15, 2010
10:00 AM in 2172 RHOB

Remarks

Good morning. Thank you for joining the Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health for this critically important hearing entitled "Combating Climate Change in Africa."

The threat of climate change is serious and extremely urgent. While the impact is felt in every country around the world, developing countries have disproportionately experienced the devastating effects of climate change.

The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has reported that, in 2008 alone, more than 20 million people were displaced by sudden climate-related disasters; an estimated 200 million people could be displaced as a result of climate impacts by 2050; climate change currently contributes to the global burden of disease and premature deaths, and adverse health impacts from diseases like malaria, dengue and diarrhea will be greatest in low-income countries.

African countries in particular are most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, such as desertification. Many countries, for example, Kenya and Ethiopia, increasingly face extreme droughts and severe floods, making their populations more food insecure and more prone to diseases associated with malnutrition.

The United Nations reported in 2009 that approximately 23 million people in seven East African countries relied on food aid due to decimated crops from a decade of poor rains.

Addressing climate change is a vital component of development, and we must devise cost-effective adaptation assistance targeted at the most vulnerable communities in Africa.

Conservation farming, storing water in times of drought, and early warning systems can have a tremendous impact in preparing communities for disasters. Strengthening methods of assessment of adaptation, providing education and training for public awareness and building capacity are also critical components of combating climate change.

The United States has committed to providing technical support and financial assistance to combat climate change. In the FY2010 Congressional Budget Justification for Foreign Operations (CBJ), President Obama requested funding for Global Climate Change and related Clean Energy assistance for Africa totaling \$104.6 million (\$95 million in Development Assistance and \$9.6 million in Economic Support Funds).

In addition to adaptation programs, strong mitigation policies are essential to combating this global crisis. We must begin to reverse the damage that has been done by reducing growth in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions while promoting energy efficiency, forest conservation and biodiversity.

African countries contribute comparatively low levels of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. The International Energy Agency estimates African nations emitted only about 3% of world carbon dioxide (CO₂) from human-related sources in 2007. However, Africa is likely to warm more than the global average.

Without policies to significantly reduce global GHG emissions, most climate models project the global average temperature to rise above natural variability by at least 2.7 degrees Fahrenheit above 1990 levels. The current global rates of deforestation contribute to more than 20% of human-caused greenhouse gas emissions, which makes deforestation a considerable contributor to human-induced climate change.

The African Union's Common African Position has given priority to adaptation, but African nations must also develop policies now that will reduce carbon emissions in the future.

The United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen was an historic step forward in the global effort to aggressively combat climate change. The Conference was attended by 120 Heads of State and laid out ambitious points of action. Although it fell short of a legally binding agreement, countries made significant financial commitments, and we must follow through on those commitments and work towards a legally binding agreement in the future.

Climate change impacts every aspect of development – from reducing poverty, to economic growth, to peace and stability. The challenges are great, indeed. However, combating climate change can be an opportunity. African nations can leapfrog over some of the steps Western nations took in their development.

The 2004 Nobel Peace Prize Winner Wangari Maathai of Kenya stated, “We have a responsibility to protect the rights of generations, of all species, that cannot speak for themselves today. The global challenge of climate change requires that we ask no less of our leaders, or ourselves.”

We in the U.S. must work with the leaders and civil society of African nations to combat climate change and its effects and infuse these efforts into our development framework.

I sincerely thank the panel of esteemed witnesses for testifying before us today and sharing their insights on what we as a nation are doing and what more must be done to address this critical issue. I will now turn to our Ranking Member for his opening remarks.