

Impacts of climate change on global food security



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“ The potential impacts of climate change on global food security go well beyond its effects on crop and livestock production. They ramify into bigger questions about economic access to food and social and political stability.”

In 1948, the United Nations General Assembly synthesized a document titled ‘ The Universal Declaration of Human Rights’. This document outlined the basic rights that all citizens, regardless of nationality, race, gender, or any other characteristic, are inherently entitled to. Article 25 of the declaration addresses the right to Food Security, “ Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services...” (The Declaration of Human Rights 1948). This declaration, being recognized by over 50 countries, exemplifies what a vital concern food security is for all nations and peoples.

However, since 1948 the idea of food security has evolved. There are more factors that play into security and more damaging results due to increased globalization and population size. The principle risk to food security is climate change. Of course, small-scale agricultural and livestock production are adversely affected in many regions, but the effects of climate change, on a global scale are extremely detrimental. The World Health organization defines food security as being when, “ all people at all times have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life” (1966). As the impacts of climate change increase it will become increasingly

difficult to achieve this goal. The Fifth Assessment by the IPCC (2014) offers a valuable explanation as to why food security is a growing concern. “

Climate change threatens human security because it undermines livelihoods, compromises culture and individual identity, increases migration that people would rather have avoided, and because it can undermine the ability of states to provide the conditions necessary for human security. “

Areas of the world that are isolated, either geographically or in terms of globalization typically have lower levels of income and national infrastructure that provide services and support. These factors amplify the harmful effects of having insecure food sources. When people are unsure of where their meals will come from, the instability can result in other reactions. These could take the shape of political uprisings, economic strife, or even starvation.

There are already instances of this theory being demonstrated in countries around the world. India has recently experienced increased growth in their economy and food production, but there is still an alarmingly high rate of under-nourished citizens. On a small-scale, this is due to social inequality, political strife and few services, but when looking at the bigger picture, there is evidence that increased temperatures, unstable precipitation patterns and more extreme weather events are contributing to food insecurity. “ The Gangotri glacier is already retreating at a rate of 30 meters a year. An increase in rainfall is simulated over the eastern region of India but the north-western deserts may see a small decrease in the absolute amount of rainfall. Diseases for human, crops and animals are on the rise. There is risk of continuous fall in productivity and production” (Hans 2014). When these

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factors combine, it is a ticking time-bomb until people attack their governments due to limited sources of food.

The Maoist insurgency recently experienced in India, referred to by the Prime Minister, Manmoham Singh as being, “ the single biggest internal security challenge faced by the country” has been attributed to hunger (Wade 2011).

The Maoists (followers of communist ideologies), represent the interests of the indigenous locals and poverty-stricken families of rural India. They believe that these people have been ignored by the government for too long and are fighting for the fair allotment of resources. Their methods of achieving their goals are extremely violent and controversial, but it could be argued that they have noble aims. When people are starving, extreme measures are taken for survival (BBC 2011).

It is inevitable that climate change will lead to reduced production of food, and this will also impact food prices, and who will be able to purchase different foods. Logically, people with more money will have more food security, and poor people will begin to suffer. Poorer communities spend the majority of their money on staple foods, because they cannot grow their own, so they will have to find ways to pay for higher food prices (Pritchard 421). When the prices of cereal foods were raised in 2011, over 44 million people were forced into poverty, according to the World Bank. This number persists well into 2015. Without mitigation, examples of these violent uprisings will continue to surface all over the globe.

If we assume that the effects of climate change will continue to persist, and that the global population will continue to grow, it is wise to invest in

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adaptive strategies for food production. Adaptive efforts will cross-sect types of people, careers and priorities. There is no, single group of people who have to 'deal' with this. The changes implemented will affect everyone from rich to poor, powerful to weak, westernized to developing. Many farmers have invested time and research into diversifying their crops and livestock and investing in new technologies and insurance programs. For example, drought and flood resistant crops are being planted, drip irrigation is being utilized to limit water waste, and rotational grazing is improving soil health. These are just a small sampling of the simple yet effective innovations happening now.

Climate change is one of, if not the greatest, threat to food security. The level of severity vastly differs depending on location and stability of the region, but it is undeniable, that increased populations and mounting tensions will result in unfavorable results if adaptive measures are not put in place. The future is uncertain, but to ensure the security of humanity, it is vital that we protect our environmental resources and focus on supporting more just societies. We can do this through education, supporting local leaders, and improving public services, and swiftly creating and implementing policy that facilitates positive change. These changes will result in reduced hunger, and ultimately, in a more peaceful world.

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