

The Global South Bears a Disproportionate Burden of the Climate Change Effect: Social and Economic Vulnerabilities and their Long-Term Effects [ENG]

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Climate change is a global issue, yet certain countries are disproportionately impacted. This can occur due to a country's location, such as an island facing rising sea levels. It is, however, also important to consider a more sociological understanding of disaster prevention and recovery. The sociological approach shifts the conversation away from understanding climate change as a violent force of nature and instead considers how social systems create added environmental vulnerability (Islam & Lim 2015). Geographical areas such as sub-Saharan Africa face ongoing desertification. The impact of this vulnerability differs greatly depending on the economic and social state of a region (Islam & Lim 2015). The Global South faces the double risk of natural disasters and inefficient social structures (Islam & Lim 2015). Climate change creates long-term economic hardships that perpetuate social instability. Climate change may directly impact the environment, but it also influences social structures that cause disproportionate burdens in the Global South.

Global South stems from the family of terms such as 'third world' and refers to the broad geographical areas of Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Oceania (Clarke, 2018). While many of these terms are demagogic, Global South places a strong emphasis on marginalized communities. Fundamental acknowledging the negative impacts of globalization and of wealthy countries subjugating entire peoples and regions (Clarke, 2018). The Global South may refer to a geographical area but it recognizes that there are 'Souths' in the geographical North and 'Norths' in the geographical South (Clarke, 2018). While no term that was created by those in power to broadly categorize a wide variety of cultures and regions, will ever truly overcome its inherent demagoguery, the term Global South acknowledges the global systemic imbalance of power in a way that other terms purposefully ignore.

The desertification of North Africa has long been a concern of scholars across the world. Desertification is defined

as arid and sub-humid areas caused by climatic variation and human activities (Capozzi et al. 2018, 281). Desertification often involves environmental degradation, increased migration, undersupply of water, food insecurity and negative economic impacts (Capozzi et al. 2018, 281). Rural sub-Saharan Africa, such as rural villages in Burkina Faso, are particularly impacted by climate change. Sub-Saharan Africa is populated with many pastoralist cultures that rely heavily on agriculture to support local households (Davis, 2005, 509). Climate change causes long-term environmental effects that disproportionately affect agriculture reliant communities (Zidouemba, 2017, 79). It is estimated that necessary resources to support pastoralist communities in the sub-Saharan drylands will be inefficient by 2030 (Ataec, 2021). As agricultural means of economic production decrease due to environmental vulnerabilities, rural villagers are forced to seek other means of economic stability, often resulting in mass urbanization and poverty (Zidouemba, 2017, 79). The sociological approach to climate change recognizes that the Global South experiences additional social inequalities as populations attempt to adapt to climate-related stressors (Islam & Lim 2015). Due to social and economic disadvantages, certain populations are less capable of coping with disasters. This can be reflected in the long distances rural communities travel to access clean water and the number of people facing food insecurity (Zidouemba, 2017, 81). The impact of desertification, access to water and land degradation has been the topic of many discussions of climate change issues (Davis, 2005). Yet, global solutions often justify policy changes that systematically disadvantage indigenous cultures and further damage the environment (Davis, 2005). A shift towards solutions designed, and implemented by indigenous and local peoples has had more success in recent years.

Ataec is participating in the shift towards glocal programs against climate change with its project, Green Lands. Green Lands is a project that aims to help local peoples in Maganimasso, Burkina Faso, to implement water and food sovereignty, reforestation-restoration camps, social architecture and educational programs (ATAEC, 2021). It is a part of the Great Green Wall initiative, which aims to restore 100 million hectares of degraded land across sub-Saharan Africa by 2030, creating 10 million local green jobs in the process (ATAEC, 2021). With the aim of approaching climate change from a glocal perspective, this project is developed with a “collective, non-hierarchical” approach to create a self-sufficient community that is knowledgeable of land caring, ecosocial building and resilience against climate changes (ATAEC, 2021). Ataec acts to provide tools of autonomy to this community, supporting indigenous artists, preserving local culture, and promoting self-resilience (Ataec, 2021). This project directly addresses the rural disadvantages that pastoralist cultures experience across sub-Saharan Africa. It aims to provide rural communities the tools to sustainably adapt to environmental vulnerabilities while targeting the social inequality these vulnerabilities create.

Developing countries are disproportionately impacted by climate change as they struggle with environmental vulnerability and the social and economic inability to adapt adequately. This social and economic disadvantage impacts the number of people who die and are affected by climate-related disasters. These disadvantages also frequently lead to long-term societal impacts. By working with local knowledge and traditions, it is possible to develop solutions to climate change that address the environmental and social vulnerabilities in a way that disconnected international interventions cannot. Climate change impacts all populations, but some societies face multiple disadvantages and environmental vulnerabilities that inevitably cause climate change to impact their society radically.

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