# Climate Justice Means Accountability to Africa


*Durban, South Africa 2011 OrinLangelle/PhotoLangelle.org*

In the decades to come, climate disruption will impact every person on the planet. However, as the NAACP Climate Justice Initiative states, **"global climate change has a disproportionate impact on communities of color in the United States and around the world."** This is true whether they're coping with displacement from coastal flooding and more intense hurricanes, higher food prices, or exposure to pollution from fossil fuel extraction and consumption. In fact, "race--over class--is the number one indicator for the placement of toxic facilities in the U.S."

**It is an injustice that the people most affected by climate change are the least responsible for causing it.** The African continent's population of 1 billion people contributes less than 4% of global greenhouse gas emissions. By contrast, wealthy countries cause 70%; the U.S. alone accounts for 20%. To put this in perspective, New York State has more cars than the whole of Africa.

**Africa is especially vulnerable to climate change**, in part because the continent has 50% higher temperatures than the global average. To date, the planet has warmed 0.8 °C above pre-industrial levels, and people in Africa are already experiencing more extreme weather events. A warmer atmosphere holds more water, causing heavier but less frequent rains. Since farmers rely on rainfall to cultivate 96% of African cropland, **increased drought and flooding threaten food security and livelihoods**. With only 1.5°C-2°C warming, the World Bank predicts that 40-80% of Africa's cropland will become unsuitable for the staple grains maize, millet, and sorghum by the 2030s-2040's.

**These threats to food production most harm low-income people on the continent**, 80 % of whom depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. **Women also bear greater burdens** as they are often responsible for growing food, collecting water, and gathering firewood in rural areas. Due to agricultural productivity loss, many more people will be forced to migrate from rural areas to cities or other regions.

**Other consequences of climate disruption in Africa include increased water scarcity, health risks such as higher incidence of malaria, and coastal flooding.** For the 320 cities and 56 million people located in low-lying coastal zones around the continent, sea-level rise will mean damage, disasters, and displacement. Again, low-income people will suffer the most, given that they are more likely to live in areas at more risk of flooding such as "flood plains" and disease spread due to poor quality sanitation.

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*The U.S. Africa Network is a Project of the Eastern Educational Resource Collaborative (East Ed.)*

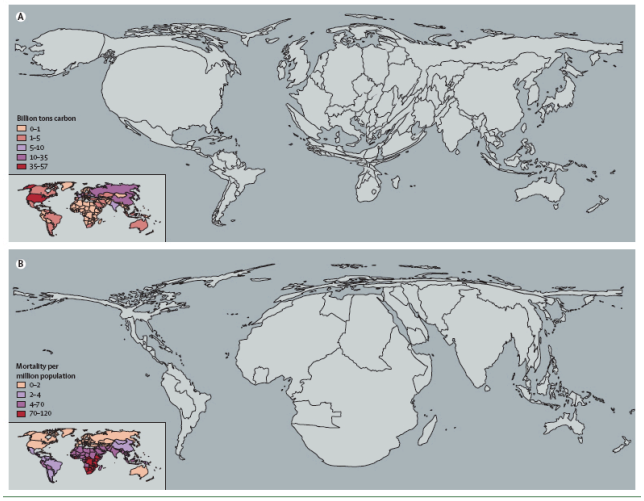
## What U.S. Climate Policies Can Stop Harming and Start Helping Africa?

**1. Reduce emissions here in the United States:**
Steep and immediate emissions reductions in the U.S. are necessary to avoid runaway climate change. Because Africa stands to lose the most from runaway climate change, a global justice perspective demands that the U.S. cut domestic emissions now.

**2. Reject international offsets and other false solutions**
REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) and other international offsets shirk U.S. responsibility for cutting emissions at home. They also almost always benefit transnational corporations at the expense of smallholder farmers and indigenous communities. The U.S. currently supports REDD, as well as funding for large-scale dirty energy projects through the World Bank, U.S. export credit agencies, and the Obama Administration's new Power Africa initiative. By contrast, small-scale renewable energy would more efficiently reach rural areas, where 84 percent of the "energy-poor" live. Rather than impose false solutions from the top down, the U.S. should support the emissions mitigation and climate resiliency efforts of African grassroots organizations and governments.

**3. Pay our climate debt to Africa**
The U.S. and other rich countries have used more than their fair share of the earth's ability to safely absorb carbon, leaving the rest of the world without the option to develop in the same way. Therefore, African climate justice advocates are demanding financial assistance for renewable energy development and removal of intellectual property barriers to technology in order to access energy without endangering the world's climate. UN agencies estimate that the full cost for low-income countries to deal with climate change and develop renewables will be hundreds of billions of dollars per year.

These payments should be made as grants, not loans. It is also critical for these funds to be accountable to African civil society and governments, rather than private corporations and international lenders.




*The top map is cumulative carbon emissions. The bottom is anticipated mortality from climate change. The Lancet, 2009.*

### Further Reading

Keynote by Nnimmo Bassey http://saharareporters.com/report/ambition-selfishness-and-climate-action-nnimmo-bassey

Pan-African Climate Justice Alliance Policy Briefs
http://www.pacja.org/index.php/en/information-hub/2012-05-16-09-30-44/policy

Fact sheets from Carbon Trade Watch
"Cap and Trade" "Carbon Offsets" www.carbontradewatch.org/factsheets

Key Arguments Against REDD+
http://www.carbontradewatch.org/publications/key-arguments-against-reducing-emissions-from-deforestation-and-degradation.html

No REDD in Africa http://no-redd-africa.org/

"Electrifying Africa, but at What Cost?" http://fpif.org/electrifying-africa-cost-africans/