



CURRENT AFFAIRS



Argasia Education PVT. Ltd. (GST NO.-09AAPCAI478E1ZH)
Address: Basement C59 Noida, opposite to Priyagold Building gate, Sector 02,
Pocket I, Noida, Uttar Pradesh, 201301, CONTACT NO:-8448440231

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THE UNJUST CLIMATE

THIS ARTICLE COVERS 'DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS' AND THE TOPIC DETAILS OF "THE UNJUST CLIMATE". THIS TOPIC IS RELEVANT IN THE "GOVERNANCE" SECTION OF THE UPSC CSE EXAM.

WHY IN THE NEWS?

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) released a report titled "The Unjust Climate", revealing how climate change disproportionately impacts income and adaptation strategies in rural areas. The study analyses data from over 100,000 households across 24 developing countries, painting a stark picture of the challenges faced by the most vulnerable populations.

SIGNIFICANT FINDINGS OF THE REPORT

UNEQUAL BURDEN OF EXTREME WEATHER:

Every day of extreme heat **reduces poor households' income by 2.4% compared to wealthier ones**. This financial strain is compounded by the pressure to rely more on climate-dependent agriculture as temperatures rise. **A 1°C increase leads to a concerning 33% decrease in off-farm income for poor households**, further limiting their ability to diversify income sources and build resilience.

IMPACT ON FOOD SECURITY:

This shift towards climate-dependent agriculture can have a **ripple effect on food security**. Poor households become even more reliant on the success of their crops, which are increasingly vulnerable to unpredictable weather patterns. This can lead to **food shortages and malnutrition**, especially in regions already struggling with hunger.

WIDENING INCOME GAP:

The report exposes a **widening income gap between poor and non-poor rural households due to climate stressors**. Impoverished households experience a substantial reduction in their income, with 5% attributed to heat stress and 4.4% to floods, in contrast to more affluent households. This translates to substantial annual losses, **with heat stress and floods widening the income gap by \$21 billion and \$20 billion, respectively**. These financial losses can push vulnerable families deeper into poverty and hinder their ability to invest in adapting to a changing climate.

DEBT TRAPS AND EXPLOITATION:

The financial strain caused by climate change can **trap poor families in a cycle of debt and exploitation**. Lost income due to extreme weather events **reduces their ability to invest in essential resources** like fertilisers, improved seeds, and irrigation systems. This, in turn, can lead to **lower crop yields and further income losses**, forcing families to take on debt at high-interest rates or sell their land at lower prices. This creates a vicious cycle that's difficult to break without external support.

MALADAPTIVE COPING MECHANISMS:

Faced with extreme weather events like floods and droughts, poor families are forced to make difficult choices. The report highlights a troubling trend of resorting to "**maladaptive coping mechanisms**" such as **distressed sales of livestock and cutting back on essential farm investments**. While these strategies may provide short-term relief, they ultimately weaken a household's ability to cope with future climate shocks and jeopardise long-term food security.

ERODING LIVELIHOODS AND ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE:

Distress sales of livestock, a critical asset for many rural households, weaken their ability to generate income and future food security. Reduced investments in farm improvements like irrigation systems can lead to **lower crop yields and soil degradation** in the long run, further exacerbating food insecurity and environmental problems.

NATIONAL CLIMATE POLICIES FALL SHORT:

The report sheds light on a **critical gap in national climate plans**. These plans often fail to adequately consider the needs of poor people and rural farmers, who are disproportionately impacted by climate change. **Less than 1% of national climate policies mention poor people or rural communities, and only a small fraction (7.5%) of climate finance is directed towards adaptation efforts**. This lack of targeted support leaves the most vulnerable populations struggling to adapt to a changing climate.

URGENT NEED FOR EQUITY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION:

The current approach to climate action **fails to address the root causes of vulnerability**. To effectively **combat climate change**, national plans must prioritise the needs of those most at risk. This includes allocating sufficient resources for adaptation efforts in rural communities, establishing social protection programs like cash transfers or food assistance during climate shocks, and ensuring these plans are designed with the participation of vulnerable populations.

GENDER INEQUALITY PERSISTS:

The report also **identifies a gender gap in how climate change impacts rural communities**. **Agricultural policies often overlook the specific challenges faced by women farmers**, who may have limited access to resources, land ownership, and decision-making power. This lack of consideration can exacerbate existing gender inequalities and hinder women's ability to adapt to climate change.

EMPOWERING WOMEN FARMERS: BUILDING RESILIENCE THROUGH INCLUSION:

Women play a crucial role in rural livelihoods and food security. By ensuring **equitable access to resources, education, and decision-making power for women farmers, communities can strengthen their resilience to climate change.** This can involve promoting women's ownership of land, providing them with training on climate-smart agricultural practices, and ensuring their voices are heard in the development of climate action plans. Additionally, investing in childcare services can free up women's time to participate in income-generating activities or climate adaptation initiatives.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EMPOWERING RURAL COMMUNITIES

The FAO report outlines several key recommendations to address the challenges faced by rural populations in a changing climate:

- **Targeted Interventions for Adaptation:** The report calls for targeted interventions that empower different segments of rural communities to adopt climate-resilient practices. This may involve providing specific resources or training programs tailored to the unique needs of each group.
- **Addressing Multidimensional Vulnerabilities:** Climate change impacts rural communities in complex ways. Effective solutions require policies and programs that address these multifaceted vulnerabilities. This includes tackling limited access to resources like land, water, and credit, which can hinder a community's ability to adapt.
- **Social Protection with Incentives:** The report suggests linking social protection programs, such as cash transfers, with advisory services. This can provide immediate relief to vulnerable households during climate shocks while also encouraging them to adopt long-term adaptation strategies.
- **Gender-Transformative Approaches:** The report emphasises the need to address gender inequality. Discriminatory social norms often prevent women from making economic decisions, hindering their ability to adapt to climate change. The report recommends employing "gender-transformative methodologies" that directly challenge these norms and empower women farmers.

PRELIMS PRACTISE QUESTIONS

Q1. "Maladaptive coping mechanisms" employed by poor families during extreme weather events include:

- (a) Investing in irrigation systems
- (b) Distress sales of livestock
- (c) Increased government assistance programs
- (d) Long-term planning for future climate shocks

ANSWER: B

Q2. The FAO accords the status of 'Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System (GIAHS)' to traditional agricultural systems. What is the overall goal of this initiative? (UPSC Prelims-2016)

1. To provide modern technology, training in modern farming methods and financial support to local communities of identified GIAHS so as to greatly enhance their agricultural productivity.
2. To identify and safeguard eco-friendly traditional farm practices and their associated landscapes, agricultural biodiversity and knowledge systems of the local communities.

3. To provide Geographical Indication status to all the varieties of agricultural produce in such identified GIAHS.

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- (a) 1 and 3 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: B

Q3. The FAO report recommends “targeted interventions” for adaptation. This means:

- 1. a) Implementing a one-size-fits-all approach for all rural communities
- 2. b) Providing specific resources and training tailored to different needs
- 3. c) Focusing solely on technological advancements in agriculture
- 4. d) Reducing government involvement in rural development

ANSWER: B

MAINS PRACTISE QUESTION

Q1. What are the key implications of extreme heat on poor households, and how does it contribute to a widening income gap?

Q2. How does the erosion of livelihoods and environmental damage, resulting from distressed sales of livestock and reduced farm investments, impact the overall resilience of rural communities?

Himanshu Mishra