



Climate change: will there be any winners?

Consider this report from Vancouver, Canada: “engineers and developers are beginning to revise building plans to allow for... sea-level rises.”[1] In this wealthy city, plans are emerging for dikes, flood control gates and sacrificial first floors. This is not unique: many world cities have been making preparations for many years; some e.g., Amsterdam, are expert at it.

So what’s different? Canada (population 35 million, area 2nd only to Russia), a land of vast plains, towering mountains, shining cities, and mostly uninhabited coastlines, ranks 2nd globally as a fossil fuel source, and 14th for greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) per capita.

Unlike most developed nations, especially of the European Union, Canada remains confused and conflicted: climate change science is accepted by a large majority of educated people, but under current political leadership there is no clear national strategy to deal with it, especially at its source: unsustainable production and consumption of high GHG emitting fossil fuels. With minimal investment in alternatives, Canada’s powerful energy industry proceeds with business as usual. Some disoriented people even comment: “So what if it warms? We could do with milder winters!”

Now contrast this with an expression of angst from a spokesperson for the small Pacific island nation of Tuvalu: “We don’t want to leave this place. We don’t want to leave, it’s our land, our God given land, it is our culture, we can’t leave. People won’t leave until the very last minute.”[2]

Looking ahead, what chance has Tuvalu, no part of it over four metres above sea level? Will Canada take in any Tuvaluans when they are forced to flee from rising waters? But Tuvalu is not alone: it belongs to the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), a 42 member coalition drawn from all oceans and world regions. They share similar development challenges and concerns about vulnerability to the effects of global climate change. [3,4] AOSIS is an advocate for global sanity: an impressive five percent of the global population, 350 million people (ten times Canada) – now under an existential threat not of their own making.

According to the Union of Concerned Scientists, **people bear unequal health risks from climate change for several reasons.**[5]

Climate impacts differ by region: People who live in floodplains are more likely to see river or coastal flooding; those who live in regions with poor air quality today are at greater risk from poor air quality in the future; those who live in regions more susceptible to the climate change induced ingress of disease vectors, will contract those diseases.

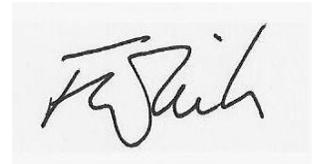
Some people are more vulnerable to illness or death: Young children, the elderly, and those already ill are less able to withstand heat and poor air quality; temperature extremes and smog hit people with heart and respiratory diseases heavily.

Wealthy nations are more likely to adapt to projected climate change and recover from climate-related disasters than poor countries: Even within nations, the less economically fortunate are more vulnerable - less likely to have air conditioning and well-insulated homes; fewer resources to escape danger. These are not theoretical risks: such impacts are happening now and will increase as the future unfolds.

Will future generations say there were any winners? If every nation doesn’t address climate change now, all will be losers: we must save the world to save ourselves and many other species who share this planet!

References:

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