

Five Key Takeaways from the Frightening IPCC Climate Change Report

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Typhoon Haiyan survivors walk through the ruins of their neighborhood on the outskirts of Tacloban, central Philippines on Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2013. (AP Photo/David Guttenfelder)

The United Nation’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) issued its latest report today. It focuses on how climate change will affect human society in coming years painting a picture of a world destabilized by a rapidly changing environment. While many of the events it details are familiar to those who follow the research on climate change, taken together in the 2,600-page report assembled by more than 300 scientists, they’re almost overwhelming to consider.

“Throughout the 21st century, climate-change impacts are projected to slow down economic growth, make poverty reduction more difficult, further erode food security, and prolong existing and create new poverty traps, the latter particularly in urban areas and emerging hot spots of hunger,” the report declared.

The longer we dither about taking action, it warns, the worse the impacts of climate change will be.

Here are five takeaways from the report:

1. The food supply is in trouble → “Nobody on this planet is going to be untouched by the impacts of climate change,” [Rajendra K. Pachauri](#), chairman of the IPCC, said at a news conference presenting the report. Climate change has already affected the global food supply; crop yields for wheat, for example, are beginning [to decline](#) even as the human population continues to grow.

2. The poor will be hit hardest, but the rich will feel it too → As with most natural disasters and food shortages, the poor will be hit hardest. But the rich will also feel it. “A warmer world will push food prices higher, trigger ‘hotspots of hunger’ among the world’s poorest people, and put the crunch on Western delights like fine wine and robust coffee,” [Seth Borenstein reports for the AP](#). “Food prices are likely to go up somewhere in a wide range of 3 percent to 84 percent by 2050 just because of climate change, the report said.”

3. The world will become less stable → A dwindling food supply coupled with an increase in natural disasters will exacerbate tensions in already-tense areas “by amplifying well-documented drivers of these conflicts such as poverty and economic shocks,” the report says. This could mean more or worse regional conflicts and civil wars, like what has unfolded in recent years in [drought-stricken Syria](#), with national security implications for the US. (For more on those risks, take a look at the [Center for Climate and Security’s blog](#).)

4. Wealthy countries are minimizing their responsibility → The World Bank estimated that poor countries would need as much as \$100 billion *per year* to offset the effects of climate change. Yet, as [Justin Gillis reports for The New York Times](#), wealthy countries, including the US, tried to have that figure stricken from the 48-page executive summary that most readers and the press would peruse before turning to the full report. Gillis writes, “The edit came after several rich countries, including the United States, raised questions about the language, according to several people who were in the room at the time but did not wish to be identified because the negotiations were private.... Many rich countries argue that \$100 billion a year is an unrealistic demand; it would essentially require them to double their budgets for foreign aid, at a time of economic distress at home. That argument has fed a rising sense of outrage among the leaders of poor countries, who feel their people are paying the price for decades of profligate Western consumption.”

5. The next big chance to do something is later this year → It’s possible to stave off the worst effects of climate change now if countries move quickly to cut emissions, the report says. World leaders will have that chance when they [meet this autumn](#) in New York City for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which will be completed in 2015. As part of the UN’s effort to push international leaders to do something about climate change, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon has challenged attendees to bring “bold pledges” and to “[i]nnovate, scale-up, cooperate and deliver concrete action that will close the emissions gap and put us on track for an ambitious legal agreement.”

John Light is a reporter and producer for the Moyers team. His work has appeared at The Atlantic, Grist, Mother Jones, Salon, Slate, Vox and Al Jazeera, and has been broadcast on Public Radio International. He’s a graduate of Columbia Graduate School of Journalism. You can follow him on Twitter at [@LightTweeting](#).

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