Africa is Losing the Climate Change Race

At the Davos Economic Forum in Switzerland in 2019, the famous English naturalist, Sir David Attenborough warned political and business leaders that the world's greatest problem is climate change. He said the world was changing very fast as industry develops. However, it was affecting our climate very badly. He said we are moving into the Anthropocene age, the age of humans, and we can destroy life on our planet – air, food, water, animals and human life by what we do. "The garden of Eden is no more." He said. Attenborough said we need a plan for international co-operation.

The big problem is greenhouse gas emissions produced by industrial regions – the US and Europe, Asia and the Middle East. This produces global warming – a rise in the temperature of the planet. Greenhouse gases pollute the atmosphere and affect crops, water and animals and plants, the things we need in order to live. Companies need to control greenhouse gas emissions. Africa is not a big contributor to greenhouse gas emissions but it may be the first and biggest victim of climate change.

In most of Africa farms are very important. So are animals. If there is no water there are no crops and no food. If there is no food, animals and then people will die. If people cannot live on the land they will move to other countries, like Europe.

Speaking in a meeting in Poland, Sir David said, "Time is running out. Right now, we are facing a man-made disaster of global scale. Our greatest threat in thousands of years. Climate change."

"If we don't take action," he continued, the collapse of our civilisations and the extinction of much of the natural world is on the horizon." He warned the political leaders at the meeting, "Leaders of the world, you must lead. The continuation of our civilisations is in your hands."

United Nations Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, said the world is losing the race with climate change and "this can be a disaster for Africa." Africa doesn't contribute much to global warming, he said. However, temperature increases will be much greater in Africa. To stop global warming, global temperatures must not rise more than 1.5% and we need to reduce greenhouse gases by 45% by 2030 to stop the earth's temperature rising. He said climate change is already "a matter of life and death" for many countries," including Africa.

Camilla Toulmin is Director of the International Institute for Environment & Development. In her book, "Climate Change in Africa" (Changement Climatique en Afrique) she writes that global warming which raises the temperature above two degrees Celsius will be very difficult for poor people in Africa. Global warming will lead to drought and to floods, and will affect crops (food), livestock (animals), water supplies and coastal areas. This will cause famine, drought, loss of homes, loss of land and migration to richer, cooler areas. Africa, without any direct responsibility for climate change, will suffer dramatically.

The first result of climate change is changes in the weather. Cyclone Idai, has devastated coastal parts of Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Malawi in southern Africa this year and more extreme weather has made life much more difficult in the Sahel region of Sub-Saharan Africa. By changing our policy and our practice we can still limit the impact of climate change - but there is not much time!

New words for this article

to destroy	completely kill
greenhouse gas	carbon emissions
crops	food plants like wheat and maize
to run out	to finish, to end
threat	danger
drought	when there is no rain
collapse	end completely
climate change	a change in the temperature of the earth
man-made	caused by human beings

Comprehension Questions

1. What must be the limit to the rise in temperature?
2. How much must we reduce greenhouse gases?
3. By when must we reduce greenhouse gases?
4. How much time have we got to stop climate change?

Answers

Comprehension questions
Questions de compréhension en lecture

1. 1.5%
2. 2.45%
3. 2030
4. not much time