“We are under many different pressures, to develop the economy, to eliminate poverty, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions—our determination in dealing with climate change must not waver, our action must not be delayed.”

—Wen Jiabao, Premier of the State Council

“As everyone knows, mankind’s greatest challenge of the 21st century is global climate change, mankind’s greatest threat is climate poverty. Mankind’s greatest duty is reducing the number of those affected by it.”

—Hu Angang, Economist

Responding to Climate Change — Protecting the Poor

Global warming is speeding up. It has already exacerbated poverty in a number of areas of China and is set to hinder current efforts at poverty alleviation in the future. In order to realise China’s long-term goals in poverty reduction and safeguard the interests of the poor, taking positive action against climate change is essential.

Greenpeace is calling for:

A Fundamental Cut in Emissions

China needs to adopt more bold and dynamic emission-cutting measures at home in order to stop climate change at its source. Massive restructuring of China’s energy sector, as well as energy efficiency improvement is needed. Meanwhile, the development of renewable energy sources would further help reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Developed countries must agree to cut emissions by 40% by 2020. China and other developing countries need to reduce their projected emissions growth by 15-30% by 2020.

The Adoption of Adaptive Measures

Climate change should be incorporated into the drafting and reformulation of poverty-alleviation policy. Current policy needs to be improved through better research, funding and technology, in order to formulate more pointed poverty-alleviation strategy that accounts for regional differences and strengthens the poor’s resilience to climate change, aiding China in its fight against poverty.

Successful Copenhagen Deal

The Copenhagen Climate Conference is humanity’s best chance to save the world from the catastrophic climate crisis. As the largest developing country and the biggest emitter of greenhouse gases, China is not only able but indeed should take a leading role in brokering a crucial global consensus. President Hu Jintao should personally attend the Copenhagen climate meeting to make the global deal happen.

1. According to the “Outline of the National Ecologically-Fragile Zones Protection Plan”, released by the Ministry of Environmental Protection in September, 2008 there were 2,365,000 people living in absolute poverty in China in 2005, more than 95% of whom were located in marginal areas with extremely fragile ecological conditions.

Climate Change and Poverty

As a developing country with a huge population, China is one of the countries expected to be most affected by climate change. Therefore dealing with climate change is a top priority for the government. Meanwhile, alleviating poverty remains a key goal in the country’s development. The vast majority of China’s poor are located in ecologically-fragile zones and because those areas are more vulnerable to climate change, the poor population are one of the hardest hit by climate change.

Climate Change and Poverty: A Case Study of China, is a joint initiative of Greenpeace and Oxfam and has been completed by experts and researchers from the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences and a number of regional institutions including the Meteorological Bureau of Sichuan, Guangdong and Gansu and the Ningxia Office of Poverty Aleviation.

Climate Change and Poverty: A Case Study of China correlates the distribution of China’s poor counties with ecologically-fragile areas and climate change, highlighting a strong connection between those areas most vulnerable to the effects of climate change and poverty-stricken areas.

The report notes that climate change has already become one of the main reasons for poverty and a return to poverty for people in China. Some 95% of those living in absolute poverty in China live in ecologically-fragile zones and are already climate change’s worst affected victims. If immediate action is not taken, climate change will cripple China’s efforts in poverty alleviation and could seriously hinder China’s chances of achieving its long-term developmental goals in poverty reduction.

In order to avoid the most severe of climate disasters, reducing greenhouse gas emissions is of immediate urgency. As a huge nation, China has the ability to make a significant contribution to climate change mitigation. How climate change adaptation can be incorporated into the fight against poverty is a new challenge for poverty alleviation in China.
Chinese Case Studies

Case Study 1: Intensified Drought in the Northwest - Yongjing County, Gansu Province

Due to local climate warming and decreasing precipitation, droughts in Yongjing County are becoming increasingly severe. The sustained drought of 2006 directly affected 83,100 people in Yongjing County, equivalent to 41.6% of its total population. 

The direct economic losses from crop failure, water shortages resulted in RMB 20,150,000 in direct economic losses from crop failure, damage to roads, irrigation facilities and power stations. 

Due to climate change, poverty alleviation in Yongjing County will become increasingly challenging with the effectiveness of certain current measures being compromised. Climate change will force some households to return to poverty.

Case Study 2: Frequent Torrential Rain in Mountainous Regions of the Southwest-Mabian County, Sichuan Province

In an area which has always often been hit by natural disasters, local climate warming and intensified torrential rains have become more frequent in mountainous regions including more localised flooding, mud-debris flows and landslides. In the last 50 years, the direct economic losses from torrential rain and flood-related disasters have significantly increased. The direct economic losses from 2000-2008 amounted to RMB 213,790,000, a yearly average of RMB 23,754,000. This was RMB 14,088,000 more than the yearly average of RMB 9,666,000 seen over the previous 50 years.

The frequent torrential rain and floods, along with consequent secondary disasters such as mud-debris flows and landslides restrict Mabian’s economic development and are one of the principal causes of recurring poverty in the region.

Case Study 3: Floods and Droughts Happen More Frequent in the Southeast-Yangshan County, Guangdong Province

Located in a limestone area, in the Southeast-Yangshan has felt the effects of climate warming with the frequency and intensity of floods and droughts both markedly increasing, threatening agricultural production. Recent years have seen many extreme weather events including typhoons, floods, freezing rains and windstorms. Torrential rains in mid-June, 2006 caused flooding that affected 42,339 people in 79 villages across the county. Some 4,598 houses were flooded and 116 collapsed. The floods resulted in RMB 20,150,000 in direct economic losses from crop failure, damage to roads, irrigation facilities and power stations.

Due to climate change, poverty alleviation in Yangshan County will become increasingly challenging with the effectiveness of certain current measures being compromised. Climate change will force some households to return to poverty.