

“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 An’ gang, 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	The Adoption of Adaptive Measures	Successful Copenhagen Deal
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.	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.	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.
2 Ceng Song, Yue Shuiting, “Weakening Wind Power Spells Future Devastation”, *Yangcheng Evening News*, 27 June, 2008
3 Jia Honglu, “Province Witnesses Serious Spring Drought-3,915,000 Hectares Now Affected”, *Heilongjiang Daily*, 22 May, 2009
4 Hu Xiaopo, “News on Tailai County’s Fight Against Drought”, *Qiqihar Daily*, 30 May, 2009
5 Greenpeace, *Yellow River At Risk*, 2005

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“Climate change is a silent human crisis. Yet it is the greatest emerging humanitarian challenge of our time. Already today, it causes suffering to hundreds of millions of people most of whom are not even aware that they are victims of climate change.”

——Kofi Annan, Former Secretary General of the United Nations, President of the Global Humanitarian Forum

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 these 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 Bureaus of Sichuan, Guangdong and Gansu and the Ningxia Office of Poverty Alleviation.

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 victims¹. 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.

“Between 2000 and 2004, 1/19 of people living in the developing world were affected by a climate disaster. The comparable figure for OECD countries was 1/1,500 people: a risk differential of 79.”
——UNDP “United Nations Human Development Report 2007/2008”

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. Reduced output due to crop failure resulted in 29,000 people needing emergency grain, 69,300 people had restricted access to drinking water and 34,000 were forced to leave their homes in order to find work or seek refuge with friends or family.

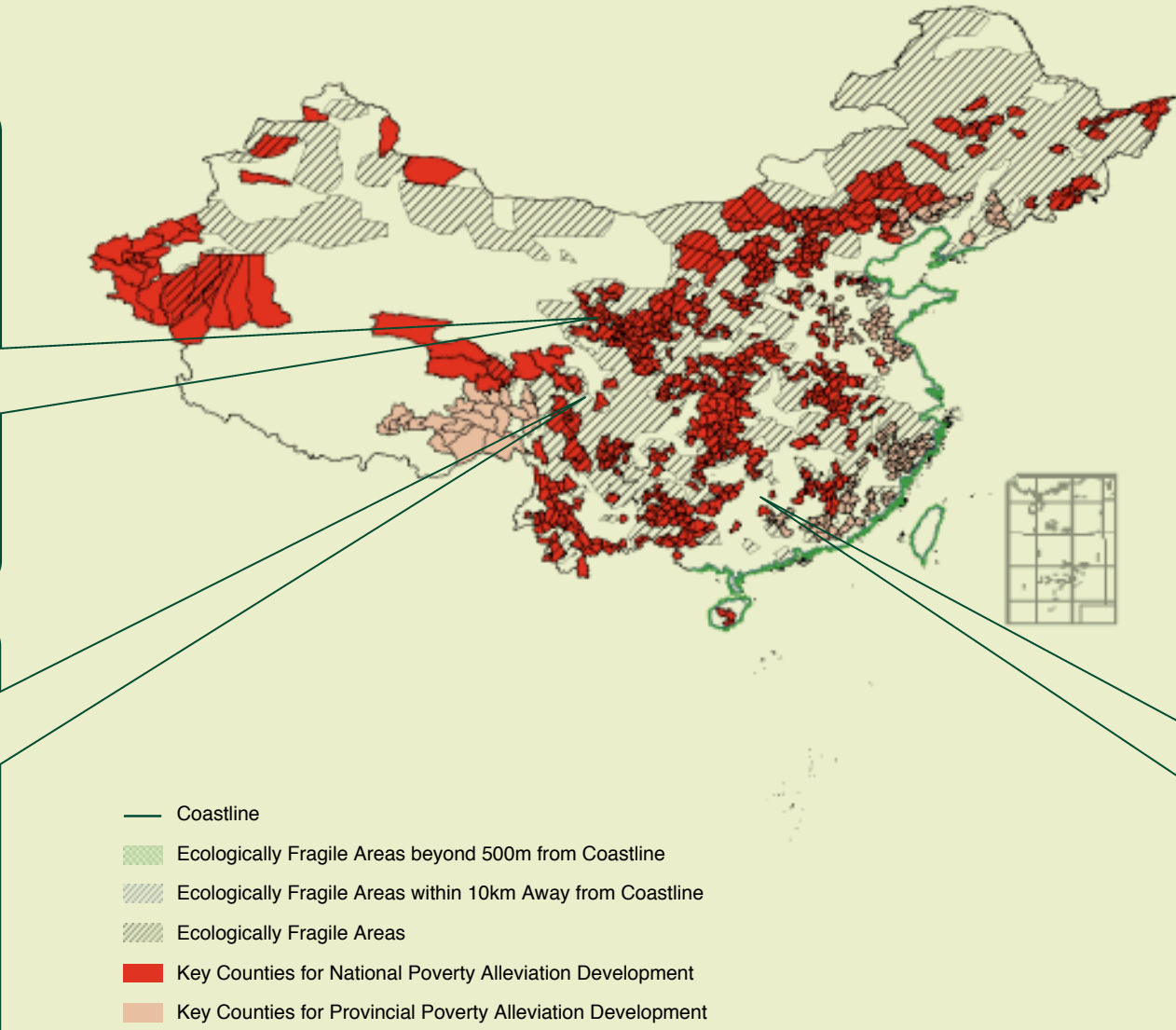
Successive years of drought have forced people in certain mountainous regions into long-term poverty. Normal productive life has been gravely affected and this has become the local community’s principal cause of recurring poverty.

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.



Costal areas: rising sea-level, intensified typhoons and storm surges, more serious seawater intrusion and waterlogging.

The torrential rains in the wake of Typhoon Fengshen caused water levels to rise sharply in rivers of poverty-stricken Xinfeng County, Guangdong. The county saw large-scale landslides in mountainous areas, over 300 hectares of farmland flooded; more than 1,300 hectares of cash-crops destroyed, over 100 houses flattened, 3,000 people stranded by floodwaters and overall more than 30,000 people directly affected by the disaster ².

The North and Northeast: significant climate warming, intensified droughts, water shortages.

In May this year, Heilongjiang was hit by a serious drought. Till the end of May, almost 4,000 hectares of land have been affected in the province, with 400,000 hectares of farmland experiencing water shortages ³. Amongst those affected is Tailai County, a nationally classified poor county, of which 100,000 hectares has been affected by drought ⁴, equivalent to 78% of the county’s cultivated land.

Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau: Permafrost thawing, intensified desertification and changes in runoff.

Known as the ‘thousand lakes county’, the first county of the Yellow River, Maduo, has 4,077 lakes. More than 3,000 of these small lakes have now dried up, with the water quality of others showing clear signs of salination. The reduction in surface area of water bodies has also reduced groundwater supply, causing further degradation of the permafrost layer. Environmental degradation impacts heavily on local nomads’ livelihoods, exacerbating ecological migration ⁵.

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, 2008 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.



Photos from Mabian Meteorological Bureau, Yangshan Meteorological Bureau, CFP, Greenpeace