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"What Should Black Americans Do About Climate Change?"

In August of 2021, BlackEconomics.org published a commentary entitled, "What Do Black Americans Know About Climate Change?" We return to the topic this time asking: What do we do about climate change?

On February 28, 2022, the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released its Sixth Assessment Report on climate change, which describes existing and likely future conditions that result from climate change—depending on the magnitude of global warming.[1] Below, we provide brief excerpts from the report with the intent of assisting Black America in starting to come to terms with climate change—including planning for it. Importantly, and to our knowledge, there is no overarching global plan to address global warming and climate change. However, IPCC reports provide clear warnings about what to expect if nothing, or if not enough, is done to constrain the temperature rise to less than 1.5 degrees Centigrade.

Focusing on the report's "*Summary for Policymakers*" (*Summary*) we reviewed an introduction and three related sections: (1) Observed and Projected Impacts and Risks; (2) Adaptation Measures and Enabling Conditions; and (3) Climate Resilient Development. In other words, the *Summary* tells us: How climate change is affecting the globe now and what to expect in the future under various scenarios; various general strategies that can be adopted to address climate change and preserve life systems on the planet; and how future development should occur if it is to be mindful of global warming and the preservation of life on Earth.

The *Summary* concludes with the following statement, which is made with "high confidence" as to its accuracy:

> The cumulative scientific evidence is unequivocal: Climate change is a threat to human well-being and planetary health. Any further delay in concerted anticipatory global action on adaptation and mitigation will miss a brief and rapidly closing window of opportunity to secure a livable and sustainable future for all. (p. SPM-35)

[1] Scientists say that climate change will be very problematic for the world's future if global temperatures rise 1.5 degrees Celsius above that prevailing during 1850-1900. Conditions will be disastrous if the global temperature rises 2.0 degrees Celsius. Estimates are that the temperature has already risen about 1.1 degree Celsius through 2020.

To highlight key details from the *Summary*, we replicate partially a graphical image which conveys what is known about climate changes' impact today in Figure 1. We reflect climate change effects for North America, Central and South America, and for Africa because these are primary locations for Afrodescendants.

Figure 1.—Impacts of Climate Change on Human Systems

Line No.	Impacts of Climate Change on Human Systems	North America	Central and South America	Africa
1	Water scarcity	+/-	+/-	-
2	Agricultural crop production	+/-	-	-
3	Animal/Livestock health and productivity	-	+/-	-
4	Fisheries yields and aquaculture production	+/-	-	-
5	Infectious diseases	-	-	-
6	Heat malnutrition and other	-	-	-
7	Mental health	-	**na**	-
8	Displacement	-	-	-
9	Inland flooding and associated damages	-	-	-
10	Flood/Storm damage in coastal areas	-	-	-
11	Damage to infrastructure	-	-	-
12	Damage to key economic sectors	-	-	-

Key
(-) Negative impact
(+/-) Positive & negative impacts
High confidence
Medium confidence
Low confidence
Limited evidence
(na) Not assessed

Figure 1 shows that, with high confidence, the IPCC found that seven of twelve human systems are being affected negatively by climate change in North America (one system shows negative and positive effects). For Central and South America, eight of twelve systems are being affected negatively with medium confidence (one system shows negative and positive effects). In Africa's case, climate change is affecting all systems negatively; five with high confidence and five with medium confidence.

Black Americans should awaken to the importance of climate change and begin to plan to respond to it. For example, it is common knowledge that low-lying areas, especially coastal cities, are likely to experience adverse effects from sea-level rise that results from climate change (see p. SPM-10). Also, the *Summary* states bluntly that approximately half of the water borne species assessed globally have shifted polewards, and that land-based species are moving to higher elevations (p. SPM-8) in response to climate change. Therefore, we should question Black America's current trend of moving southward (toward the Equator) and to coastal cities—to the extent that we do not already reside in these locations.

Blacks in America and elsewhere already suffer from inequality in almost all respects. If we fail to consider and respond to climate change appropriately and effectively, then we guarantee greater future inequality. We should study climate change, identify our vulnerabilities to climate change, and plan to adapt to climate change to ensure future effective and resilient development that produces a reduction in inequality.

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