



ROBERT GLASSER

Secretary General of CARE International

Poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa is persistent and wide-spread. Whereas across the world the number of poor people has fallen from 52% of the population in 1981 to 26% in 2005, in Sub-Saharan Africa there has been no change in the percentage (50%) and in absolute terms the number of poor people has nearly doubled from 200 million to 380 million.

The pool of desperately poor, predominantly young, people in Sub-Saharan Africa represents an enormous threat to stability and to the region's prospects for economic development. That pool is growing rapidly. The population of the region is likely to increase from 770 million people today to up to 2 billion people by 2050. Population pressures are likely to exacerbate existing social and religious tensions, increase competition for scarce resources, trigger mass migration and magnify the scale and severity of humanitarian emergencies.

The recent increase in the price of food, itself a consequence of drought, population growth and patterns of economic development, is compounding existing food security challenges in the region. In the Horn of Africa alone 17 million people are currently at risk of famine.

Climate change will have profound effects here. Among other things, it will aggravate existing water stresses, undermine food production and increase the disease burden. Climate modeling suggests that the frequency and severity of natural disasters, including floods, cyclones and droughts, will also increase. CARE International research, which has identified hotspots in Sub-Saharan Africa of high humanitarian risk under changing climatic conditions, suggests that some countries in the region will be more affected than others.

Reports from CARE Country Offices in Africa indicate that climate change is already having a major impact. In Mozambique, for example, the country's weak socio-economic infrastructure and geographic location make it particularly vulnerable to climate change impacts. Evidence gathered by CARE researchers indicates that climate change is undermining crop yields, harming livestock, and increasing the country's exposure to natural disasters.

New thinking and more practical approaches to humanitarian assistance are needed to respond effectively to the challenges posed by population growth and climate change in Sub-Saharan Africa. Aid must be directed towards reducing vulnerability rather than simply reacting to emergencies. For every dollar invested in disaster risk reduction and preparedness, roughly seven dollars are saved in disaster response.

A key element of the international and national response must be to reverse the shocking neglect of, and underinvestment in, African farming. 70% of the region depends on agricultural production. Without major improvement in productivity, countries will continue to be unable to feed even their existing populations, let alone the levels anticipated in future. Carbon markets, which are emerging as part of the global response to climate change, could become an important source of financing for some of this important work (particularly in the agro-forestry sector). By 2025, emissions trading schemes are expected to mobilise more than US\$1 trillion per year.

Countries in the region with support from the international community also need urgently to focus efforts on slowing the explosive growth in population. Educating women and girls is the single most effective way to achieve this critical objective.