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CLIMATE CHANGE IS ABOUT THE FUTURE OF OUR LAND, OUR RESILIENCE AND OUR SECURITY

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By all accounts the latest summary report released today from the climate change experts (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change or IPCC) paints a picture of a planet in peril. There were last minute attempts to soften what some considered activist or even alarmist language, arguing that the IPCC is a scientific body and as such should remain policy neutral.

However, its work is predicated on the assumption that we care about future generations otherwise why would we expend massive amounts of intellectual capital on this exercise.

While the threat of mass species extinctions has diminished since the 2007 report, we still face serious threats to our land, our resilience and our security. The report warns of the possibility of increased floods, drought, conflict and economic losses if carbon emissions continue unabated. Granted that the costs are often difficult to measure in terms of global GDP, events such as floods and hurricanes and processes such as drought and desertification do come with a price tag, not to mention untold human suffering. In 2012, when more than 80 percent of US agricultural land experienced drought, export losses were estimated at \$20 billion and food prices rose significantly both in the US and abroad.

Clearly the industrialized countries need to raise and sustain their level of ambition when it comes to reducing carbon emissions but it is time for them to recognize their self-serving obligation to the rest of the world that is striving to grow and prosper. The impacts of climate change will be felt first and foremost on the ground and not in the air. Many developing countries are already struggling to cope with the devastating impacts on human health and livelihoods. This obligation entails redirecting investments and building capacity for land-based solutions.

Europe's land footprint is now around 640 million hectares a year, about 1.5 times its size. In other words, nearly 60% of the land and water resources used to meet Europe's demand for agricultural and forestry products are located outside the continent. In a world of finite resources, this is unsustainable. By 2050, 80% of the expected 9 billion people will become "global consumers" - the bulk of them from the developing countries – demanding food, energy, water and other vital services that come from healthy and productive land. Yet, the IPCC report points to the likelihood that median agricultural yields will decrease by up to 2% per decade while, during the same time, demand is set to increase by 14%.

Practical land-based solutions will help reduce the burden of climate change, particularly in the developing countries. Sustainable land management practices are often low-cost and do not require resource-intensive inputs as in the case of modern industrial agriculture.

In Africa, the adoption of these practices can more than double yields and conserve other vital resources such as water. Land users in China have access to over 1,000 distinct practices which are cheap but durable, and with the right incentives, can be disseminated widely and rapidly.

This paradigm shift in the management of land and water resources would also increase rural employment opportunities, thus easing migration pressures and reducing the incidence of conflicts. The intensification of sustainable farming practices would allow us grow more with less while reducing carbon emissions and avoiding the further conversion of our natural ecosystems.

The IPCC report predicts that renewable surface- and ground-water resources will decline, most significantly in dry subtropical regions; and that by 2025, billions of people may be living in areas that are subject to periods of intense water scarcity. Slow onset disasters, such as drought exacerbated by poor management, have already been a major contributing factor to forced migration and conflict in places like the Horn of Africa or Darfur.

In these and other instances, we see how instability can spill over national boundaries, create massive refugee crises and result in dangerous flows of illegal migrants. Sustainable land and water management practices are natural solutions that can play an important role in keeping people on the land and reducing community vulnerabilities to climate change. If the industrialized countries fail to recognize their obligation to help improve land stewardship and increase resilience, the

poorest of the poor are left with only one option: to migrate to the urban centers and developed countries in search of human dignity and economic opportunity.

While the IPCC report focuses on the impacts of climate change, it fails to capture the key role of adaptation; that is, ecosystem-based solutions for managing climate risks. These solutions are at hand without additional finance; all that is required is a realignment of investment flows. This should not be seen as a threat to vested interests but rather as an opportunity for more equitable development. Investing in practical solutions that transform lives and increase adaptive capacity would be cheaper and work better than investing in walls, wars and relief. Improving the resilience and well-being of the rural poor and other land-dependent communities will improve our own well-being, our national security, and help ensure international stability today and in the future. ■

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