



## A New Vision for Sacred Life and Living Earth



### SAFCEI Policy Conference

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#### DISCUSSION PAPER: FOOD AND CLIMATE JUSTICE

Climate change is making life more difficult for everyone, but it will unjustly impact those who have contributed least towards it, especially people living in rural sub-Saharan Africa. Industrial and factory farming of crops and animals is contributing to climate change and destroying biodiversity. Climate change is starting to and will increasingly affect the ability of both commercial and smallholder farmers to grow food. The result will be less food in the market, which will drive prices up making it even more unaffordable for the most vulnerable in society. This will deepen the food and nutrition crisis in southern Africa.

When we destroy the natural resource base and related knowledge systems, we run the risk of disrupting the fabric of our society and irrevocably damaging the Earth's life support systems. Food customs and practices are deeply embedded in communities, linked to faith traditions and cultural identity.

**22%** of wild crop relatives likely to go extinct<sup>1</sup>

Maize yields could decrease by up to **30%**<sup>2</sup>

No. of hungry people growing **10 million** a year<sup>3</sup>

#### Faith perspectives on food and climate justice

The sharing of food is a cultural and ritual practice. It is a celebration of hospitality that has brought people of faith together over the ages. Faith communities uphold the wholeness, divinity and sanctity of food and life, remembering that the physical intake of food has a spiritual dimension.

<sup>1</sup> Pereira, L. 2017. *Climate change impacts on agriculture across Africa*. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Environmental Science. New York: Oxford University Press.

<sup>2</sup> Pereira, L. 2017. *Climate change impacts on agriculture across Africa*. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Environmental Science. New York: Oxford University Press.

<sup>3</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization. 2019. *The state of food security and nutrition in the world 2019*. <http://www.fao.org/state-of-food-security-nutrition/en/>.

The ancient San lived in sufficiency with nature, respecting the rights of plants and animals to survive. While talking about climate change in 2017, Pope Francis said that “ensuring everyone’s right to food and nourishment is an imperative that we cannot ignore. It is a right to which there are no exceptions.”<sup>4</sup> Judaism stresses the importance of knowing where one’s food originates.<sup>5</sup> The Qur’an speaks about carefully “choosing soil for cultivation ... and eating good fresh food”.<sup>6</sup> The Qur’an (7:31) also calls on the faithful to “Eat and drink, but do not be extravagant, for God does not love extravagant people”.

### Questions to consider from a faith perspective

- Does your faith have a position on food and climate justice? If not, is there a responsibility or need to formulate one?
- What is your faith doing about food and climate justice? What should or could you be doing?
- What current practices does your faith community support that enhance food security, including access to nutritious food?
- What might encourage and enable people in your faith community to support the right to food within a context of climate justice?

### **Background to the food and climate justice issue**

The Earth is growing warmer at almost twice the rate it was 50 years ago<sup>7</sup> and, as a result, the climate is changing. We are causing this accelerated warming through our use of fossil fuels, which emit greenhouse gases. Average temperatures are likely to rise by 3–4°C over the next century.<sup>8</sup> Rainfall patterns are shifting, there are more frequent and intense droughts and floods, and new pests and diseases are emerging, or shifting habitats. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has identified southern Africa as a climate change hotspot.<sup>9</sup> It also notes that most people and communities in Africa are directly reliant on the natural environment for survival and livelihoods, and do not have the necessary safety nets to adapt to climate change.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> McMaster, A. 2017. On World Food Day, Pope Francis says linked between climate change and hunger is undeniable. [www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/pope-francis-united-nations-climate-change-hunger/](http://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/pope-francis-united-nations-climate-change-hunger/).

<sup>5</sup> Neril, Y. & Sinclair, J. n.d. *We are how we eat: a Jewish approach to food and sustainability*. [aytzim.org/resources/articles/275](http://aytzim.org/resources/articles/275).

<sup>6</sup> Khalid, M.N. & Sediqi, S.M. 2018. *Improving nutritional and food security status in Muslim communities: integration of Quranic practices in development programs. A review*. [jliflc.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/76-304-2-PB.pdf](http://jliflc.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/76-304-2-PB.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> National Geographic. 2019. *Causes and effects of climate change*.

[www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/global-warming/global-warming-causes/](http://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/global-warming/global-warming-causes/).

<sup>8</sup> Zewdie, A. 2014. Impacts of climate change on food security: a literature review in sub Saharan Africa. *Journal of Earth Sciences Climate Change* 5(8):225.

<sup>9</sup> Ngcobo, N. 2018. *Intergovernmental panel says southern Africa a climate change hotspot*. <https://ewn.co.za/2019/01/21/intergovernmental-panel-says-southern-africa-a-climate-change-hotspot>.

<sup>10</sup> Wlokas, H. L. 2018. The impacts of climate change on food security and health in southern Africa. *Journal of Energy in Southern Africa* 19(4).

Climate change will make it much harder to produce food.<sup>11</sup> Most farmers in Africa practice rain-fed agriculture. When rainfall patterns shift and the rain does not come when expected or does not come at all, crops and livestock die. Droughts and floods will devastate homes, public infrastructure and agricultural production. The increase in average temperature, faster in Africa than anywhere else in the world, is already reducing yields. In particular, the poor and most vulnerable will likely have even less access to nutritious food than they do now. This will perpetuate the cycle of poverty and malnutrition.<sup>12</sup>

A drop in calorie availability in Africa – because food is not available or affordable – will result in an estimated 11 million more children being malnourished in coming decades.<sup>13</sup> It will also affect the quantity and quality of food purchased by households, and influence how food is allocated within households, with negative implications for women and children.<sup>14</sup> More extreme weather events will also damage public infrastructure such as railways and roads making it difficult to transport food over long distances.

The industrial farming model is often positioned as a response to food insecurity on the continent. But this model contributes to climate change through emissions and degrades the environment through the use of synthetic fertilisers and pesticides and the destruction of biodiversity. It will also be significantly affected by climate change, given its reliance on hybrid or genetically modified seed, which is not able to adapt to changing climatic conditions. This model tends to produce a limited diversity of food with low nutritional content. It also enables the inhumane treatment of animals through intensive cattle feedlots and caged egg production. We must question industrial agricultural systems that contribute to climate change; we must protect and enhance biodiversity and the accompanying knowledge to enable adaptation to changing production conditions; and we must ensure that smallholder farmers practising rain-fed agriculture are supported in adaptation efforts,<sup>15</sup> and are involved in decisions made related to food and climate change.<sup>16</sup>

A just food system in a context of climate change will produce a range of nutritious foods that are accessible and affordable to even the most vulnerable, that will farm animals ethically, that will empower women and that will restore the health and diversity of life on Earth.

We need our agricultural systems to work with and not against nature's diversity. This means supporting farming and food systems that build resilience to climate change and that are socially just.

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<sup>11</sup> Pereira, L. 2017. *Climate change impacts on agriculture across Africa*. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Environmental Science. New York: Oxford University Press.

<sup>12</sup> Wlokas, H. L. 2018. The impacts of climate change on food security and health in southern Africa. *Journal of Energy in Southern Africa* 19(4).

<sup>13</sup> Zewdie, A. 2014. Impacts of climate change on food security: a literature review in sub Saharan Africa. *Journal of Earth Sciences Climate Change* 5(8):225.

<sup>14</sup> Zewdie, A. 2014. Impacts of climate change on food security: a literature review in sub Saharan Africa. *Journal of Earth Sciences Climate Change* 5(8):225.

<sup>15</sup> Smith, C., Elliot, D. & Bragdon, S.H. 2015. *Realizing the right to food in an era of climate change*. Geneva: Quaker United Nations Office.

<sup>16</sup> Mary Robinson Foundation for Climate Justice. n.d. *The geography of climate justice*. [https://www.mrfcj.org/pdf/Geography\\_of\\_Climate\\_Justice\\_Introductory\\_Resource.pdf](https://www.mrfcj.org/pdf/Geography_of_Climate_Justice_Introductory_Resource.pdf).