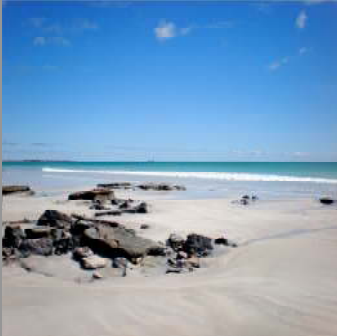




Fact sheet:

Human rights and climate change



The terms defined

Mitigation aims to avoid the unmanageable impacts of climate change

Adaptation aims manage the unavoidable

Background

The physical effects of climate change are predicted to have an impact on communities around the world. In the Pacific, these impacts are already being recorded in the form of rising sea levels, changes to precipitation rates, increased temperatures and more frequent and intense severe weather incidents. These environmental changes have corresponding human consequences. Communities which rely on subsistence farming as their main source of food and income are experiencing a shortage of arable land due to contamination of soil and water table from salt-water inundation. Rising temperatures and changing precipitation patterns are likely to cause an increase in the incidence of water-borne and mosquito-borne diseases, as well as exacerbating other health problems. Fish stocks, an important source of food and income, have decreased due to changes in ocean salinity, temperature and currents. These environmental impacts and the implications they have for communities present several issues of concern from a human rights perspective. Human rights law therefore provides an appropriate and useful framework to help address the challenges of climate change.

The law

Climate change has the potential to impact upon many rights that are guaranteed at international law. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights guarantees to all people the right to health, the right to an adequate standard of living, including adequate food and housing, and the right to safe and healthy working conditions. The environmental changes outlined above threaten the ability of individuals and communities to enjoy these basic rights. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights guarantees to everyone the right to life. Where poor health, injury or death are foreseeable consequences of climate change then even the right to life is at risk.

International law also provides particular rights for Indigenous peoples and minorities including the right to self-determination and to dispose of their own natural wealth and resources, and the right to enjoy their

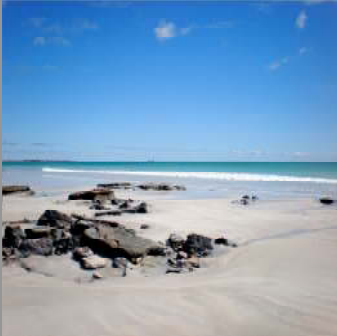
References should be located here. To modify this section, select view on your task bar and scroll down to header and footer. This text is located in a text box and can be modified to suit

Project Survival Pacific is an initiative of the Australian Youth Climate Coalition. For more information see our website at <http://youthprojectsurvival.org>



Fact sheet:

Human rights and climate change



The terms defined

Mitigation aims to avoid the unmanageable impacts of climate change

Adaptation aims manage the unavoidable

own culture, religion and languages. These rights are threatened by climate change where environmental changes impact on economic, social and cultural practices.

In addition to multilateral treaties, there are also many regional human rights instruments which guarantee rights relating to health, housing and living conditions, as well as environmental health and sustainable development.

The benefits

While it's clear that climate change is likely to affect people's ability to enjoy their human rights, there remains debate about how human rights law might be employed when trying to tackle the problem of climate change.

There have been several successful cases in regional human rights regimes which confirmed the principle that environmental degradation can amount to a breach of human rights. More recently, cases have been brought in regional human rights tribunals alleging that governments' failure to address climate change and reduce greenhouse gas emissions amount to a violation of fundamental human rights. These cases suggest there is potential for communities suffering from the effects of climate change to pursue actions within the human rights legal framework.

As well as offering a potential avenue of redress for individuals or communities, human rights law may have other significant benefits for the climate change debate. If climate change is constructed as a human rights issue then it may be brought within the scope of existing legal obligations, allowing governments to be held accountable under human rights law for failure to take steps to address the problem. Human rights principles can also be used as a normative framework upon which to develop our responses, and in so doing can help ensure that we focus on the people who will be most affected and who are most in need of support.

References should be located here. To modify this section, select view on your task bar and scroll down to header and footer. This text is located in a text box and can be modified to suit

Project Survival Pacific is an initiative of the Australian Youth Climate Coalition For more information see our website at <http://youthprojectsurvival.org>