

Warning to polluters: 3.6bn people are now climate vulnerable



While the world population reached 8bn on November 15, 2022 according to the United Nations, nearly 3.6bn people are now climate vulnerable. It is in this context that one should analyse the news that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Synthesis Report under the Sixth Assessment Cycle will be released on March 20 following negotiations this week by governments on the 'Summary for Policymakers'.

The report will gather and distil scientific evidence from the IPCC working group reports and special reports published between 2018 and 2022. It will be the last such report from the IPCC in this cycle until further reports are published under the next assessment cycle, which could be only in 2027 or 2028.

Culminating with this Synthesis Report, the science from the

IPCC is crucial evidence to governments for this decade on the current state of the climate crisis. It must serve as a warning to polluters that their time is up. The window of time to keep global temperatures below 1.5°C is fast closing in. Current climate targets put the world on a 2.8°C pathway by 2100. A rapid equitable fossil fuel phase out must be top priority for all governments while scaling up investments in renewables and energy efficiency measures. Wealthy nations must substantially increase their international climate finance based on their fair share, the Climate Action Network (CAN) has urged in a statement last Friday.

Past reports under this assessment cycle have underlined the dire situation and stated unequivocally that greenhouse gases – from the reliance on fossil fuels, industrialisation and land-use – is driving up emissions and causing unprecedented levels of global heating. Human actions have caused the last decade to be the warmest decade in the last 125,000 years. Sharpening inequities show that the richest 10% of households contribute about 36%-45% of global greenhouse gas emissions. Communities in many vulnerable regions will experience the limits of adaptation even before 1.5°C warming and sea-level rise poses an existential threat to some small islands and low-lying coastal areas.

“The forthcoming IPCC report should mobilise governments to envision and act towards transitioning into a fully renewable-energy powered society supported by strong energy efficiency measures, based on principles of justice and the protection of human rights,” stated Stephan Singer, senior global specialist on climate science and energy, CAN International, and head of delegation for CAN at IPCC. Investing in renewables means rapidly divesting from fossil fuels and nuclear energies and phasing them out by mid-century to ensure the least damaging pathway towards climate stability. The IPCC Synthesis Report must reiterate its recent findings that renewable energy, particularly solar and wind, are technologically, financially and economically the key means to fight climate change, he said.

Dr Stephen Cornelius, Global Deputy Lead for Climate and Energy, World Wide Fund for Nature, stated that leaders must heed the science and act immediately with the pace and scale necessary to decarbonise the economies in time. An accelerated phase-out of fossil fuels is needed to limit global warming to below 1.5°C and avoid the worst climate change risks. As he explained, nature is our secret ally in the fight against climate change. Natural systems have absorbed 54% of human-related carbon dioxide emissions over the past decade and have slowed global warming and helped protect humanity from much more severe climate change risks. We can't hope to limit warming to 1.5°C, adapt to climate change and save lives and livelihoods, unless we also act urgently to safeguard and restore nature, a non-negotiable part of the solution to the climate crisis, as Dr Cornelius said.