



UNDERSTANDING CLIMATE CHANGE

The Impacts: How Climate Change Affects Africa

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Transcript

[TEXT: Young African Leaders Initiative - Online Training Series]

[TEXT: Wanjira Mathai - Director, Partnership for Women's Entrepreneurship in Renewables, Wangari Maathai Institute]

I'm Wanjira Mathai. My mother, Wangari Maathai, founded the Green Belt Movement and dedicated her life to environmental conservation and community empowerment.

[TEXT: Karura Forest - Nairobi, Kenya]

I'm standing here in Karura Forest where my mother made her stand to protect this special place. In this lesson, we're going to talk about the impact of one of the most critical challenges facing Africa and the world: climate change.

[TEXT: The Impacts: How Climate Change Affects Africa]

Nearly 40 years ago, women living in Kenya — my home country — reported a troubling phenomenon. Their streams were drying up. Crops were failing, and they were being forced to travel farther and farther away from their villages to gather firewood. Today, this story remains all too common across Africa. Climate change may seem like something distant and abstract, but it's very real and it impacts every one of us.

As you learned in the last lesson, climate change causes our Earth's temperature to rise. It brings about changes in precipitation levels, a rise in sea level, and more frequent and intense weather events. And it can threaten our access to such basic needs as food, water, health and shelter. Let's look more closely at some of these impacts.

Changes in our Earth's climate have a direct impact on what we grow and eat in Africa. We know that agriculture is extremely important to Africa's economy. Seventy percent of the population lives by farming and a third of the income in Africa is generated by agriculture.

Most crops in Africa — over 95 percent — are primarily watered by rainfall. This makes food crops on our continent vulnerable to health stress from our warming planet and extreme weather events linked to climate change. These include changes to seasonal rainfall, droughts and floods. In fact, rain-fed agriculture in Africa could drop by half in 2020.

Climate change is already affecting many fisheries around the world. The warming brought about by climate change increases ocean temperatures, which causes some fish to move to



cooler waters beyond their normal range. These changes to the marine environment have devastating consequences for people dependent on fishing for food and their income.

Climate change will also have a huge impact on our health. Changes in rainfall associated with climate change can increase the population of disease-carrying mosquitoes. This can result in more malaria, the biggest killer in Africa. Scientists have noted that malaria is already spreading to higher elevations in Africa — in part due to climate change. Predictions are for a 5 to 7 percent increase in malaria distribution by the end of the century.

A warmer environment with more rainfall can also increase the cases of other deadly diseases, such as yellow fever and dengue fever. In addition to these diseases, the poor air quality that often accompanies a heat wave can lead to breathing problems and worsen respiratory conditions.

All too often it is the most vulnerable among us —urban poor, older adults, young children, traditional societies, and subsistence farmers — who are most harmed by these threats.

Extreme weather events linked to our changing climate can cause huge migrations of people. Flooding, drought, and other competition for resources like fresh water can ignite conflict. It can impel people to leave their homes and migrate. And as my mother once said, "In a few decades, the relationship between the environment, resources, and conflict may seem almost as obvious as the connection we see today between human rights, democracy, and peace."

But I don't want to leave you without hope — far from it. These impacts of climate change are real and very serious. But there is much that we can do to combat it, here in Africa and around the world. So please join me for the next lesson to discuss ways to address this important challenge.

[TEXT: Test your knowledge - yali.state.gov - YALI Network]

