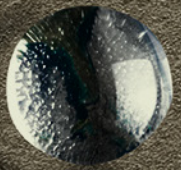




CIPRIANI COLLEGE
OF LABOUR AND CO-OPERATIVE STUDIES



WORK MATTERS

COLUMN

April 2022

CLIMATE CHANGE, THE ELDERLY, FOOD SECURITY, AND SOCIETY.

In the period since the Industrial Revolution, human emissions of the greenhouse from fossil fuel combustion, deforestation, and agricultural practices have all led to global warming and climate change. Observed and anticipated changes in the climate include higher temperatures, changes in rainfall patterns, changes in the frequency and distribution of weather events such as droughts, storms, floods, heatwaves, sea-level rise, and consequent impacts on human existence.

Climate change is everyone's business. Trinidad and Tobago is beginning to experience the effects and impact of climate change, along with the rest of the world. This is evident by the weekly presence of peddlers who are today's soothsayers encouraging citizens to invest in domesticated animals' manure and topsoil for planting short crop vegetables in their kitchen gardens because we are experiencing drought-like weather patterns.

Research has shown that the impacts of climate change will be devastating for ever part of the planet. Climate change poses an existential threat to mankind's future. However, actions to respond to climate change has been slow, particularly in developing countries which lack the resources (human and financial) to mitigate the effects; and change their processes and production paths. Further, climate change draws attention to the relationship between the environment, science and society, and thereby challenges global governance institutions, and has the potential to trigger new social movements.

One also has to be cognizant of the impact of climate change on an aging global population, as this creates a nexus of vulnerability which has been predicted to increase over the coming decades. Scientific consensus has been reached that the earth's climate is warming due to greenhouse gasses and the modes of production, which are not climate-friendly. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has concluded that climate change is already causing increases in global average air and ocean temperatures, widespread melting of snow and ice, and rising average sea levels and that it is

extremely likely this is due to human activity. This is of particular concern for countries with coasts, like Trinidad and Tobago, where rising sea levels will have disastrous effects on the livelihood and survival of the society. Small Island Developing States will disproportionately feel the ill-effects of climate change as opposed to more developed nations, and this will serve to increase the levels of vulnerability of these states in the international system. Further, to be able to adjust to these changes and the effects of global warming, international assistance programmes are being developed and expanded to facilitate the altering of production modalities and the development of sustainable economies and ecosystems.

While it is internationally accepted that effects of climate change are being experienced globally, evidenced by more extreme weather events and the resulting impacts on people's lives, health, and wellbeing; it should also be acknowledged that the cause of these events do not lie squarely at the feet of the developing countries, but rather the more-developed countries.

Locally and internationally, due to advances in technology and medicine, there has been a rise in the aged population over the last fifty years. This means that the dependent population is increasing relative to the working population and this has implications for national social protection networks, and the care of this vulnerable group. Further, the negative implication of climate change will necessarily mean that the vulnerability of this group will be exacerbated. In essence, it is being argued that elderly people are already profoundly affected by the impacts of climate change, whether they reside in rural or urban areas. These impacts are predicted to increase due to the combination of increased stress factors from climate change leading to increased mortality and poor health, accompanied by reduced access to food and other resources.

Even without or with limited international assistance, adaptation and mitigation strategies have to be implemented in all countries across the globe, as choic-

es made now will affect the consequences of climate change throughout the 21st century and beyond.

It is important that the Trinidad and Tobago government adapts a national aging strategy framework that would account for the rising aging population and their specific vulnerabilities. Without specific policies and more age-specific services for older people and strategies for an aging population in a changing climate, marginalized older people will be pushed further to the edge of safety and survival.

“The desire to live in a safe and secure planet does not diminish with age. For us to create a sustainable future for our planet, we have to ensure every stage of the life course is considered in development and climate change discussions.” Rosita Kornfeld-Matte, UN Independent Expert on the Enjoyment of All Human Rights by Older Persons

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