

Environmental Rights Fact Sheet

“Human rights and the environment are inherently interdependent... Each human being depends on ecosystems and the services they provide, such as food, water, disease management, climate regulation, spiritual fulfillment, and aesthetic enjoyment. At the same time, efforts to promote environmental sustainability can only be effective if they... are greatly informed by the exercise of certain human rights.” ([UNEP](#))



Dakota Access Pipeline protesters square off against police near the Standing Rock Reservation and the pipeline route outside the little town of Saint Anthony, North Dakota, U.S., October 5, 2016. Photo by Reuters

Environmental Rights Fast Facts

- Between 2008 and 2014, an average of 26.4 million people per year were displaced by disasters... The majority of displaced people globally were displaced by weather-related disasters... The likelihood of being displaced by a disaster today is 60% higher than four decades ago. ([IOM](#))
- Pollution is one of the biggest global killers, affecting over 100 million people. That's comparable to global diseases like malaria and HIV... People who live in places with high levels of air pollutants have a 20% higher risk of death from lung cancer than people who live in less-polluted areas. ([DoSomething.org](#))
- Americans make up an estimated 5% of the world's population. However, the US uses 25% of the world's resources - burning up nearly 25% of the coal, 26% of the oil, and 27% of the world's natural gas. ([DoSomething.org](#))

Climate Change Fast Facts ([WRI](#))

- 2016 was the third consecutive year of record-warm global average temperatures.
- 15 extreme weather events each costing \$1 billion or more occurred in the United States in 2016, causing \$46 billion in aggregate damages.
- Scientists have determined that it is extremely likely that the increase in greenhouse gas emissions from human activity has caused more than half of the observed increase in temperature over the last 60 years, making it the largest driver of climate change.

Examples of Human Rights Affected by the Environment

Water Pollution and Human Rights: Dakota Access Pipeline Example

- It's a \$3.7 billion project that would cross four states and change the landscape of the US crude oil supply. ([CNN](#))
- One underlying reason for the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe's opposition to the construction of the oil pipeline is the tribe's concern about safe drinking water. The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe lawsuit argues that the US government failed to properly consider the potential risks of the pipeline construction to the source of the Tribe's drinking water. The 1,172-mile-long Dakota Access Pipeline is slated to cross under the Missouri River, less than a mile upstream of the reservation's boundary. Pipeline breaches can risk water sources... The Dakota Access Pipeline itself was rerouted because of concerns that a spill could affect the drinking water for the city of Bismarck. ([HRW](#))
- An assessment conducted last year determined that building the final segment of the pipeline would not have a significant effect on the environment. However, the Army decided in December that further study was warranted to address tribal concerns. The Corps launched an environmental study on Jan. 18, but Trump signed an executive action six days later telling the Corps to allow the company to proceed with construction. Legal experts have disagreed on whether the Army can change its mind simply because of the change in White House administrations. ([AP News](#))

Deforestation and Human Rights: Cote d'Ivoire Land Evictions Example ([HRW](#))

- International law protects anyone who occupies land from forced evictions that either do not provide adequate notice or do not respect the dignity and rights of those affected, regardless of whether they occupy the land legally.
- Côte d'Ivoire – which at one point reportedly had the highest rate of deforestation in Africa – saw its forest decline from 50 percent of the national territory in 1900 to less than 12 percent in 2015. To help protect the country's biodiversity and combat climate change, the Ivorian government has committed to return at least 20 percent of its territory to forest.
- Côte d'Ivoire's forestry agency evicted farmers from forests without warning and without giving them alternative housing or land. "Without our land, I don't know what we're going to do," one farmer said. "We don't even have enough food to give us the energy to work." Said a woman who was evicted in June 2015, "I still haven't gotten back on my feet, I have trouble feeding my children, and they are not going to school anymore."

Food Loss and Waste and Human Rights: The United States Example ([WRI](#))

- If food loss and waste were its own country, it would be the third-largest greenhouse gas emitter.
- In the United States, 40 percent of food is wasted, and every year American consumers, businesses and farms spend \$218 billion growing, processing, transporting and disposing food that is never eaten. The United States comes in dead last among developed nations in the Economist Intelligence Unit's new food sustainability index, which ranks how much food countries waste.
- Organic and other low-impact methods of farming are now more essential than ever, given that "we currently have the thinnest and most depleted soil in the history of agriculture," said Jerry Glover, a soil scientist and advisor at USAID. Buying products that are produced sustainably and locally eases pressure on natural resources, and supports local farmers and communities.