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# Hunger looms

RELENTLESS CLIMATE CHANGE PREDICTED TO HIT AT LEAST HALF THE WORLD'S FOOD PRODUCTION IN A DECADE

By **KARL WILSON** in Sydney  
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A report due to be released at the end of the month paints a bleak picture for food security in Asia. And the impact climate change will have on the production of rice, wheat and maize — for at least half the world's population.

Scientists are already warning that salt levels in the world's oceans are rising, impacting weather patterns.

Research by scientists in Australia and the US on data collected over the last 50 years shows arid regions are becoming drier while high rainfall regions have become wetter as the planet continues to get warmer.

Meteorologists are predicting the return of severe drought-inducing El Nino weather patterns along Australia's eastern seaboard while the forecast for Asia is longer, wetter monsoons and widespread droughts.

The upcoming report by the UK-based Centre for Low Carbon Futures — *Near future drought and related food security projections for Asia* — says within the next 10 years, large parts of Asia can expect long periods of severe drought. Northern China, India, Afghanistan, Mongolia and Pakistan will be among the most seriously affected.

"Until now, most projections on food security and drought have been to the 2050s ... far out of range for most policymakers to contemplate," says Jon Price, director of the center.

"Our report projects impacts for the 2020s. It shows in this period we will see marked increases in drought severity

across much of Asia."

Climate change is perhaps the biggest single threat facing future development and the growth of Asia.

From China down to India, the region is home to many of the world's fastest-growing economies. But in a cruel twist of fate, it is also home to two-thirds of the world's poorest people and more than 60 percent of the global undernourished population.

This is a region that produces around 60 percent of the world's wheat, 27 percent of maize, and 94 percent rice. The three cereals alone are worth over \$100 billion annually.

"Asian governments are facing challenges to ensure food security — changing consumption patterns of the emerging middle class, increased production for animal feeds and biofuels, and climate change," says Yao Xianbin, director-general of Asian Development Bank's Pacific department.

"The planet is now home to seven billion people and rising. One of the key challenges for developing Asia will be ensuring food security in the face of competing rural demands, poor agricultural management, and climate change, while not compromising on equitable economic growth."

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