

## GREEDY CITIES: ENVIRONMENTAL INJUSTICE

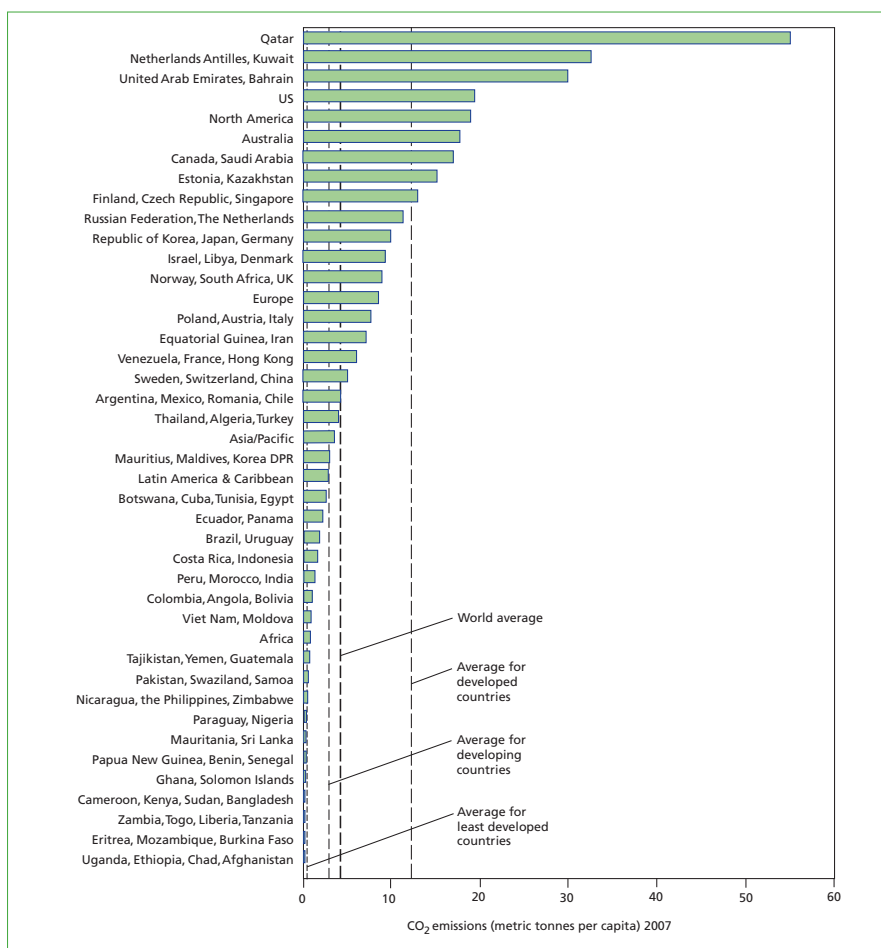
*With 20 per cent of the world's population, developed countries account for 46 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions*

The urban poor will pay a heavy price for the affluence and consumption of wealthy cities — normally situated a world away from them. Those in developing countries even more so, as global inequity increases with the rising impact of climate change. These are the hard-hitting findings of **Cities and Climate Change: Global Report on Human Settlements 2011**.

This new report highlights three harsh realities about the drivers of human-induced climate change and its main victims. The first is the inverse relationship between the consumers most responsible for high greenhouse gas emission and those most vulnerable to its impacts. Secondly, it will be the wealthy citizens, cities and countries that will best insulate themselves from the adverse effects of climate change. Thirdly, the greatest burdens will not only fall on developing nations, but on the poorest and most marginalised people within their cities.

“The findings are quite shocking” said Joan Clos, the Executive Director of UN-HABITAT. “The inequity of the urban divide is set to become even more pronounced as the effects of climate change are more frequently felt. As well as efforts at the global level, there must be action at the local level to address these inequalities.”

**FIGURE 3.3: CO<sub>2</sub> EMISSIONS PER CAPITA IN SELECTED COUNTRIES AND WORLD REGIONS (2007)**



Source: Satterthwaite et al, 2009, p368

According to the report, there are huge differences in per capita emissions varying by a factor of 100 or more between the lowest- and highest-emitting countries. The 20 per cent of the world's population living in developed countries account for 46 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions. The 80 per cent of the world's population living in developing countries account for the remaining 54 per cent. The US and Canada alone account for 19.4 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions, while South Asia accounts for 13.1 per cent and Africa just 7.8 per cent.

## THE URBAN APPETITE

A wide range of greenhouse gas emitting activities are associated with cities and their functioning. In fact, energy, transportation and buildings (with increasingly high proportions situated in cities) account for almost half of all global emissions. National greenhouse gas inventories are based on the assumption that a country is responsible for all emissions produced within its area of jurisdiction. As a pragmatic measure to facilitate national targets and reductions, this is likely to be the only enforceable strategy, as countries only have legislative power within their own national boundaries.

## ETHICAL MEASURING

But individual consumers also use and demand a range of goods and services that may often have been produced outside the urban area or even in other countries. Many polluting and carbon-intensive manufacturing processes are no longer located in Europe or North America, but have been sited elsewhere in the world to take advantage of lower labour costs and less rigorous environmental enforcement.

This means that the patterns of consumption that drive emissions (notably in the energy and industry sectors) are often veiled and result in reduced emissions in Europe and North America.

Indeed, while 12 per cent of Chinese emissions were due to the production of exports in 1987, this figure had increased to 33 per cent (equivalent to 6 per cent of total global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions) in 2005. Analysts are increasingly questioning whether consumers of these export products should also bear responsibility for the associated emissions.

## HUNGRY CITIES

Fruits and vegetables consumed in developed countries often travel between 2500 and 4000 kilometres from farm to store. In North America, for example, the average food product in the supermarket has travelled 2100 kilometres before ending up on a shelf and the food system accounts for some 15–20 per cent of the energy consumption in the US.

## THE POLITICS OF COUNTING RESPONSIBILITY

The report highlights the problems both technical and political of counting responsibility. National inventories of greenhouse gas emissions are a basic requirement expressed in international climate agreements and conventions. High consumers are keen to use the production-based analysis of greenhouse gas emissions so that production systems outside their geographical territories are not included.

The consumption-based approach provides an alternative framework. By this measure, consumers with their choices, preferences and demands are made accountable for the greenhouse gases caused on their behalf wherever the product is manufactured. Not only the manufacturing cost in terms of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalents, but also the packaging and transportation and all associated carbon-rich activities. Attempting such calculations is problematic but, as the report argues, moves towards a more equitable and responsible measure of accountability in inventories.

Irrespective of whether a production or consumption-based analyses of greenhouse gas emissions is used, the impact is the same. In many cases, cities in developing countries will feel the impact of climate change long before achieving higher and adequate living standards that their citizens aspire to, and which are common-place for wealthier countries. Furthermore, while failing to meet higher living standards they will also be unable to afford to pay for mitigation and adaptation strategies that may stave off some of the worst disruption caused by climate change. However, the political reality is that the wealthy also have a greater influence on the political structures at play, making such equitable distribution of responsibility difficult, at best, and unlikely if business continues as usual.