



buddhist global relief



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How Climate Change Threatens our Food Supply and What We Can Do About It



By Ven. Santussika Bhikkhuni - I grew up among people who watched the sky. Countless times, I've seen my father and grandfather looking to the west, observing, assessing and predicting. Countless times, I've heard my mother and the other women talking about rain. Farmers talk about the weather in a way that reaches far beyond casual comments to relieve socially awkward moments. I've known times when a conversation about the weather could take up most of a Sunday afternoon, going over all the experience from the past that could be remembered and all the possibilities of what to do, if ...

When a force so powerful and so far out of one's control can make or break your livelihood, one tends to pay attention, close attention. In the past, a farmer could usually count on some more-or-less reasonable limits to weather patterns. At some point, it will rain or stop raining, probably before the crop is lost. Those conversations about the past, about how rarely the weather had swung outside the normal limits, were a comfort. The risk was always present, but also present was a sense of order, of fairness. This probably came from experience as much as it did from faith. In the 50-plus years that my father farmed, we never lost a crop. Oh, we had our share of too much rain and not enough rain, of sweltering heat and late frost and early snows, of hail and crop-flattening wind and tornadoes. But through all of that, every year most of the crop would survive. There would be some remedy: replant some fields or work feverishly hard to bring in a harvest before the weather worsened. And there were years when everything that was needed was there. The result: a bumper crop.

But now things are changing. The predictable unpredictability is beginning to yield to a kind of chaos we have never known in the history of agriculture on Earth. Extreme flooding, droughts, and super-storms threaten the livelihood of farmers and the food supply for all of us.

Just taking a sample of recent news articles gives us insight into the changes that have been occurring:



In [Extreme Weather Worries Insurers](#), Farmers the Des Moines Register (Dec 11, 2013) reported that Iowa has experienced one weather anomaly every four years since 1980, as compared with a previous rate of one weather anomaly every 20 years; Iowa is receiving more

moisture, causing faster erosion of fertile topsoil; and global insurance losses due to extreme weather have averaged \$70 billion a year since 2010, an increase of 75 percent from 2000 to 2009 and 367 percent from 1980 to 1989.

The [Center for Climate and Energy Solutions](#) (Feb 13, 2014) reported that recent U.S. droughts have been the [most expansive](#) in decades. In 2011, Texas experienced its driest 12 months ever. At one point, 80 percent of the state was rated at an "exceptional" level of drought. At the peak of the 2012 drought, an astounding 81 percent of the contiguous United States was under at least abnormally dry conditions. Severe drought can affect agriculture. Droughts affect livestock and crops, including cornerstone commodities like corn, soybeans and wheat. At the height of the 2012 drought, the U.S. Department of Agriculture [declared a natural disaster](#) over 2,245 counties, 71 percent of the United States.

Tonight, as I write this, CBS News is airing "[Extreme Weather in California is Forcing Farmers to Take Drastic Measures](#)" (February 14, 2014).

LOS ANGELES -- While most of the East is buried under ice and snow, the West is having a heat wave... President Obama is meeting with farmers in California's Central Valley who are struggling through one of the driest years in memory... In 61 percent of the state, [the drought] is extreme or exceptional. Farmers have been forced to take drastic steps. Farmer Joe Del Bosque says he'll have to leave as many as 600 acres fallow because he has no water. In a normal year, Del Bosque's fields would grow lush with almonds, cherries and melons, but with reservoirs at record lows, the state -- for the first time -- is cutting off water to growers in the Central Valley farm belt... The Fresno area normally gets about 11.5 inches of rain in a year. Last year it got three... Del Bosque is a second generation farmer in this valley. He fears he'll be the last. "Next year, if we have another dry year like this and we get no water, I think I'll just be hanging it up," said Del Bosque. Fresno County, where Del Bosque is farming, is the top agricultural producer in the country; there, 250,000 acres will lay fallow because of the drought...

The formula is simple: climate instability causes reduced crop yields, which cause food shortages and reduce food security. This is already impacting the poorer people of the planet. It will soon impact all of us if we do not act quickly. Without going any further into the social and political unrest that could result, let's focus on solutions.

It is imperative that we drastically reduce carbon and methane pollution, the primary causes of climate change, as soon as we possibly can. We must stop burning fossil fuels; keep 80 percent of the gas, oil, and coal already discovered in the ground; put a tax on carbon and methane emissions; end subsidies to the fossil fuel industry; ban further fossil fuel exploration; prohibit further development of fossil fuel infrastructure; put an end to fossil fuel exports; and rapidly develop renewable energy. We need to do this at lightning speed, with the same vigor, commitment, and urgency that we would if our own home and family were in direct danger ... because they are.

Each and every one of us can help to turn our policies around to accomplish these objectives. Here are important steps to take:

Make a fierce commitment to speak and act in line with the truth about climate change. At every point when the talk of strange weather comes up, we can point out that this is the result of climate change. When we hear people say things about climate change that we know are false, we can speak up.

Talk with our friends, families, coworkers, and members of the organizations we are part of about the facts of climate change and the solutions we need to implement. Help mobilize them.

Join together with others to meet with officials at all levels of government to secure their commitments to push policies forward to make the necessary changes.

Make sure that all our investments are fossil-fuel free. Divest our own interests from fossil fuels and work to get organizations we are associated with (universities, churches, pension plans, etc.) to do the same.

Participate in actions organized by 350.org, the Sierra Club, and others that are resisting fossil fuel extraction, production, and use.

Speak out against and resist all forms of extreme fossil fuel extraction: fracking, deep-sea drilling, mountain-top removal, tar sands, and drilling in the Arctic.

Write letters to the President, the State Department, the Environmental Protection Agency, and any other agencies of government with a mission to protect the people and interests of the nation.

This is the first time in human history that every one of us on the planet is being threatened by the same danger. We truly are all in this together, even if some of us do not yet realize it. Everything we do to turn this situation around helps every being on this planet. Let's not waste another moment.

[Ven. Santussika Bhikkhuni](#) grew up in Indiana, raised two children, and worked as a software designer and engineer before ordaining as a Theravadan nun. She teaches Dhamma as it applies to life experience with a focus on engaged Buddhism. She serves on the board of Buddhist Global Relief.

A Light Shines in the Bronx: The Urban Rebuilding Initiative



By Sarah Auerbach - Take the no. 2 train uptown to the Bronx in New York City, about thirty minutes from Times Square, and you'll see what economists mean when they speak of an "economic divide" or what activists mean when they speak of "food injustice." In just a short ride you'll travel from a part of the city where you can spend [\\$1,000 on a bagel](#) to a neighborhood where, over the course of a month, folks are lucky to spend half that to feed a family of four. Food insecurity, in this neighborhood, is a serious matter.

Fortunately, however, in an area that most people are afraid to visit, a light shines on positive pockets of inspiration and resources. One such pocket is the [Urban Rebuilding Initiative](#), a budding community group in the process of forming their own formal nonprofit. The Initiative was founded in 2011 by Harry Mcneary, who was motivated by his own personal struggle through poverty, incarceration, and homelessness. In 2013 Harry began laying the foundation for the group's focal project, the Urban Community Food Project, which works to alleviate food insecurity among local Bronx residents.

In the backyard of the Tried Stone Baptist Church on Boston Road, Harry, with the help of volunteers and interns, has built two greenhouses. Six short blocks away, he manages a vacant city lot through a partnership with NYC Green Thumb, where there are now several greenhouses. This past year, in their first spring and summer seasons, Harry and his crew experimented with organic pea shoots, spinach, kale, collard greens, beets, radishes, string beans, and basil. They planted and harvested food as a team,

donating the produce to the Church's food pantry and a nearby men's homeless shelter. In the coming months the group will be planting potato spuds in vertical towers that will conserve space while making for maximum yield. Even in the winter, in a snowy New York, food can grow.



The Food Project has been changing the lives of individuals in the area, and it is not only the folks who get the much needed food that benefit; those who participate in its collaborative growing effort also gain. Harry has reached out to local schools, youth groups, and community organizations, including probation programs for youth offenders. He works with at-risk students, some of whom have already been incarcerated. Young men and women work with him and learn about sustainability and urban farming. They learn how to build greenhouses, how to plant vegetables, and how to care for them. They learn about better nutrition. Most of all, they learn that there is more opportunity in life than they imagined.

Last spring, for example, Joanna Alvarez, a high school student at Fanny Lou Hamer Freedom High School, found the group through her school internship program. She worked side by side with Harry as the group's first Youth Manager for twenty hours a week throughout the spring and summer, continuing even after her required commitment was complete. This was Joanna's first work experience and helped motivate her to apply for college and continue with community based work. In the fall, Harry met Juan Alvarez through a partnership with the Fortune Society. Juan, age 19, currently works on the project as part of his probation program. His commitment and dedication to the project keeps him safely out of prison and on a productive path with a new and brighter outlook toward his own future.

The Urban Rebuilding Initiative manages the Urban Community Food Project with a core group of volunteers. Structured like a nonprofit, they have an eight-person board comprised of community members, educators, an agricultural advisor, a grant writer, legal counsel, and a youth representative. The group hosts weekly "Sustainability and Civic Action" workshops on Wednesday and Friday evenings, and "Open Farm" volunteer days on the weekend.



This work has been made possible through the generosity of the Tried Stone Baptist Church in providing free use of their backyard space, and grant funding from Buddhist Global Relief, Citizens Committee for NYC, the Pollination Project, and the City Parks Foundation. While the group has not yet been registered as an independent nonprofit, they have fiscal sponsorship from the American Friends Service Committee and can collect tax deductible donations through this partnership. Looking forward to 2014, URI aims to grow a few thousand pounds of food, expand their program to include free fitness classes for the public, and formalize their own 501(c)3 nonprofit status. For more information, please visit them at <http://www.uripeoplesinitiative.org>

Sarah Auerbach is a volunteer with the Urban Rebuilding Initiative.

GATE and GATEways Success Stories

By Jennifer Russ - Since 2009, BGR has partnered with Lotus Outreach in their GATE [Girls' Access To Education] program, which provides primary and secondary scholarships to high-achieving girls in Cambodia, along with bags of rice to their families. Over the past few years an extension of the program known as GATEways has been providing GATE program graduates with scholarships to college and trade schools. Here are profiles of three success stories that have emerged from these programs. These accounts are based on Lotus Outreach's report to BGR, "Three Years of Great Work, A Review of 2011-2013."



Chantha Luen. The road to Chantha Luen's success was not an easy one. Her father abandoned her family when she was in ninth grade, and her mother passed away in her final year of high school. She moved in with her grandmother, but she also passed away that year. Fortunately, Luen was able to live in one of Lotus Outreach's GATE residential homes.

Luen graduated from high school despite these significant setbacks and began teacher training with the help of a GATEways scholarship. Thanks to her hard work and good grades, she graduated third in her teaching class and had the choice to teach anywhere she wanted. A testament to the tremendous community impact of educating women, Luen chose to return to the rural Row Lueh Commune in the district of Svey Check, right next to her home village!

Luen knows the people of her hometown area, and she was proud to return. "I am so happy to be working in my home village. Here, I can be a role model and will help the children and families here to value education and stay in school as long as they can."

Luen's story has a fairytale ending. Luen met a young man while in pedagogy school, and they are now engaged to be married. Her fiancé is teaching at another nearby school.

Just several years ago, this kind of story would have been very unlikely in a country like Cambodia. Thanks to BGR and its supporters, and our partner Lotus Outreach, more women like Luen are attending school, and they are paying it forward to the next generation.

Plean Sreytoek. Sreytoek is the third of four children born to laborer parents in Bantat Boh village, Banteay Meanchey Province, Cambodia. Sreytoek's parents care for the cattle of a rich family in their village. Sreytoek is the only child in her family who could reach the 12th grade; her other siblings were unable to even reach secondary school.

The extreme poverty of Sreytoek's family discouraged her at a young age from academic pursuits. As a child she dreamed of completing high school, but she never believed it would be possible. Her family owns no land. They can grow no crops for sale. At one point in her early adolescence she thought she would drop out in order to migrate to Thailand and support her family from there.



When Sreytoek was in the 8th grade, she applied for and won a full GATE secondary school scholarship. Sreytoek lived in a GATE residential house and earned excellent grades. Even when her

mother fell ill and Sreytoek had to work weekends in the rice paddies to help pay her family's debts, she maintained her position as one of the top ten students in her class.

Lotus Outreach's GATE project supplied Sreytoek and her family with rice support to help lessen the burden of her mother's medical bills. This tremendous assistance granted Sreytoek's family the disposable income to pay their debts sustainably. Her family said they will never forget this great support for their daughter and their whole family.

Sreytoek is now graduating high school and dreams of becoming a high school teacher. She aspires to provide an education to her community and earn money to support her family. Thanks to the generosity of GATE supporters, Sreytoek and her family have been able to escape the pitfalls of poverty.



Norin Rotha. The dusty border town of Poipet has been described as a wasteland. Much of the town was settled by refugees escaping the massacre of the Khmer Rouge genocide, and the shelters and shacks in which much of the population still lives are a stark reminder that Cambodia is still recovering from those events decades ago. The streets have no sanitation services, and there is a serious threat of typhoid and malaria.

Norin Rotha's family lives here. Their small home has tin walls and an earthen floor. One room has a small, raised wooden platform on which the family sleeps on straw mats. Just below the platform is a pool of black, stagnant water.

But from these inhospitable surroundings comes a ray of hope. Rotha, who attends 9th grade at Poipet Secondary School, is a Lotus Outreach GATE scholar. Piled on a shelf are her books and a small whiteboard she is using to teach her siblings to read and write. Rotha is completely committed to her studies, but managing the needs of her family and siblings is a considerable challenge.

Rotha's older sister was married and divorced after having three children. She left Cambodia to find work in Thailand three years ago and never returned. Her family does not know what has become of her. Rotha dropped out of school in 8th grade to care for her sister's children.

Thanks to BGR sponsorship and a grant from Lotus Outreach's GATE program, she was able to attend school again. "Since I have the GATE scholarship, I am able to study from 7 AM to 6 PM and use my stipend to pay for a packed lunch that I prepare before I go to school," she says. "Since November this year, I am now placed 8th out of 50 in my class!" Rotha's family also receives 50 kilograms of rice support, which is enough to feed them for three weeks out of each month.

Rotha's favorite subjects are physics, chemistry, and math. She dreams of becoming an engineer. "Ever since I was young, when I see bridges and tall buildings, I always wish I could build them," she explains.

As GATE and its funders build bridges to brighter futures for these young scholars, Rotha is building academic bridges for her sister's children, whom she tutors in reading, writing and math. With our continued support, perhaps Rotha will someday build brick-and-mortar bridges for Cambodia.

A Walk of Compassion in the Homeland of Buddhism



By Ayya Yeshe - BGR's "Walk to Feed the Hungry" has been taking place now for several years. We at the Bodhicitta Foundation in Nagpur, India, have been happy to participate. Without the funding BGR so generously gives us, we would not be able to do the work we're doing to help poor and oppressed women and children in our women's job training and community center.

Here in Nagpur we know directly what poverty feels like. Our workers are largely drawn from the slum and then educated. One of our new employees has a hole in the side of the tin shed in which she lives; it has been eaten through by rust. In winter, she and her family huddle together to stay warm, while her father tries to keep warm by drinking more than usual, slowly killing himself in the process. Her mother goes out to work as a laborer at the first light of morning. Though she does as much work as a man, since she's a woman she is paid less.

The amazing thing about the Dalit community among which I work, the former "untouchables," is that amid all this misery they always have hope. They turn up to work with a smile. Smeeta's family is just one of the roughly 70 percent of Indian families that lives on less than \$1.25 a day. Smeeta wants to be a social worker and is studying part time.



We had approximately 230 people at our rally. It was a sunny day and people waved flags and walked peacefully through the main streets of Nagpur with the BGR banner, trying to raise awareness of the injustice of poverty. Children joined in the march. People came without much pressure, they were so grateful to have been part of our job training programs. Many of them have found new confidence and incomes as a result.



We may only make a small ripple in this world, with its widening gap between the rich and the poor. But I have also heard that the fluttering of a butterfly's wing can give off a breeze that eventually will cause a huge storm. Maybe our little efforts in seeking to correct the world's injustices are like the wings of the butterfly, or like the stones that start an avalanche.

I myself can sleep peacefully at night and wake up with a smile because I know I'm doing all I can to make the world a better place. When we come together for a noble cause it uplifts us as well. Helping others, we are also helped. None of this would have been possible without the kindness and generosity of the kind donors and staff at BGR. We are your hands, and you are our heart. Thank you for walking the walk of compassion with us.

BGR ED Kim Behan Honored on Oxfam Website



By Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi - This year Oxfam America celebrated International Women's Day, held annually on March 8th, by asking their staff and supporters to share stories of "women who are making a difference in the fight against hunger, poverty, and injustice." One of their staff members chose as her inspirational model BGR Executive Director, Kim Behan! The writer is Oxfam America's Manager of Strategic Alliances Elizabeth Carty, whom Kim and I first met in Washington DC in 2010 and who helped us establish an ongoing partnership with Oxfam America.

In the covering email, the Oxfam America team wrote to Kim: "Thank you so much for all the work you've been doing to make a difference in your community and in the world. You're an inspiration to us." And, I would add, she is an inspiration to all of us at BGR—truly one of the world's outstanding Buddhist women.

Here is the text of Elizabeth's submission, the original of which can be [found here](#):

Kim Behan - Westminster, CO

Submitted by Elizabeth Carty - Newton, MA

I am honoring Kim Behan, Executive Director at Buddhist Global Relief, because of her dedication to helping end hunger, poverty, and injustice. I first met Kim at a White House briefing for Faith Leaders in 2010. Her friendly and warm personality immediately drew me in, and we became fast friends. We were thrilled when Kim agreed to become an Oxfam Sisters on the Planet Ambassador. Not only has she and Buddhist Global Relief partnered over the years with Oxfam on World Food Day and International Woman's Day, but they have also been a generous partner of Oxfam in collaborative projects over the past three years.

Like all staff at Buddhist Global Relief, Kim takes no salary but donates her time and expertise to the organization. She is truly dedicated to ending hunger, poverty, and injustice, and understands well how this vision will only be achieved by investing in women.

Kim, I am proud to honor you this International Woman's Day!

News: First 2014 Walk to Feed the Hungry in Tampa Bay, Florida

The first walk of our 2014 Walks to Feed the Hungry will be held on Sunday, March 23rd, in the Tampa Bay area of Florida. The local coordinator is board member David Braughton, so this will be a very special kickoff to our year's events. Please check out the [Tampa Bay Walk Event](#) page on FirstGiving for details. We hope many of you can join us there!

News: April Concert to Feed the Hungry in New York City

The 2014 Concert to Feed the Hungry will be held at the Interchurch Center, 475 Riverside Drive New York on Friday April 25th. The New York City team has done a fantastic job organizing this event, headlined by well-known jazz musicians Esperanza Spalding, Kenny Werner and Dan Blake. This concert is a wonderful opportunity to publicize BGR's mission and raise funds for our projects. Go to www.concerttofeedthehungry.org for more information and to buy tickets.

How You Can Help

Interested in volunteering for BGR? By joining our team you will meet others who share your values and are working to put compassion into action and help create a better world. Right now we are looking for volunteers to form a team that can manage our Facebook and Twitter pages. Some volunteers need to be located in a particular place, but most can work from home, wherever that may be. Please check the list of [Volunteer Opportunities](#) on our website and contact our volunteer coordinator at <mailto:miroehm@buddhistglobalrelief.org> for further information.

As always, donations to BGR are welcome. You can donate by PayPal or credit card on the [website](#), on Facebook, or by check to:

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