

Rockefeller Foundation *news advisory*

Media Inquiries Only:
Katherine Snider
212.852.8488
ksnider@rockfound.org

Rockefeller Foundation Announces \$70 Million Commitment to Climate Change Resilience

New Initiative Seeks to Build Resilience to the Effects of Climate Change

New York, NY, August 9, 2007 -- Rockefeller Foundation president Judith Rodin announced today a \$70 million commitment to a new five-year Initiative on Climate Change Resilience.

News reports across the United States this summer have linked several dramatic events to climate change: Following twelve consecutive days of 110°F weather this July, the shelters of Phoenix, Arizona were overwhelmed with homeless people seeking water and refuge. Another summer of devastating fires in western states has prompted the U.S. Forest Service to begin a global warming-related forest management plan. An eighteen-month drought has forced South Florida's water managers to look for alternative sources of clean water, such as desalinization of seawater. According to a report issued by two American scientists on July 30th, twice as many Atlantic hurricanes formed each year from 1995 to 2005 compared to parallel years a century ago-- a result of global warming.

And although the issue of global warming has received considerable attention recently, most of the focus has been on reducing carbon dioxide emissions. Yet, according to the report issued by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in April 2007, the world will experience at least 90 more years of warming, regardless of actions now undertaken, however important, to reduce future emissions.

Recognizing that various levels of impact from climate change are unavoidable, and in some instances could be devastating, the Rockefeller Foundation's \$70 Million Initiative seeks to build the resilience of communities most likely to be hardest hit by climate change.

For millions of people, climate change will mean increased flooding; longer and more severe droughts; more frequent and devastating coastal storms; the spread of infectious diseases like dengue, malaria and cholera; increasing salinity of freshwater aquifers; and dramatic coastal erosion—all of which could result in loss of livelihoods, loss of homes, and loss of lives.

The Rockefeller Foundation's Climate Change Resilience Initiative aims to develop the ability of communities to manage and plan for the inevitable effects of climate change and to make sure that planning includes the most vulnerable citizens. Since building resilience requires actions on multiple levels and scales, the Foundation expects to partner on the Initiative with governments, other foundations and donors, NGOs and groups from the private sector.

"While climate change will affect all of us, it will affect every aspect of life for poor people in particular—the type of food they eat, where they live, the water they drink, and even their jobs. Simply put, we see climate change as one of the most significant problems facing poor and vulnerable people today," said Dr. Rodin. "Climate change must be integrated into poverty-reduction work, urban planning and development, public health and agriculture—all sectors where the Rockefeller Foundation has experience, expertise and networks."

One component of the Foundation's Climate Change Resilience Initiative will focus on Asian cities. According to the Population Reference Bureau, more than 60% of the increase in the world's urban population in the next 30 years will occur in Asia, a region that already has a larger urban population than all other regions of the world combined. In addition, a recent study of populations at risk to sea-level rise revealed that 8 of the top 10 countries affected are in Asia.

The Rockefeller Foundation will work with a number of cities in Asia, where the capacity to generalize the learning about climate change resilience approaches and models to other countries and regions is greatest. The effort will begin with vulnerability analyses of the cities, followed by the development of pilot projects that might include coastal restoration, land-use and building-code reform, or catastrophe bonds and insurance products. After an evaluation of the pilot programs, the Foundation will work with its various partners to create mechanisms for sharing information and replicating these model projects.

Another component of the Climate Change Resilience Initiative will focus on raising awareness in the U.S., and exploring relevant solutions. The destruction caused by hurricanes, record heat waves and wildfires in recent years, as well as the introduction of climate adaptation plans in Seattle, New York City and California, all underscore the increasing importance of the need to expand domestic approaches for building resilience to climate change. Part of the effort will require developing a shared agenda between the groups working on climate change mitigation and those working on building resilience to climate change.

The final component of the Initiative will focus on Africa, where vulnerability to climate change is also very high because of poor financial and institutional resilience and a strong reliance on natural resources. Given the dependence on rain-fed agriculture in the region, the growing season could decrease as much as 20% in parts of sub-Saharan Africa, according to a study by the International Livestock Research Institute. In addition, the IPCC reports that yields from rain-fed agriculture could be reduced by as much as 50% in some African countries by 2020.

The Foundation will begin making grants related to these components of the Climate Change Resilience Initiative during the next few months.

“Limiting future climate change is critical, but so is building resilience to the impacts of climate change,” said Rockefeller Foundation associate vice president Maria Blair. “Currently there is a very low awareness for the need for this type of work. There are few existing networks, a deplorable lack of capacity, and little funding for resilience work. We hope this Initiative will help expand upon the vitally important work being done in the field of climate change adaptation.”

Dr. Rajendra Pachauri, the director general of the Energy and Resources Institute, and the chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), said "I am delighted to learn that the Rockefeller Foundation is committing significant funding for activities related to climate change. Particularly valuable is the focus on Asian cities, parts of Africa and raising awareness in the U.S. This funding has the potential for benchmarking similar efforts by other foundations as well."

The Rockefeller Foundation was established in 1913 by John D. Rockefeller, Sr., to "promote the well-being" of humanity by addressing the root causes of serious problems. The Foundation works around the world to expand opportunities for poor or vulnerable people and to help ensure that globalization's benefits are more widely shared. With assets of more than \$3.5 billion, it is one of the few institutions to conduct such work both within the United States and internationally. Visit www.rockfound.org for more information.

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