



Statement before the Committee on Foreign Affairs  
Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health  
On Combating Climate Change in Africa

## Managing Climatic Risk in Africa

Dr. Kenneth P. Green

Resident Scholar

American Enterprise Institute

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*The views expressed in this testimony are those of the author alone and do not necessarily represent those of the American Enterprise Institute.*

Chairman Payne, Congressman Smith, Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for inviting me to testify today. Along with my remarks, I have submitted a pertinent study entitled “Climate Change: The Resilience Option.”

To contextualize my remarks, I offer a bit of background.

I am an environmental scientist and policy analyst by training, having spent the last 20 years studying environmental policy at research institutions in the US and Canada.

My beliefs regarding climate change are based on what I learned in my doctoral studies, supplemented by an additional 20 years of reading in the scientific literature as well as the reports of the IPCC, two of which I appraised as an expert reviewer.

For all of that time, I have believed that manmade climate change is real, and climate science both legitimate and important.

I believe that, all things being equal, doubling the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere would likely raise the global average temperature by about one degree Centigrade, posing a mixture of moderate risks and benefits.

I am not convinced that strong, positive feedbacks will boost global warming to extreme levels. As physicists such as MIT's Richard Lindzen have observed, the opposite seems to be true: negative feedbacks seem to be cancelling out some of the expected impact of humanity's greenhouse gas emissions.

This comports with both common sense and an understanding of homeostasis: the Earth has been hotter and cooler in the past, with higher and lower greenhouse gas levels than at present, but it has never "run away" into a permanent swelter or deep freeze.

If the climate were so unstable that sudden pulses of greenhouse gases, such as recent human emissions or previous volcanic emissions could easily make it "run away," we would most likely not be here.

I also believe the institution of climate science has been badly perverted by entanglement with government.

In particular, the priority governments have placed on getting climate scientists to offer up predictions in order to facilitate planning has led to far too much emphasis placed on computer models with little more predictive capability than computerized horoscopes.

Trying to plan national economies - and the global economy - have wasted vast amounts of time and money that could have done much more good invested elsewhere.

Now, to the issue *du jour*: how can we help Africa manage its climatic risks?

First, the single most helpful thing we can do for Africa is to help her people become wealthier.

Wealthier societies, especially those with democratic institutions and market economies, are naturally resilient to environmental variability and disasters of all sorts.

Promoting the development of liberal democratic and market-economic institutions in Africa should be our country's primary focus.

Second, we should stop trying to impose expensive and immature technologies on ourselves, and on others.

Despite the optimistic chatter of would-be rent seeking wind or solar tycoons, we do not currently have the technologies needed to significantly curb greenhouse gas emissions without breaking the bank.

To the extent we deploy costly and immature technologies we will slow our rates of economic growth and technological development, while raising the costs of our exports, including our food and medicinal exports.

And to the extent we impose such technologies on developing countries, all we will do is impede their development and hinder their most urgent mission of lifting people out of poverty.

It's hard to see how that helps the people of Africa, or anyone else.

In any event, serious people must recognize that any near-term greenhouse gas emission reductions we might achieve will be swamped by Chinese emissions growth, making the actions all pain, for no gain.

Finally, we should avoid making things worse by inadvertently encouraging climatic risk-taking. Subsidizing risk-taking is a common side-effect of governmental intervention in disaster relief as well as infrastructure development.

Too often, government *actions* unintentionally tell people not to worry about climatic risk, as they will be bailed out.

An example from here in the U.S.: when people who live at water's edge or in floodplains are hit by storms or floods, our government intervenes, not only to rescue them and their property, but to keep them financially whole as well. Hence, we encourage people to ignore climatic risk, and help them rebuild in the same fragile areas.

And too often, government actions actually lead people into harm's way through infrastructure creation that guides people to living in climatically-fragile areas, or facilitating dependency on climatically-sensitive resource flows. An example would be the construction of subsidized water systems that let people farm or build massive cities in deserts and drought prone areas. Or the construction of un-priced highways that let people live far from where they work.

U.S. assistance to Africa should be scrutinized to ensure that we are not making things worse by creating incentives for African people to live in climatically delicate areas, whether through our assistance with infrastructure development, or the nature of disaster relief we offer.

Finally, I suggest we trust in resilience, but tie up our camel. In case climate change does turn out to be a more serious threat, we should try to give ourselves options to deal with that unlikely risk cost-effectively not only for ourselves, but for other countries as well.

In that regard, we should increase research funding to look for inexpensive, easily-deployed low-GHG power sources that can make people more able to adapting to climate fluctuations.

We should also increase research into geo-engineering in case we decide we need to physically alter the climate locally or globally.

Developing such fallback tools is one of the best things we can do for Africa and ourselves as well.

Thank you for your attention, I look forward to your questions.