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## **New Paper Showcases Best Practices for Protecting, Empowering Vulnerable Gulf Coast Communities in the Face of Climate Change**

Most Americans understand the importance of curbing greenhouse gas emissions to prevent a climate catastrophe in the future. But many communities are already feeling the effects of our warming planet. Impacts on the Gulf Coast are particularly challenging. In a new paper released today, the Center for Progressive Reform (CPR) highlights recommendations and best practices for protecting and empowering vulnerable communities as they adapt to climate change. The release comes ahead of an [April 15 forum](#) in New Orleans on risk reduction strategies for Louisiana coastal areas.

The paper, *Climate Change, Resilience, and Fairness: How Nonstructural Adaptation Can Protect and Empower Socially Vulnerable Communities on the Gulf Coast*, explains that many communities in the region are intimately tied to the area's environment and rich natural resources; local families depend on the land and sea for jobs in fishing, shrimping, and tourism. The effects of climate change, from rising sea levels to stronger, more damaging storms, can threaten the livelihoods of these communities, many of which are socially and economically marginalized.

"Working together, residents and political leaders can protect coastal populations' culture and their way of life," said Robert Verchick, President of the Center for Progressive Reform and a contributing author of the paper. "But we need action and leadership now. Residents need the best scientific information, ample resources, and direct involvement in the decision-making process."

In the past, officials have focused on building large-scale infrastructure projects like dams and levees to combat flooding, storm surges, and other effects of extreme weather events. However, as Hurricane Katrina taught us, these projects may not provide the protection expected or can catastrophically fail. *Climate Change, Resilience, and Fairness* asserts that so-called nonstructural adaptation is also needed and can reduce the need for massive walls of concrete and miles of canals.

"Identifying areas at highest risk from flooding, high winds, and other damage can go a long way toward protecting people and natural areas from climate change impacts," said Yee Huang, lead author of the paper. "Other approaches, including pre-disaster planning, ordinances and regulations for zoning and floodplains, flood-proofing and elevating homes, and educating community members about natural risks, can also help."



To achieve these goals, the paper's authors offer a set of recommended best practices. These include:

- Reach out to vulnerable communities at the outset and integrate non-governmental, community, and grassroots organizations in climate change adaptation strategies.
- Build flexibility into all programs and tailor them to local needs.
- Ensure that public investments in grants sufficiently cover the cost of flood-proofing, elevating homes, and other physical efforts, and make sure vulnerable communities qualify for this funding and other federal assistance from the outset of the programs.
- Empower local communities by collaboratively and cooperatively designing programs, including voluntary buyout programs in areas at high risk of inundation and destruction.

Verchick added, "In order for any approach to be successful, local, state, and federal leaders must make funding a high priority. Including residents and grassroots advocates in the planning and development process will help ensure that the programs reach all communities, including those most in need."

The full text of the paper is available online at [http://www.progressivereform.org/climatechange\\_gulfcoast.cfm](http://www.progressivereform.org/climatechange_gulfcoast.cfm). The New Orleans forum, *Beyond the Levees*, is sponsored by CPR, Oxfam America, and Loyola University—New Orleans; more details are available at [www.progressivereform.org/events.cfm](http://www.progressivereform.org/events.cfm).

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