



UNDERSTANDING CLIMATE CHANGE

What is it? Who's most impacted?
And what can you do about it?

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Honiara, Solomon Islands: Harry, who lives along the Mataniko River near Honiara, has seen the river level rise in the 20 years he has lived here. Harry built this sea wall to keep the water out but it floods during high tides.

Photo: Collin Leafasia/Oxfam.

WHAT IS CLIMATE CHANGE?

Discover the causes and effects of climate change, our planet's greatest threat.

An evening thunderstorm. A day of rain showers. A week-long heatwave. These everyday changes in the atmosphere are what we know as the weather.

Climate change, on the other hand, describes the long-term shifts — over several decades or longer— in weather patterns; for example, average conditions becoming warmer, wetter or drier.

So, what causes climate change? The main driver is human activity, due to increasing emissions from burning fossil fuels like coal, oil and gas. Burning fossil fuels such as coal generates greenhouse gas emissions that act like a blanket wrapped around the earth, trapping heat from the sun and raising temperatures.

As a result, our planet is now about 1.1°C warmer than it was in the late 1800s. Alarmingly, the last decade (2011-2020) was the warmest on record.

Almost all parts of the world are experiencing a changed climate, which is fuelling more frequent and intense droughts, storms and heatwaves, along with changes in rainfall and rising sea levels. In Australia, the horrific bushfires of 2019-2020 were followed by the highest temperature ever recorded, in January 2022, and devastating floods just a few months later.

The climate crisis poses the greatest threat to both our planet and humanity today.

WHAT IS THE EXTENT OF THE GLOBAL PROBLEM?



THE NUMBER OF CLIMATE-RELATED DISASTERS HAS TRIPLED IN 30 YEARS

WITH ONE EXTREME WEATHER EVENT RECORDED PER WEEK



20 MILLION PEOPLE PER YEAR

ARE BEING FORCED FROM THEIR HOMES BY WEATHER-RELATED DISASTERS – THE BIGGEST DRIVER OF INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT GLOBALLY



THE RICHEST 1% OF THE WORLD'S POPULATION ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR MORE THAN DOUBLE THE CARBON EMISSIONS OF THE POOREST HALF OF THE WORLD'S POPULATION

Source: World Health Organization



“WHERE ARE WE GOING TO LIVE?” GRACE’S STORY

For young women like Grace in Solomon Islands, the climate crisis poses significant risks to their future. Grace knows it will be her generation who must find a way to live in a village where the tides have risen right up to their very doorsteps.

However, many women in Solomon Islands have little influence on the critical decisions that impact their lives because they are not included in decision-making groups or processes.

If women like Grace had improved access to government funding, they could advocate for the bridges and sea walls they need to survive, and the increased climate action that they need to thrive.

“The sun is hotter, the winds are strong and the sea is rougher than what it used to be. It worries me because we are the new generation. Where are we going to live?” — Grace

Photo: Collin Leafasia/Oxfam.

What does the future hold?

Our planet is facing many complex problems due to climate change, including:

- **Rising sea levels.** Increasing global temperatures are causing the ice packs of the North and South Poles to melt, thus increasing the amount of water in the oceans. Glaciers around the world, including in Latin America and New Zealand, are melting too. If we don't take appropriate action to curb the effects of climate change, rising sea levels will result in many islands and coastal cities being submerged in the coming decades.
- **Agriculture and food.** Changes in climate cause damage to crops — not only because of higher temperatures, but because there are more droughts, more floods and more natural disasters.
- **Spread of disease.** The spread of otherwise contained diseases, and the proliferation of new ones never seen before, is glaring evidence of climate change. Warmer temperatures around the world allow tropical diseases to expand into new areas. For example, diseases like dengue fever and malaria could wreak havoc in Australia.
- **Damage to biodiversity.** Changes in temperature and rainfall put many species of animals and plants at risk of extinction. Many species are adapting to a changing environment, but they cannot do it fast enough to ensure their long-term survival.

How does climate change affect us?

Do we all feel the effects of climate change equally?

Climate change is a problem that affects us all, but not everyone feels the consequences equally. While the wealthiest in the world



contribute the most to climate change, it's the people who have done the least to cause the crisis who are suffering the most. This injustice is pushing them further into poverty.

For people living in poverty, climate change exacerbates the inequalities they already experience. Because they are politically, socially and economically marginalised these communities are least equipped to respond and protect themselves against climate change.

As global temperatures continue to rise, it will become even more difficult for these communities to access clean water and grow enough food to eat. Healthcare services will be even more strained, with more people getting sick from waterborne diseases and malnutrition.

Already, people in low- and lower-middle-income countries are around five times more likely than people in high-income countries to be displaced by sudden extreme weather disasters. More frequent and devastating droughts, hurricanes and floods will increasingly endanger their lives and livelihoods.

Governments must take ambitious and urgent action to tackle the twin climate and inequality crises. In addition to essential measures to rapidly shift energy supply to sustainable renewable sources, policies are needed that reduce demand among the richest and highest emitters, while prioritising efforts to ensure everyone can realise their human rights.

Does climate change intensify social inequality?

Impoverished communities, which are least able to deal with the impacts of climate change, often live in places where land is cheaper and most at risk of climate-related hazards such as flooding, landslides and droughts. The effect of this is to worsen pre-existing inequality.

The rise in food prices is one of the most worrying impacts of climate change in relation to social inequality. With a higher number of droughts or floods, the number of lost crops increases exponentially. This translates into steep price rises and people having even more difficulty feeding themselves and their families.

The international community needs to adopt sustainable agriculture policies that help guarantee the essential rights of small-scale food producers. If producers earn a liveable wage for their product, it will be much easier for them to put measures in place to protect themselves from disaster and rebuild if or when it does strike.

You can contribute to a more sustainable global economy by buying fair trade products wherever possible, which have been produced with respect for the environment and the rights of those involved in their creation.



How can we combat climate change?

The quest for climate change solutions

Climate change is a global problem and we must tackle it on all possible fronts: governments must take strong, decisive action to curb emissions; communities need to prioritise sustainability; and individuals can take small actions. Only by using all available means, and acting swiftly and decisively, will we be able to curb the devastating effects of global warming.

So, what steps are being taken by governments around the world to combat this problem? And what can you do to reduce your own carbon footprint?

What governments are doing

Governments first began to realise that global warming was a real problem in the 1980s, when it became clear that something was changing on our planet. In 1992, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was created – an international agreement that is now accepted by most countries. The goal of the agreement was for governments to control their emissions of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere and to take appropriate measures to effectively monitor the problem.

While the wealthiest people in the world contribute most to climate change, it's people living in poverty in low-income countries who pay the highest price.

At COP21 in Paris in 2015, a landmark international treaty on climate change was adopted. The Paris Agreement built upon the UNFCCC and, for the first time, brought together all nations around a common cause to undertake ambitious efforts to combat climate change and adapt to its effects.

Its central aim is to strengthen the global response to the threat of climate change by limiting the global temperature rise to “well below” 2 degrees Celsius, preferably

to 1.5 degrees Celsius, compared to pre-industrial levels. But because the Paris Agreement allows nations to set their own emission targets – also known as ‘nationally determined contributions’ – specific climate goals are voluntary rather than being legally binding. To achieve a climate-neutral world (net-zero greenhouse gas emissions) by 2050, countries need to take bold action now.

What is Australia's contribution to the climate crisis, and what are we doing to address it?

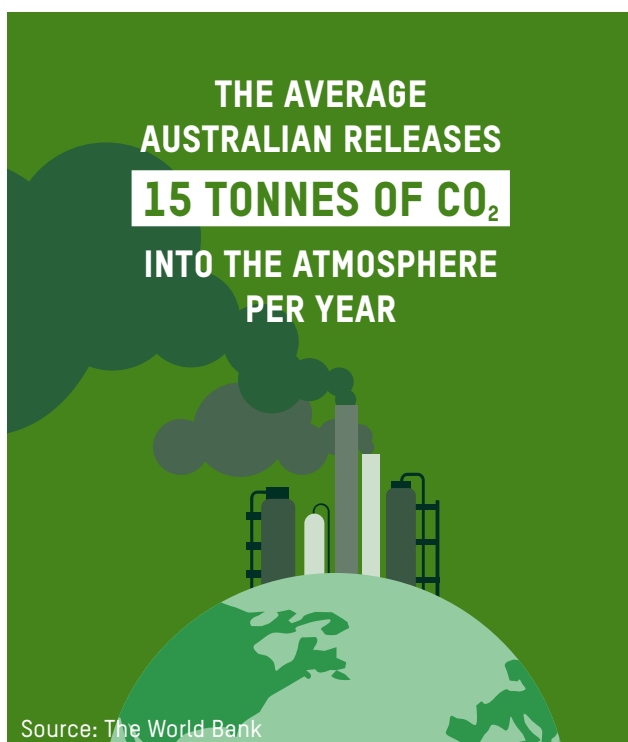
In 2022, after nearly a decade of stalling and delaying on climate action, Australia's new government promised new policies and set new emissions reduction targets. And while they have passed legislation to cut emissions by 43% by 2030 and to net zero by 2050, climate scientists have said steeper cuts are needed – at least 50% by 2030.

While Australia is experiencing the devastating consequences of climate change, we have more resources to draw from to rebuild and recover. We have also contributed significantly towards causing the climate crisis, which means we have a moral duty to support lower income countries to respond to worsening climate impacts.

FACT: The average Australian releases 15 tonnes of CO₂ into the atmosphere per year, when the average human should aim to release no more than 2 tonnes per year to stay within the Paris Agreement.

In November 2022, governments across the world convened for critical discussions on progressing urgent global climate action at COP27 in Sharm el-Sheikh.

Worsening climate impacts and the rising costs of climate disasters will put even more lives and livelihoods at risk, as communities are pushed further into poverty and insecurity. Now, more than ever, we need meaningful action from governments and big businesses to support lower-income countries as they face these compounding crises.



INDIGENOUS PARTNERSHIP BRINGING CLEAN WATER TO REMOTE COMMUNITIES

As climate change continues to exacerbate water scarcity issues around the world, a collaboration between Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation, Oxfam and Monash University is offering new hope. The innovative project improves access to water in communities in remote off-grid locations across Australia through the development of a portable micro desalination unit. The pilot project is a major breakthrough in meeting the growing demand for reliable and affordable safe water across the world.



“PAREEYT

POONDEEW-TEEYT”

(WATER IS LIFE)

– Damien Bell, CEO of Gunditj
Mirring Traditional Owners
Aboriginal Corporation

Gunditjmara Country, Australia: Damien Bell, CEO Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation, pictured during the desalination pilot project in collaboration with Oxfam, Monash University and Gunditj Mirring.

Photo: Keith Parsons/Oxfam.

EVERYDAY WAYS TO COMBAT CLIMATE CHANGE

What can you do to save the planet?

If we want to put the brakes on climate change, we need everyone to join the fight – and that includes YOU!

Climate change is a problem on an enormous scale, but here is the good news: there's a lot we can do as individuals to help make a difference. Here are some simple ways we can all do our bit:

Climate change solutions at home

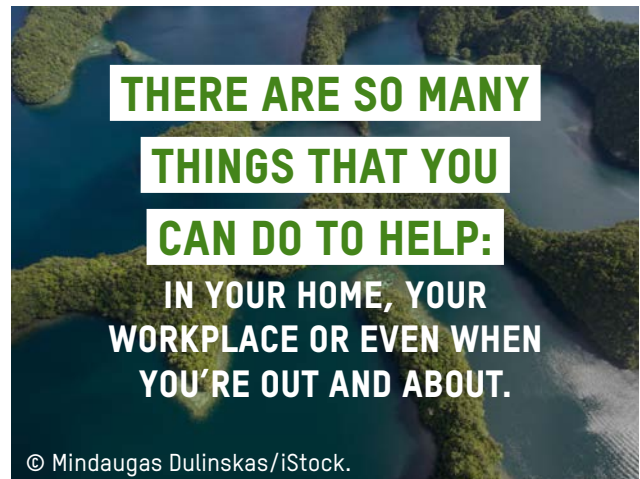
- **Insulate your home.** From the windows to the floor to the roof, good insulation is crucial for not losing heat. You'll be warmer in the winter, cooler in the summer, and you'll save money, too!
- **Change to LED lights.** LED lighting uses 80% less energy than standard incandescent bulbs use, and will save you money on your energy bill!
- **Choose energy-efficient appliances.** Every time you have to buy a new one, choose the product with the best energy certification. And remember to switch your TV, kettle or toaster off at the wall, as they continue to consume power even when they are not operating.

Climate change solutions in the kitchen

- **Eat less meat and more vegetables.** Each year, more than 40kg of meat is produced per person, while cattle are responsible for emitting almost 19% of all the greenhouse gases released into the atmosphere. Eating less meat can also massively reduce our water consumption, as much less water is needed to grow vegetables than is needed for livestock.
- **Buy local.** Buying local products reduces the distance that your food has to travel

before it reaches your plate, which means less greenhouse gas emissions from transport.

- **Reduce food waste.** One-third of all food produced is either lost or wasted. Avoid waste by only buying what you need, planning meals, storing food correctly, getting creative with leftovers, sharing extras with your friends and neighbours, and composting if you can.



Climate change solutions when moving about

- **Green your transport.** Every time you choose to take public transport, walk or cycle somewhere instead of driving your car, you are reducing greenhouse gas emissions. If you have to drive, arrange a carpool with your colleagues or your children's school to reduce carbon emissions and ease traffic.
- **Switch to electric.** If you're considering changing cars, try to invest in an electric or plug-in hybrid. When you have to make long journeys or public transport isn't an option, you'll still be reducing your impact.
- **Fly less.** Reduce the number of long-haul flights you take. If you do fly, make sure you offset your emissions.

BUILDING RESILIENT COMMUNITIES: VISHNU AND JAMNA'S STORY

Vishnu, right, and Jamna are school teachers in Badin, one of the most climate-affected districts in Pakistan. Seawater intrusion, floods, drought and rising temperatures have had detrimental effects on the lives and livelihoods of Badin communities.

As part of Oxfam's Building Resilient Communities project, which supports communities to leverage technology and adopt innovative solutions to build climate resilience, Vishnu and Jamna learnt to use a web-based app to receive weather information and agricultural advice. The user interface has been built with low literacy communities in mind, and includes pictorial information, voice instructions and Sindhi translations for ease of use. They have shared the climate smart agricultural skills they learnt with dozens of farming families.



Badin District, Pakistan: Jamna, left, and Vishnu shared the climate-smart agricultural skills they learnt with dozens of farming families.

Photo: Oxfam in Pakistan.

HOW OXFAM IS HELPING COMMUNITIES HIT BY CLIMATE CHANGE



We advocate for the inclusion of communities' voices in international negotiations. For example, we supported the 'Africa Climate Caravans', which crossed 23 African countries to converge at COP27. Hundreds of African organisations took part in this virtual "road show" to demand immediate climate action for those least responsible and most affected by climate change.



We respond to climate-related emergencies around the globe. In the last year alone, with our partners we have provided humanitarian assistance to hundreds of thousands of people caught up in deadly floods, storms and droughts. For example, following Cyclone Idai, which left more than 2.2 million people in Africa in urgent need of humanitarian aid, we helped deliver clean water, sanitation and hygiene kits to over 500,000 people.



We work with local communities to build resilience in the face of the climate crisis. For example, in northern Ethiopia where droughts are more frequent and severe, we have introduced with our partners a micro insurance scheme for small-holder farmers. This innovative program allows Ethiopia's farmers to use labour to pay for weather insurance for their crops. Providing security against the changing climate and weather disasters allows farmers to be more resilient to these shocks.

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