

Climate Justice and Environment Policy	
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Approved by: OAU Board of Directors	

Oxfam Australia Climate Justice and Environment Policy

1.1 Definition¹

Oxfam Australia (OAU) considers climate justice to be one of four dimensions of inequality and injustice to be prioritised in its work. The impacts of climate change on the most vulnerable people are disproportionately severe: in addition to being sometimes life-threatening, climate change and the extreme weather events that it engenders wreak havoc on people’s livelihoods, critical infrastructure, productive industries and ecosystems,² and consequently can lead to further negative human rights impacts such as increased child labour, exploitative labour, forced relocations, deepening poverty and dysfunctional families and communities.

Addressing climate justice requires a strong foundation of environmental protection and sustainable natural resource management. While all human life depends on the natural environment for survival, vulnerable people are often directly reliant on natural resources for their livelihoods. When environments are damaged – over exploited, polluted, and degraded – pre-existing inequalities usually become more extreme. Environmental degradation is both a contributing factor to climate change and a result of it.

1.2 Scope

This policy applies to all program activities³ including long-term development programs, humanitarian response, advocacy and campaign activities, and to programs directly implemented by OAU or through partners or other Oxfam affiliates. It is not confined only to OAU’s climate justice thematic work and should be applied across all thematic areas.

This policy has been developed in line with OAU’s Climate Justice Thematic Strategy 2021. The environmental performance of Oxfam Australia’s domestic operations, including the management of water, waste, purchasing and greenhouse gas emissions, is covered under *Oxfam Australia’s Environmental Policy and Environmental Strategy (2015-2020)*.

1.3 Background

People living in poverty are often the first to feel the effects of climate change and environmental degradation and are the hardest hit. They may be reliant on shared resources, and as such may have limited access to and control over the resources that their lives and livelihoods depend on. People living in poverty are also more likely to lack adequate resources or power to protect their environment and may live in already marginal, degraded or polluted environments. Environmental changes may often be caused by exploitation or projects that are outside of community lands and territories and that cross-state boundaries.

Climate change and its impacts are increasingly challenging communities across the globe. The acceleration of carbon emissions because of human activity is driving the increase in global average

¹ This program policy and implementation guide is in line with Oxfam Australia’s Strategic Framework 2020-2025 ([2020-CO-002-Strategic-Plan_FA_Digital.pdf \(oxfam.org.au\)](#)) and in accordance with the organisation’s feminist principles ([What we believe | Oxfam International](#)).

² See *DFAT - Climate Change Action Strategy*, November 2019.

³ ‘Program activities’ is used throughout this document to refer to all OAU’s development, humanitarian, campaigns and advocacy programs and projects and OAU-funded programs, as well as internal processes (where applicable).

temperatures that is resulting in increased climate-related disasters – fires, floods, drought – as well as rising sea levels and damage to the biodiversity and ecosystems on which we depend. Wealthy nations, including Australia, have contributed significantly to climate change, with a long track record of high carbon emissions and the export of fossil fuels.

OAU recognises that people living in poverty and inequality are often the most affected by negative climate impacts. Environmental and climate change often exacerbate existing social vulnerabilities and inequalities. These changes can be experienced differently by men and women, girls and boys, by people living with disabilities and groups marginalised because of their race or ethnicity, or sexual identity.

OAU's Climate Justice Thematic Strategy 2021–2025 provides strategic priorities for how to ensure that the most at-risk communities are resilient to the impacts of climate change and lead the way to ending the climate crisis and creating a brighter, fairer future. It incorporates relevant intersections with gender, economic and First Peoples' justice priorities to create a truly transformational agenda for climate justice. This thematic strategy has three focus areas: climate resilience, climate finance, and just transitions.

1.4 Key Principles underpinning this policy

OAU's climate justice and environment policy is guided by the following principles:

Human rights-based approach: OAU uses a rights-based approach that places respecting, protecting and promoting human rights at the centre of our work. There are many rights recognised in the key international human rights instruments that may be negatively impacted by climate change, including the right to life, the rights to water, food and health, and the rights of Indigenous peoples. Climate justice recognises that those hardest hit by climate change will mostly be those who have done least to cause the crisis, with the least resources and capacity to adapt or recover.

Climate justice requires gender and racial justice: OAU emphasises a feminist approach to climate justice, challenging unequal power relations based on discrimination against women and girls, black, indigenous and people of colour (BIPOC) and other people facing exclusion. Problem analysis aims to identify the adverse impacts of climate change on people facing exclusion and to shed light on problematic social and cultural norms and assumptions that stand in the way of climate justice such as patriarchal hierarchies and entrenched racial discrimination.

Inclusion and participation: OAU commits to transformative leadership and practice, including by elevating the voices of those most impacted by the climate crisis, including them at all stages of the project cycle. Inclusion is an essential part of the foundations of environmentally sustainable development. OAU recognises that local decisions are of primary importance in shaping community response to the environment. OAU recognises the importance of traditional indigenous knowledge, resource management practices and ownership patterns in fostering environmentally sustainable development and land care. OAU recognizes that change is only possible at scale when acting in solidarity with the people experiencing poverty and injustice and that, to be credible, OAU must respect their experience.

Do no harm and mitigate risk: OAU will not intentionally cause harm to any person participating in program or project activity, including its own staff and partners. It will identify and quantify any risk involved to participants, and to the environment, of project activity and will take steps to mitigate such risk. OAU acknowledges that in some communities, participation in programs and projects may meet with the threat of reprisals, especially against women and marginalised groups in communities where they act outside of gender or societal norms and undertakes to safeguard participants wherever possible.

Poverty is both a consequence and a cause of environmental damage: OAU must ensure that its work does not negatively impact on the environment and strive to improve environmental outcomes for the benefit of those it works for. OAU will support the rights of communities to

healthy environments that will provide the resources they need and challenge the environmental damage caused by wealthy individuals and nations. These are necessary conditions for sustainable development.

Supporting networks and movements: OAU supports local existing and emerging networks, prioritising the connection between local action and global campaigns on climate justice. OAU will respect the local knowledge, pace and capacity of local actors, including the beneficiaries of and participants in programs and projects as well as partners implementing these activities.

2 Implementing the Climate Justice and Environment program policy

2.1 Minimum standards in the Project Cycle

OAU will ensure that climate justice principles and environmental risk management are integrated throughout the program/project cycle and, where appropriate, in program operations by:⁴

Project Identification

- Considering how OAU programs and projects are implementing the climate justice thematic strategy and how other thematic strategies are also supported to achieve their priorities.
- Undertaking a context analysis and review of environmental and climate change impacts, as well as the potential opportunities to positively contribute to improved climate and environmental outcomes for the people we work with.

Project design and planning:

- Ensuring compliance with all relevant environmental laws and regulations of Australia and/or the partner country; and with the codes and standards outlined in Annex 1.
- Assessing the risks of environmental and climate change impact of all OAU programs and projects, and of program operations, to mitigate and where possible eliminate these risks, per the process set out in Annex 3. This includes screening all OAU funded programs and projects for potential environmental risks as part of the appraisal process, applying a risk rating to any risks identified, and documenting appropriate mitigating actions in a management plan.
- Designing and delivering high-quality initiatives that deliver impact towards OAU's climate justice thematic strategy. This includes drawing on Oxfam good practices for consideration of climate change and environmental risks and opportunities.

Project implementation, monitoring and management

- Ensuring that all OAU and implementing partner staff understand their responsibilities to manage environmental risk in their own decisions and actions.
- Implementing identified mitigation actions, per the screening process and associated management plan
- Ensuring that environmental and climate change risks and impacts are monitored and reported on, including:
 - a. identifying positive outcomes and how they have been achieved, and
 - b. collecting information on any negative environmental impacts of Oxfam's interventions and how they have been/will be addressed.

Project evaluation and exit:

- Environmental and climate justice impacts should be incorporated into evaluation systems by evaluating positive outcomes for future learning and identifying any negative impacts to be addressed.

⁴ This applies to all OAU development, humanitarian, campaigns and advocacy programs/projects and OAU-funded programs.

2.2 Additional Good Practice

- Attracting allies, supporters and donors to enhance OAU’s work on climate justice and environment, ensuring OAU is the partner of choice.
- Influencing decision makers and powerholders who can affect the changes OAU seeks across climate finance, climate resilience and just and fair transitions.
- Mobilising financial resources for partners working to deliver climate justice outcomes. Using its influence to advocate with decision-makers for positive action towards meeting international climate change and environmental sustainability goals or exceeding them in a timely manner.
- Supporting innovative solutions both to address the factors resulting in climate change and to addressing the risks faced by climate change-affected communities.
- Taking every opportunity to reduce vulnerability to climate impact by focusing on community capacity to plan and implement inclusive approaches and address disaster and climate risk; and by increasing the capacity of local authorities/governments to support communities in climate-related actions.

2.3 Climate Justice and Environment Responsibilities and Accountabilities⁵

Accountable	Activity
Program Managers in Australia and in-country	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsible for ensuring all program staff understand how this policy relates to their area of work. • Responsible for ensuring the key principles and minimum standards are adhered to and implemented in OAU program and project activities. • Responsible for ensuring the required capacity to implement is built into program activities and into the program/project budget. • Responsible for sharing this policy and implementation guide with partners and that they understand the policy and their role in implementing it.
Unit Manager or Country Director (or equivalent)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsible for ensuring all staff have the necessary skills and attitudes to effectively implement this policy and are held accountable to the policy. • Ensure the minimum requirements of this policy are incorporated in unit- and country-level planning, budgeting and resource allocation. • Ensure that an environmental risk assessment is made periodically for country offices and that any identified risk is identified and minimised/eliminated.
Program Director and Public Engagement Lead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsible for ensuring that all program activities and public policies and statements meet the principles and standards of this policy.
Management Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the implementation of this policy across all OAU areas. Promote a culture that reflects OAU’s commitments in its internal operations, policies and processes. • Ensure staff are given safe opportunities to raise concerns about areas where OAU is not following good environmental practices.

⁵ Unless specified otherwise, these refer to OAU positions. In-country, job titles may differ and during inductions and training/briefings, these responsibilities should be clarified. It is important to make sure that all responsibilities are covered.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure this policy is regularly reviewed to align with OI direction, and that there is an integrated approach to climate justice and environment throughout all OAU operational and programmatic activities.
Chief Executive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold Section Directors accountable to this policy and promote policy principles in the OI confederation.
OAU Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that OAU work enhances environmental sustainability in both its internal operations and in its program activities and hold OAU accountable to its climate justice commitments.

Annex 1

Conventions and Obligations

Climate justice is a human rights issue. OAU is guided by international conventions on rights as defined in key United Nations (UN) instruments. OAU is also a signatory to the Oxfam International (OI), Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) and Red Cross Code of Conduct which guide its actions. OAU is guided by national laws relating to the environment.

<p>United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)</p>	<p>The UNFCCC was adopted in 1992 and is the main global forum for climate change negotiations. Australia is a Party to the Convention. Its objective is to stabilise greenhouse gas concentrations “at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic (human-induced) interference with the climate system”.</p> <p>The Convention recognises that “developed” countries have played a significant role in causing climate change and operates on a system of ‘common but differentiated responsibilities’ for States in collectively addressing climate change. UNFCCC members (Parties) meet annually at the UNFCCC Conference of the Parties (COP) to monitor progress.</p>
<p>Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)</p>	<p>SDG 13 calls for urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts. It impacts and is linked to all 16 of the other Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.</p>
<p>Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) Code of Conduct (June 2017)</p>	<p>The ACFID Code of Conduct is underpinned by a set of values which inform the behaviours of all members, all the time. The values are translated into high-level Quality Principles that are then translated into specific Commitments and associated Compliance indicators. The following Quality Principles apply to this policy:</p> <p><i>Quality Principle 2: Participation, empowerment, and local ownership</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development and humanitarian responses enable sustainable change through the empowerment of local actors and systems: • promoting the participation of primary stakeholders; • promoting the empowerment of primary stakeholders; • promoting gender equality and equity; • promoting the empowerment of people with disabilities; • promoting the participation of children. <p><i>Quality Principle 3: Sustainable change</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development and humanitarian responses contribute to the realisation of sustainable development by: • seeking durable and lasting improvements in the circumstances and capacities of primary stakeholders;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • contributing to systemic change; • promoting environmental stewardship and sustainability.
<p>DFAT – Environmental and Social Safeguard Policy for the Aid Program, effective from 1 January 2018</p> <p>https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/environmental-social-safeguard-policy.pdf</p>	<p>This policy applies to all DFAT funded aid investments regardless of value or funding mechanism. This includes all aid activities implemented through other Australian Government agencies and public sector agencies, multilateral organisations and bilateral donor partners, private sector and civil society organisations. Therefore, this policy applies to all Australian Government funded activities implemented by Oxfam.</p> <p>The policy stipulates that it is mandatory to screen all aid investments, regardless of value or delivery mechanism, for environmental and social impacts against five safeguards including environmental protection. Where screening indicates that an environmental or social impact may occur, the level of risk must be assessed and rated. If a negative environmental or social impact is likely, a proportional environmental and social impact assessment must be completed. Impacts identified in the environmental and social impact assessment must be managed and monitored through an environmental and social management plan.</p> <p>Note that when considering impacts to the environment, DFAT stipulates that, consistent with the definition in Australia’s Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act, the following aspects of the ‘environment’ must be considered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ecosystems and their constituent parts, including people and communities; • Climate and natural systems and processes; • Natural and physical resources; • Qualities and characteristics of locations, places and areas; • and Heritage values of places; social, economic and cultural aspects of the above, including those related to indigenous peoples.
<p>Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) Climate Action Strategy 2020-2025</p>	<p>DFAT’s Climate Change Action Strategy (2020-25) underpins Australia’s climate investments and assists DFAT in meeting Australia’s climate finance commitments. The Strategy recognises that climate change is a major risk to sustainable development and is threatening global efforts to eradicate poverty. Addressing the risks of climate change, as well as taking advantage of the opportunities from climate action – such as more climate-resilient economic growth, jobs and technologies – reinforces sustainable development and supports poverty reduction.</p>

<p>The Climate and Environment Charter for Humanitarian Organisations</p>	<p>The Climate and Environment Charter for Humanitarian Organizations is a document for and by humanitarian organizations, intended to help them play their part and highlight their relevance in responding to the climate and environmental crises.</p> <p>The Charter’s seven commitments are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Step up our response to growing humanitarian needs and support those who are the most at risk to the impacts of the climate and environmental crises (adaptation, disaster risk reduction and anticipatory action). 2. Maximize the environmental sustainability of our work and rapidly reduce our greenhouse gas emissions. 3. Embrace the leadership of local actors and communities: our action will be guided by the leadership and experience of local actors and communities. 4. Increase our capacity to understand climate and environmental risks and develop evidence-based solutions. 5. Work collaboratively across the humanitarian sector and beyond to strengthen climate and environmental action. 6. Use our influence to mobilize urgent and more ambitious climate action and environmental protection. 7. Develop targets and measure our progress as we implement our commitments.
<p>OI Programs Standards</p>	<p><i>Standard 1: Collaborative, iterative, analysis of root causes of poverty and injustice forms the basis of all programs.</i></p> <p>“Collaborative” means that OAU undertakes such analysis with partners and allies and with those whose rights are being denied or abridged. “Root causes” means that this collaborative analysis includes gender analysis, power analysis, vulnerability, trends, natural factors (e.g. climate change), and political economic analysis.</p> <p><i>Standard 2: Program strategies are created in a participatory and collaborative manner...</i></p> <p>Oxfam does not work alone. Long-term program strategies are developed jointly with others. In addition, in all its work, OAU needs to pay close attention to gender dynamics and be explicit about the changes in gender relations that programs will foster.</p>

Annex 2

Definitions

For the purposes of this policy, OAU uses these definitions:

Climate justice:	Justice that links development and <i>human rights</i> to achieve a human-centred approach to addressing <i>climate change</i> , safeguarding the rights of the most vulnerable people and sharing the burdens and benefits of climate change and its impacts <i>equitably</i> and <i>fairly</i> .
Climate change:	A change of climate which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and which is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods.
Climate finance:	There is no agreed definition of climate finance. The term climate finance is applied both to the financial resources devoted to addressing climate change globally and to financial flows to developing countries to assist them in addressing climate change.
Climate resilience:	Climate resilience is the ability to anticipate, prepare for, and respond to hazardous events, trends, or disturbances related to climate. Improving climate resilience involves assessing how climate change will create new, or alter current, climate-related risks, and taking steps to better cope with these risks.
Environment:	The Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (EPBC Act) defines the 'environment' as: Ecosystems and their constituent parts, including people and communities; Climate and natural systems and processes; Natural and physical resources; Qualities and characteristics of locations, places and areas; and Heritage values of places; social, economic and cultural aspects of the above, including those related to indigenous peoples.
Just and fair transitions:	Characterised as moving from 'business as usual' towards an environmentally sustainable economy that no longer relies on fossil fuel energy and contributes to decent work for all, social inclusion and eradication of poverty.

Annex 3 – Environmental Screening and Risk Management Process Map

