



CLIMATE CHANGE

Policy Position
World Vision NZ
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INTRODUCTION

As a child-focused Christian development, relief and advocacy organisation, World Vision plays an important role in helping developing countries adapt and respond to the effects of climate change. We seek to educate communities on the effects of climate change, and build resilience within their changing natural environments. We also educate our supporters and advocate policy solutions to governments, hoping that our collective work will stabilise our climate and make our planet safe for future generations.

This document lays out World Vision New Zealand's understanding of climate change and provides key messages for internal and external use. It details how climate change impacts the communities we work with. It further provides an overview of our climate-related work in the field as well as advocacy calls that we promote with governments, including in New Zealand.

To summarise:

- The world's climate is changing at a speed and on a scale that has grave implications for humanity. Human-induced climate change intensifies natural disasters such as floods and droughts, and also causes slow-onset hazards such as rising sea levels and changing rainfall patterns.
- Climate change has grave implications for the wellbeing of communities we work with. It is already disrupting the lives of vulnerable women, men and children, and poses a severe threat to progress made in the fight against poverty, hunger and disease.
- Climate change is an issue of justice as it disproportionately impacts those who have done the least to contribute to the problem. The poor and vulnerable, particularly in low-lying coastal areas such as the Pacific, will be hit the hardest by future climate-related storms, floods, droughts and water-borne illnesses.
- Our faith compels us to care for the earth and act to protect the environment. We are stewards of God's creation; as such, World Vision has been working with communities for years to increase their resilience to the effects of climate change, for example through disaster preparedness planning, reforestation and improving food and water security.
- World Vision welcomes the commitments made by the international community under the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals to slow climate change. We add our voice to the call to limit the global average temperature rise to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, and scale-up funding to support climate mitigation and adaptation in developing countries.
- World Vision NZ encourages the New Zealand Government to adopt a "Zero Carbon Act" – a new legislative and policy framework to reduce the country's greenhouse gas emissions to zero by 2050. This would ensure New Zealand's quick transition towards a carbon-neutral economy, in line with our international commitments and responsibilities towards developing countries.
- World Vision NZ encourages the New Zealand Government to provide meaningful assistance to communities affected by climate change, in particular through local-level disaster risk reduction and adaptation programmes with a focus on the Pacific. This support should be new and in addition to existing ODA commitments.
- World Vision NZ is concerned about the potential of large-scale climate-related displacement, and encourages the New Zealand Government to consider steps, in partnership with vulnerable states and territories, to close the legal protection gap for people displaced by climate change.



Why is climate change relevant to World Vision?

Climate change is happening now, and poor communities are being hit the hardest

Climate change is not a concern for the distant future. It is happening now and its impacts are already being felt around the world, particularly by communities in the developing world. It threatens to wipe out decades of hard-earned progress in reducing poverty, hunger and disease.

Climate change, meaning the unprecedented increase in global average land and ocean temperatures primarily due to human activity, has numerous dramatic consequences. It increases the scale and frequency of extreme weather events such as cyclones, floods, heat waves and droughts. It also causes slow-onset environmental hazards like rising sea levels, changing rainfall patterns and desertification.¹

While all countries are being affected, those bearing the brunt of our warming planet are developing countries, particularly in low-lying coastal areas such as the Pacific. Climate change threatens their food security, water supplies, health and economic development. This has devastating costs for the poor and other vulnerable groups including the elderly and disabled.

Across the Pacific, climate change is now the biggest threat to the wellbeing of communities. Sea-level rise and the devastation wrought by Cyclone Pam serve as a forceful reminder of the effects of climate change.² We are already seeing many Pacific nations deal with the increase in extreme weather events, temperature changes and disease outbreaks. Communities are also struggling against coastal erosion and sea inundation as well as threats to fresh water and food from sea level rise.

Children are among those most vulnerable to climate change; their basic rights to life, food, water and health are at risk. Worldwide, over half a billion children live in areas where the occurrence of floods is extremely high.³ Climate change is further projected to exacerbate the top causes of death for children under 5 – malnutrition, diarrhea and malaria. Not least, children face less obvious risks in a changing climate – education, for example, is disrupted when disasters hit, while threats to families' livelihoods often hit children the hardest.

The scientific basis of climate change

World Vision acknowledges with grave concern the findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the leading scientific forum for climate analysis. In its *Fifth Assessment Report*, strong conclusions are drawn on our changing climate, the high probability that human actions are causing this change, the catastrophic consequences for people and nature, and consequently the need for action at the global, national and local level.

Climate science tells us that planet earth is warming in a historically unprecedented manner; global temperatures have risen by 0.85 degrees Celsius between 1880 and 2012 and the global amounts of snow and ice have drastically diminished.⁴ While there are multiple complex drivers, the IPCC suggests that these changes can be mainly attributed to excessive levels of human-induced greenhouse gas emission, particularly the burning of fossil fuels (coal, oil and gas) and the destruction of forests.⁵ Greenhouse gases collect in the atmosphere and, like a blanket, warm the surface of the earth. Their concentration in today's earth atmosphere is 40% higher than before the Industrial Revolution.⁶

Without urgent action, conservative estimates project that the world’s average surface temperature could rise by 2.6-4.8°C by 2100⁷ — with some areas of the world expected to warm even more. This would have dramatic consequences for a large fraction of species and the majority of mankind; it would cause destruction as well as widespread food insecurity, water stress and disease.



How is climate change disrupting peoples’ lives, including in the Pacific?

Pacific Island countries are on the “frontline” of climate change

The Pacific is exposed to a wide range of dangerous climate hazards, despite being responsible for only 0.006% of the total global greenhouse gas emissions.⁸ The *2016 World Risk Index*, for example, ranked Vanuatu first, Solomon Islands sixth and Papua New Guinea tenth among countries most at risk of disaster resulting from extreme weather events. Any sudden- or slow-onset changes in the natural environment have devastating

consequences as the majority of human settlements are located on the low-lying coastal fringes of islands where communities are largely dependent on subsistence farming and fishing.⁹

The following are three examples of recent climate-related disasters that have had devastating impacts on Pacific Island communities.

- **Cyclone Pam in Vanuatu:** A severe category five tropical cyclone tore through Vanuatu on 13 March 2015 with winds of up to 250 kilometres per hour. Some 188,000 people were affected. Access to safe water was compromised with as estimated 70 per cent of wells contaminated, and health and sanitation practices were also affected, with up to 70 per cent of health facilities and sanitation superstructures destroyed. Furthermore, 80 per cent of key export crops were wiped out in the most affected areas, leaving families with few alternative food sources.¹⁰
- **Rising sea levels in the Solomon Islands:** In the Solomon Islands, rates of sea-level rise have averaged around 8 millimetres a year between 1993 and 2012. This has been driven partly by human-induced climate change and partly by natural climatic cycles. Five islands have already disappeared into the ocean, with a further six so severely eroded that families have had to be relocated, including a whole village. The impacts are particularly visible on Kwai, a white-sand atoll with a population of 1000. The atoll’s churches, thatched-roof houses and trees, previously scattered along the coastline, are now deserted or destroyed due to rising sea levels.¹¹
- **Drought in Papua New Guinea:** Due to the harsh effects of climate change and an extended El Nino, drought has been drying up water supplies and destroying crops in the Tobenham community of Papua New Guinea. Whereas the village once kept bellies full with banana, cassava, yam and sweet potatoes, now families are struggling to put food on the table.¹²

Around the world, climate change amplifies existing risks and creates new ones for natural and human systems

- A rise in average temperatures over the last 50 years has caused a significant increase in heat waves, droughts and fires across the globe.¹³ This negatively impacts soil fertility, making it harder for communities to grow crops and feed themselves. The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) cites that crop yields may decline by 10-25 per cent or more by 2050 due to climate change.¹⁴
- More frequent and extreme rainfall is causing devastating floods and mudslides. This in turn leads to physical destruction, pest-spread, salt-water intrusion into crops and water supplies, and other life-threatening issues.¹⁵ It is estimated that by 2055 extreme rainfall events which typically occurred once every 20 years will occur seven times more often in the same time period.¹⁶
- Climate change is limiting access to reliably clean water, which in turn results in increased rates of cholera, diarrhoea and vector-borne diseases like dengue and malaria.¹⁷ Between 2030 and 2050, climate change is projected to cause approximately 250,000 additional disease-related deaths per year.¹⁸
- Sea-level rise causes coastal erosion, loss of biodiversity and habitat, particularly in low-lying communities. Under high-end projections, countries like Kiribati, Tuvalu and the Marshall Islands - only one to two metres above sea level - are expected to become uninhabitable.¹⁹ Even low-end projections of sea-level rise will require complicated infrastructure solutions to prevent land loss (e.g. sea walls and water storage facilities) as well as psychosocial support for populations affected e.g. by forced relocation.



What is World Vision doing to help those affected by climate change?

Our responsibilities as Christians in a changing climate

We are stewards of God's creation; we care for the earth and act to protect the environment. This is because we believe the natural environment is God's gift to humanity, as it provides food, clean water and shelter to communities around the world. Climate change is one of the most serious issues facing our stewardship of the earth; as such, we work with communities to help them be effective stewards. We also believe we must call people in positions of power to more effective and just stewardship, including decision-makers in New Zealand.

World Vision works to strengthen community resilience to climate change

World Vision is already working with communities to reduce their risks to climate change and meteorological hazards. In the Pacific, for example, our experts are involved in a number of disaster risk reduction programmes incorporating climate risk adaptation which are designed to build community resilience. These include trialling better crops and agricultural techniques, investing in cyclone resistant structures, and to increasing communities' preparedness and awareness of climate risks.²⁰

The following are three examples of how World Vision New Zealand specifically is supporting communities on the frontline.

- **Disaster Risk Reduction:** World Vision is working with communities in Myanmar to help reduce the risk and impact of future climate-related disasters. An example is Chauk community, which lies in the ‘dry zone’ of Myanmar and is prone to fires and flooding. *Disaster Preparedness Plans* have been established in 19 communities to improve their preparedness and resilience, including through an early warning system and water tanks.²¹
- **Land regeneration:** World Vision is working with farmers in Timor-Leste to restore previously unusable land, in order to increase resilience to climate-induced shocks. They used to employ a ‘slash and burn’ practice to maintain soil fertility, meaning they would indiscriminately burn wood from the forest. As a consequence, however, soil quality has degraded substantially and forest cover has disappeared. With the support of World Vision, farmer groups are now learning how to regenerate trees and shrubs from the ‘underground forest’ of living tree stumps and roots, breathing life back into original land cover.²²
- **Emergency response:** When climate disaster hit Vanuatu, World Vision was there to respond with life-saving help and supplies. We stayed on, and we are still working with communities recovering from the destruction caused by Cyclone Pam.²³ Almost 6000 people in Tafea province received essential assistance, including food and sanitation services.²⁴

What policy solutions does World Vision advocate?

Stabilising our climate means reducing greenhouse gas emissions and building resilience

It is clear that climate change is a real and urgent threat, and that we must take action to mitigate and adapt to it. As such, climate change requires strong political responses from countries large and small. We owe it to vulnerable communities and future generations to do whatever we can.

World Vision welcomes the adoption of the Paris Agreement, a landmark treaty binding the international community to tackle climate change. This agreement commits the world to holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels, while pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C. Its aim is further to scale-up funding to support climate mitigation and adaptation in developing countries. World Vision also welcomes the commitments made under Goal 13 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to “take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.”

Safeguarding our planet for future generations means taking ambitious action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions today. The science is clear: To stay within the maximum temperature increase of 2°C above pre-industrial levels, net global emissions of greenhouse gases must be reduced to zero by the latter half of this century. It is important to bear in mind, however, that the 2°C warming level that has been deemed safe by some governments still entails potentially catastrophic impacts for low-lying areas like the Pacific. As such, there is widespread recognition that global warming must in fact be kept to a maximum of 1.5°C. World Vision supports this view. As such, we encourage countries large and small to prioritise the rapid transition towards zero-carbon growth paths.

Limiting global warming, however, is not enough. Many impacts of climate change are already underway and need to be minimised, including through building seawalls, water reservoirs, food banks, disaster-proof buildings and early-warning systems.²⁵ Communities on the frontlines require meaningful support to mitigate, build resilience and adapt to the effects of climate change. As such, World Vision will continue to stand up for significant increases in development assistance and climate finance to keep the most vulnerable communities safe.

There is room for New Zealand to strengthen its climate action

WVNZ notes the commitment made by the New Zealand Government under the Paris Agreement to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 30 per cent from 2005 levels and 11 per cent from 1990 levels by 2030. According to the Government, this will be achieved through a “mix of domestic emission reductions, the removal of carbon dioxide by forests and participation in international carbon markets.”²⁶ We further acknowledge the Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) as being the principal Government-level initiative for achieving economy-wide emissions reductions. The ETS assumes that placing a price on greenhouse gas emissions creates a financial incentive for businesses and consumers to pursue environmentally sustainable behaviour.²⁷

However, we note with concern that New Zealand’s climate mitigation policies have received sustained criticism by experts for lacking ambition, and have yet to effectively reduce greenhouse gas emissions in practice.²⁸ For context, New Zealand’s emissions have risen significantly since 1990 – the Ministry for the Environment reported a 24.1 per cent increase in emissions between 1990 and 2015.²⁹ New Zealand’s gross emissions per capita are well above average for developed countries.³⁰

World Vision believes it would be appropriate for New Zealand to establish a legal framework for reducing its greenhouse gas emission. Climate legislation with binding targets, measures and accountabilities has led to positive developments in a number of countries. In the UK, for example, the 2008 Climate Change Act set legally binding emission reduction targets, required the government to make plans to achieve these, and established an independent climate body to provide expert advice. The UK’s greenhouse gas curve has since bent downwards, with net emissions falling 38 percent between 1990 and 2015. We believe a similar framework would work well in the New Zealand context.

World Vision also believes that New Zealand’s climate finance and climate-related ODA commitments towards developing countries, particularly in the Pacific, can be strengthened. We note New Zealand’s commitment to provide \$200 million in climate-related support in the time period until 2020.³¹ We also acknowledge that New Zealand makes a significant contribution to improving access to clean, efficient and affordable energy in the Pacific region. However, we do believe that planning and reporting on climate-related aid should be more transparent, and that the creation of a legal framework on climate action would help in that regard. We also stress that all climate-related assistance should prioritise building resilience *at the community level*, including through local-level disaster risk reduction and adaptation programmes. As such, less priority should be given to spending aid on the economic and productive sectors, and more funding should be made available for civil society to build resilience at the community level.

Lastly, World Vision believes there is a significant legal gap in New Zealand to protect people displaced by climate change. A recent survey of 86 case studies of community relocations in Pacific Islands found that environmental change and natural hazards accounted for 37 communities relocating.³² While current trends suggest that most climate-related displacements are, and will be, internal, some significant cross-border movement is to be expected. There is currently no international or domestic legal guarantee that climate-displaced persons will be able to seek protection in another country, either temporarily or permanently.³³ This protection gap must be closed, and New Zealand, in partnership with vulnerable states and territories, can play a leading role in this area.

Further Reading

- Bailey, I. and Inderberg, T.H.J. (2016): *New Zealand and Climate Change: what are the stakes and what can New Zealand do?*
- Carabine, E. (2014). *The IPCC's Fifth Assessment Report: What's in it for Small Island Developing States?*
- Children in a Changing Climate Coalition (2015): *'Child Centred Adaptation: Realising Children's Rights in a Changing Climate'*
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- Ferris, E., Cernea, M.M. and Petz, D. (2011): *On the Front Line of Climate Change and Displacement: Learning from and with Pacific Island countries*
- Food and Agriculture Organisation (2016). *FAO's Work on Climate Change.*
- Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2013): *Neglected displacement: Human mobility in Pacific disaster risk management and climate change adaptation mechanisms.*
- IPCC (2013): *Climate Change 2013: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*
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- MacLellan, N. and Meads, S. (2016): *After Paris – Climate Finance in the Pacific Islands.*
- Ministry for the Environment (2017): *New Zealand's Greenhouse Gas Inventory 1990-2015*
- Ministry for the Environment. (2016): *New Zealand's 2030 climate change target*
- New Zealand Parliament (2016): *National Interest Analysis: The Paris Agreement.*
- Ni, X. (2015): *A Nation Going Under: Legal Protection for "Climate Change Refugees."*
- Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment (2017): *Stepping stones to Paris and beyond.*
- Royal Society of New Zealand (2016): *Transition to a low carbon economy for New Zealand.*
- UNICEF (2011): *Children's Vulnerability to Climate Change and Disaster Impacts in East Asia and the Pacific.*
- UNICEF (2015): *Unless We Act Now: The impact of climate change on children.*
- United Nations (1992): *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.*
- Vivid Economics (2017): *Net Zero in New Zealand.*
- World Health Organisation (2016): *Climate Change Infographic*
- World Vision International (2013): *World Vision Public Policy Positions: A guide for staff 2013.*

ENDNOTES

- ¹ E Carabine (2014), *The IPCC's Fifth Assessment Report: What's in it for Small Island Developing States?* Overseas Development Institute and Climate and Development Network.
- ² For background on the links between climate change and the destructive impacts of tropical cyclones, see: The Carbon Brief (2015): *Cyclone Pam: Untangling the complex science on tropical storms and climate change*
- ³ UNICEF (2011): *Children's Vulnerability to Climate Change and Disaster Impacts in East Asia and the Pacific*.
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ IPCC (2013): *Climate Change 2013: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*
- ⁶ E Carabine (2014), *The IPCC's Fifth Assessment Report: What's in it for Small Island Developing States?* Overseas Development Institute and Climate and Development Network.
- ⁷ The possibility of reaching what climate scientists call "tipping points" is one of the key factors in the call to limit temperature rise to below 2°C. Once a tipping point is reached, a self-reinforcing cycle is set in motion which will be impossible to stop – hence the extreme urgency with which climate action must occur.
- ⁸ Ferris, E., Cernea, M.M. and Petz, D. (2011): *On the Front Line of Climate Change and Displacement: Learning from and with Pacific Island countries*
- ⁹ World Bank.: *Our work in Timor-Leste, Papua New Guinea and the Pacific Islands*
- ¹⁰ Government of Vanuatu (2015): *Tropical Cyclone Pam: Humanitarian Action Plan*
- ¹¹ New Zealand Herald (2015): *Hidden Pacific: Villagers at mercy of rising sea levels.*
- ¹² New Zealand Herald (2015): *Hidden Pacific: Paradise lost – the fight for safe water in Papua New Guinea's Hanuabada village.*
- ¹³ Carabine (2014)
- ¹⁴ Food and Agriculture Organisation (2016): *FAO's Work on Climate Change*
- ¹⁵ UNICEF (2011)
- ¹⁶ Carabine (2014)
- ¹⁷ IPCC (2014): *Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, p.1624
- ¹⁸ World Health Organisation (2016): *Climate Change Infographic*.
- ¹⁹ Ferris, E., Cernea, M.M. and Petz, D. (2011): *On the Front Line of Climate Change and Displacement: Learning from and with Pacific Island countries*, p.9.
- ²⁰ World Vision uses the *Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific* as policy guidance – see <http://gsd.spc.int/frdp/>
- ²¹ World Vision New Zealand (2016): *Global Impact Report* [Internal Document]
- ²² Martin, P. (2013): *Timor-Leste terrain recovers from the ashes of 'slash and burn'*.
- ²³ Maclellan, N. and Meads, S. (2016): *After Paris – Climate Finance in the Pacific Islands*. p.7.
- ²⁴ World Vision New Zealand (2016): *Global Impact Report* [Internal Document]
- ²⁵ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2015): *Global Estimates 2015: People displaced by disasters*.
- ²⁶ Ministry for the Environment (2015): *New Zealand's Climate Change Target – Our contribution to the new international climate change agreement – summary of consultation responses*.
- ²⁷ This is predominantly due to perceived economic risks. New Zealand produces an unusually large portion of methane (CH₄) and nitrous oxide (N₂O) emissions due to the significant role of agriculture in New Zealand's economy. The other half of New Zealand's greenhouse gas emissions arise from the burning of coal, oil and gas for electricity generation, industrial heat processes, transport, and everyday activities in homes and commercial buildings.
- ²⁸ New Zealand's *Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment*, among several other independent experts, has noted that "very low carbon prices mean that the ETS has been ineffective in encouraging the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions within New Zealand". Regarding New Zealand's climate target under the Paris Agreement, almost three-quarters of the 11,000 submitters to a public consultation called for a carbon reduction of 40 per cent below 1990 levels, in line with what many comparable countries have committed to.
- ²⁹ Ministry for the Environment (2017): *New Zealand's Greenhouse Gas Inventory 1990–2015*
- ³⁰ Royal Society of New Zealand (2016): *Transition to a low carbon economy for New Zealand*
- ³¹ NZ Government (2015): *Updated strategies and approaches for scaling up climate finance from 2014 to 2020*
- ³² IPCC (2014), p.1625.
- ³³ In 2015, the New Zealand Supreme Court dismissed an application from a man from Kiribati and his family to be granted refugee status on the basis of sea-level rise associated with climate change threatening his life.