

Background Information and Talking Points: Climate Change Adaptation

AUGUST RECESS 2023

OVERVIEW

The background information and talking points in this document serve as a guide for how to structure your meetings with your members of Congress.

Our work together in the United States is the outward expression of missionary discipleship. We are called to encounter Christ in the members of our global family most in need and to share the Good News with others—becoming prophetic advocates for justice and the common good. We are grateful for your partnership in building a more just world. By advocating for holistic solutions that address the root causes of poverty, we can ensure that all people may live with dignity and thrive.

As an opportunity to stand with people experiencing poverty or vulnerability, your congressional meetings will focus on building relationships with your legislators while also educating them about communities around the world whose lives and livelihoods are affected by climate change.

Your voice matters! Your members of Congress want to know *why* you and your community care about these issues. As you prepare to meet with your senator/representative, reflect on the stories of our sisters and brothers around the world that you can share to illustrate the importance of caring for our global family and how you and your community are taking action to support people in need.

BACKGROUND: CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change is an urgent challenge for our world today and disproportionately affects communities experiencing poverty or vulnerability. Often these communities lack the basic resources and support to overcome the challenges brought on by severe weather events, making it difficult to recover or rebuild their lives. Climate change is becoming a common driver of poverty by devastating homes and communities, disrupting livelihoods and causing economic instability and inequality. The World Bank estimates that if we do nothing to address the impacts of climate change today, up to 130 million people will be pushed into poverty by 2030.

Driven by the effects of a changing climate, millions of people around the world are facing increased food insecurity. Smallholder farmers are losing their crops due to extended periods of drought, such as in the Dry Corridor of Central America, Afghanistan and the Horn of Africa where communities faced the worst drought ever recorded after five consecutive failed rainy seasons. The increasing severity of storms or monsoon rain is causing flooding, which destroys crops and washes away the topsoil, leaving the land depleted of nutrients. As farmers continue to lose their harvests—often a main source of income—they and their families are often forced to migrate to other areas in search of food and work. This causes conflict over land and resources, resulting in disruptions to local food, livestock and crop production.

Pope Francis reminds us in *Laudato Si'* that “We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a

solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature” (139). In caring for our planet, we must also care for our sisters and brothers who are most affected by the climate crisis. We are all one human family, sharing a common home. We cannot address poverty without also addressing the impacts of climate change.

CRS’ APPROACH TO CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION

Around the world, CRS works shoulder to shoulder with communities most vulnerable to climate change through adaptation programs—focused on agriculture, disaster risk reduction and humanitarian response—that help communities manage risks, recover, adapt and strengthen their resilience against future economic or climate hardships.

Agriculture

CRS works with smallholder farmers to build a pathway to prosperity—helping them move from farming that only meets their daily food needs to establishing a growing, flourishing business that can contribute to local markets. Farmers build their capacity to adapt to the changing climate by learning new skills and techniques, improving infrastructure, gaining access to seeds and other resources, and restoring degraded lands to improve natural resources like soil and water. In Tanzania, a group of young people are applying new farming techniques that increase their agricultural yield and improve their storage practices—which protects food from pests and diseases. They are also implementing irrigation practices that help minimize damage from heavy rain. And in El Salvador, farmers are using water-smart agricultural practices, which focus on improving and retaining moisture in the ground, so their crops can grow even during times of drought.

Disaster Risk Reduction

CRS works with local leaders to develop disaster preparation plans that can protect lives, livelihoods and reduce the damage caused by severe weather or disasters. Activities include community risk mapping, developing early warning systems, creating evacuations plans and preparing evacuation kits. Community members strengthen their resilience by diversifying their livelihoods so they are not dependent on one source of income, protecting assets like livestock or water sources, and connecting communities with their government for disaster response and support. In the Philippines, fishermen are planting mangrove trees that help protect their homes and shorelines from severe typhoons or strong currents. And in regions of Bangladesh that are prone to natural disasters—including river erosion—communities are improving their housing, raising latrines, protecting their livestock and saving money or grain.

Humanitarian Response

Emergencies and disasters cause extreme hardship and can be difficult to bounce back from. Short-term programs provide immediate food, medical and agriculture supplies to communities experiencing need, while medium- and long-term programming focuses on income generation, education, health, natural resource management and improving livelihoods.

Access to fresh water is also important. Water sources can get ruined, depleted or contaminated through flooding, drought and other extreme weather events. CRS focuses on building sustainable landscapes to protect watersheds, developing water-smart practices, promoting improved hygiene practices and creating access to quality water supplies and sanitation facilities. In regions of Kenya where prolonged drought is common, communities are improving water systems, building water points and latrine blocks, all of which enhance access to water, sanitation and hygiene. And in Lesotho, communities are conducting land and water restoration activities—such as planting trees to prevent erosion—that improve their rangelands for grazing and farming.

To learn more about CRS climate change adaptation programming, read the following stories, or find more at crs.org/act.

- [Adapting to Climate Change in Bangladesh to Fight Hunger](#)
- [Building Resilience from the Ground Up](#)
- [A Story of Hope from Kenya](#)
- [Nery's Story](#)
- [Darfur Farmers Learn to Grow Despite Climate](#)
- [Helping Farmers to Adapt to Climate Change in Niger](#)

BUILDING A FOUNDATION FOR ACTION

To take effective action on this critical issue, we need bipartisan collaboration and leadership. Our goal is to build support on both sides of the aisle so that we can move toward concrete policy and legislation that benefits our global family. Together, as a movement of people committed to transforming our world, we can amplify our voices to enact change that will enable our sisters and brothers to survive and thrive in the face of climate change.

While climate change can be a polarizing topic, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops calls Catholics and others of goodwill to rise above partisan politics to collectively find solutions that address the impacts of climate change on our global family members. In the 2001 document *Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence and the Common Good*, the USCCB states that “global climate change is not about economic theory or political platforms, nor about partisan advantage or interest group pressures. It is about the future of God's creation and the one human family. It is about protecting both 'the human environment' and the natural environment.”

Our greatest asset to overcoming partisan politics is building and strengthening relationships with members of Congress, which sets the foundation for dialogue, education and influence, helping move congressional members up the champion scale. By reframing how we talk about the issue, we can turn the focus toward human dignity—calling attention to the lives of people most affected by the climate crisis and our responsibility to care for our one human family.

For additional support on climate change advocacy and how to strategically frame the conversation for your legislators, [watch the trainings provided in the CRS National Calls for June and July](#).

AUGUST RECESS

August Recess is a major opportunity to engage with congressional members and begin building relationships on the topic of climate change adaptation. Your meetings will focus on building a foundation for future action through relationship building, education and dialogue. You can better prepare for your conversation by researching your member of Congress on the issue of climate change adaptation. Assess where they might fall on the [Congressional Champion Scale](#) and what actions you can take to move them up the scale over time.

Meeting Objectives

- Educate your member of Congress about communities affected by climate change and how adaptation programming supports them in overcoming the challenges they face as well as strengthen their resilience for the future.
- Engage your member in a discussion on climate change adaptation and take notes on their responses to your questions. In addition, record any questions they have on this topic. Use the information you gather from this meeting as a resource for your continued relationship building efforts and share them with CRS by including them in your action report on the CRS Chapter Community site or the CRS Action Center.

TALKING POINTS FOR CONGRESSIONAL MEETINGS

Framing

Begin with gratitude

Thank you for your time to allow us to get to know each other and to discuss issues that are important to me/us, including global poverty and the impact of a changing climate on vulnerable communities around the world.

Express gratitude. Check your member of Congress' website to thank them for something they have done in the recent past.

Introduction: Who you are and why you're there

As a person/people of faith seeking justice and care for all in our world, I/we believe there is a moral obligation to provide assistance to people in need and address the root causes of poverty. The impact of climate change, which especially affects people experiencing poverty and vulnerability, is an urgent issue that needs to be addressed. Today, I/we would like to share more about climate change adaptation programming and hear your thoughts on this important issue.

Briefly share about yourself/the group, your work in the state/district, your connection to CRS and why global issues like climate change adaptation are important to you.

Moving to the issues: Set the stage for the conversation

Share a story about someone from around the world who was impacted by climate change. Support your story by emphasizing the importance of adaptation programs and how they support people in overcoming the challenges of a changing climate and build their resilience for the future. Consider using one of the CRS stories as well as other information found in this background document.

Discussion

Note: As the central focus of your meeting, this discussion should take the most amount of your time. Be sure to record detailed notes on the responses to these questions. Include these notes when you submit your action report on the CRS Chapter Community site or the CRS Action Center.

Questions to Ask

- Keeping in mind the recent impacts of the changing climate in our own state/district, namely [provide an example or short story], what are the senator/representative's thoughts on the impacts of similar extreme weather events on communities and people experiencing poverty and hunger around the world?
- How does the senator/representative propose addressing the impact of a changing climate on communities worldwide who are experiencing poverty or vulnerability?
- What role does the senator/representative see the U.S. playing in helping vulnerable communities to cope with the impacts of the changing climate globally?
- What can I do, as a constituent, to continue to advance this important issue with the senator/representative?

Thank you for this discussion. The United States government has the responsibility and capacity to address the needs of people around the world experiencing poverty and vulnerability by providing necessary assistance in adapting to the world's changing climate. U.S. global leadership is critical in our collective effort to address the impacts of climate change and ensure that communities worldwide can strengthen their resilience and thrive.

The Ask

I/We invite you to learn more about climate change adaptation programs by attending a CRS event in October where you'll be able to hear from a panel of experts on this issue. I/We will follow up with more details on this event in the coming weeks.

Final Comments to Raise

- If the senator/representative travels abroad, would he/she like to visit CRS programming in the future? CRS is in more than 100 countries around the world and would welcome an opportunity to show the senator/representative the impact United States investments in food security and climate change adaptation have on the ground.
- Please know that I/our [group]—along with CRS—can serve as a resource both in Washington, DC and back home in the state/district. I/We am/are interested in continuing to dialogue with your office on these and other issues of mutual interest.