



[Photo by Philip Laubner for CRS]

Climate Change Capacity Statement

JUNE 2022

THE CHALLENGE

“Listen to the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor, who suffer most because of the unbalanced ecology.”

— POPE FRANCIS

Climate change affects all life on Earth, but it is increasingly evident that the effects will not be felt equally across all countries and communities. The injustice of this inequity is exacerbated by the fact that the countries most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change are precisely those contributing the least to causing this catastrophe, as their greenhouse gas emissions are the lowest.

The Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) found that 3.3 – 3.6 billion people live in countries that are highly

vulnerable to climate change.¹ Globally, 3.2 billion people are affected by land degradation, especially those in rural communities, smallholder farmers, and the very poor.² Land degradation and climate change act as threat multipliers for people whose livelihoods are already precarious. The World Bank estimates that up to 216 million people could be forced to migrate by 2050.³ This massive displacement of people will be triggered by drought, but also caused by factors such as water scarcity, declining crop productivity, rising sea-levels, overpopulation, and poor governance.

- 1 The global hotspots are Small Island Developing States, the Arctic, South Asia, Central and South America, and much of sub-Saharan Africa.
- 2 Olsson, L., H. Barbosa, S. Bhadwal, A. Cowie, K. Delusca, D. Flores-Renteria, K. Hermans, et al. “Chapter 4 : Land Degradation — Special Report on Climate Change and Land.” IPCC, 2019. <https://www.ipcc.ch/srcl/chapter/chapter-4/>.
- 3 Clement, Viviane, Kanta Kumari Rigaud, Alex de Sherbinin, Bryan Jones, Susana Adamo, Jacob Schewe, Nian Sadiq, and Elham Shabahat. “Groundswell Part 2: Acting on Internal Climate Migration.” Washington, DC: World Bank, September 13, 2021. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/36248>.



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CRS Response

As the official international humanitarian and development agency of the Catholic community in the United States, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) saves, protects and transforms lives in more than 100 countries without regard to race, religion or nationality. Our mission is to help those communities least able to help themselves to adapt to the effects of a changing climate and strengthen their resilience. In his encyclical on human and natural ecology, *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis calls on all of us to protect and care for the Earth, our common home. To avoid the worst consequences of climate change and protect our common home, we will need to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius and help the most vulnerable communities adapt to climate change.^{4,5}

Guiding Principles

CRS programs are informed by the Integral Human Development model, which is rooted in Catholic

Social Teaching.⁶ To meet people's basic needs in a sustainable way, measures need to address the complex, multidimensional and systemic nature of poverty, vulnerability and injustice. CRS adheres to these principles in all of our work, including combating climate change:

- 1. Work as local as possible:** A core guiding principle of CRS is subsidiarity – the belief that local organizations and communities should be the architects of their own development. We support local leadership and the growth of locally led humanitarian and development efforts. We have established six key principles to support and expand these efforts⁷ and have endorsed the Locally Led Adaptation Principles formulated by the Global Commission on Adaptation.⁸
- 2. Lift up the poorest and most vulnerable:** As *Laudato Si* notes, “deterioration of the environment and society affects the most vulnerable people on the planet.” Climate change will impact all

4 US Conference of Catholic Bishops. “Catholic Leaders Express Hope with President’s Announcement That U.S. Will Rejoin the Paris Agreement on Climate Change,” January 21, 2021. <https://www.usccb.org/news/2021/catholic-leaders-express-hope-presidents-announcement-us-will-rejoin-paris-agreement>.

5 US Conference of Catholic Bishops. “Letter to Congress on Federal Budget Reconciliation,” September 7, 2021. <https://www.usccb.org/resources/letter-congress-federal-budget-reconciliation-september-7-2021>.

6 US Conference of Catholic Bishops. “Seven Themes of Catholic Social Teaching.” <https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/seven-themes-of-catholic-social-teaching>.

7 Catholic Relief Services. “Policy Principles to Support Effective and Sustainable Local Leadership In Humanitarian Response And Development Assistance.” May 6, 2020. <https://www.crs.org/get-involved/advocate-poor/public-policy/policy-brief-policy-principles-to-support-effective-sustainable-leadership>.

8 World Resources Institute. “Principles for Locally Led Adaptation.” <https://www.wri.org/initiatives/locally-led-adaptation/principles-locally-led-adaptation>.



[Photo by Dooshima Tsee /CRS]

countries, but the most vulnerable and poorest will suffer the worst.

3. Take a holistic, people-centered approach: Better outcomes are achieved by meeting people's needs across the humanitarian, development and peace (HDP) nexus and across sectors. Peace and justice are the foundations of human development, yet today about 1.2 billion people live in conflict-affected areas, almost half of which are in countries typically considered stable. Conflict-affected communities are particularly vulnerable to climate hazards, such as droughts, floods and erratic rains, because of damage to infrastructure, markets and livelihoods. They are simply unable to cope with these challenges, layered on the detrimental effects of ongoing conflicts. Therefore, the first step is ending violence so that holistic, multi-sectoral programs to reduce climate risks can be successfully implemented.

4. Collaborate and Partner: Partnerships are central to CRS programming. We recognize that tackling climate change requires engaging multiple stakeholders, including governments, the private sector and think-tanks. We seek to leverage each of their strengths and expertise and identify strategic synergies.

Strategic Priorities

In 2019, CRS launched a new strategic plan, *Vision 2030: In Their Own Hands*,⁹ to spark transformational change in areas that will yield the greatest benefit for

⁹ Catholic Relief Services. "CRS 2030 Strategy: In Their Own Hands." Text. CRS, January 25, 2019. <https://www.crs.org/about/agency-strategy>.

the world's most vulnerable people. Our plan outlines a strategy for combatting the effects of climate change by focusing on agriculture, disaster risk reduction and humanitarian response. We have also launched scaling platforms to transform livelihoods and landscapes and integrate peacebuilding and justice. Furthermore, CRS has signed the InterAction NGO Climate Compact¹⁰ to reduce its own carbon footprint and is currently establishing a baseline to guide our greenhouse gas reduction targets. Climate change demands bold actions based on social and economic justice, solidarity and equity.¹¹ At CRS, we will continue to support communities around the world that are suffering from the devastating impact of climate change, focusing our work in the following areas:



Agriculture, Livelihoods and Landscape Restoration

Because farmers rely on the weather, they often experience the effects of climate change first. Extreme weather and persistent droughts caused by climate change threaten their already precarious livelihoods. Through decades of work with communities that rely on rural agriculture for food and income, CRS has developed a tailored approach we call the *Pathway to Prosperity* (P2P).¹² P2P starts with ensuring that families recover from natural disasters and conflict. It then builds on this foundation to support those families' efforts to further accumulate assets and improve their capacity to expand their livelihoods and manage climate change and other risks, with the ultimate goal of helping farmers move out of poverty.

Given the enormity of the challenges farmers face across the globe, CRS created a platform called *Transforming Livelihoods and Landscapes*. The platform focuses on scaling four land restoration models built on decades of experience working with small-scale farmers and rural communities. These four land restoration models are: water-smart agriculture, watershed restoration, drylands re-greening, and multi-story agroforestry. These solutions all work in harmony with nature to provide benefits for people and the environment.

¹⁰ InterAction. "InterAction Launches the NGO Climate Compact," April 20, 2020. <https://www.interaction.org/blog/ngo-climate-compact/>.

¹¹ US Conference of Catholic Bishops. "Global Climate Change A Plea for Dialogue Prudence and the Common Good," June 15, 2001. <https://www.usccb.org/resources/global-climate-change-plea-dialogue-prudence-and-common-good>.

¹² Catholic Relief Services. "Pathway to Prosperity," August 11, 2016. <https://www.crs.org/stories/pathway-prosperity>.



[Photo by Sarah Page/CRS]

In the context of climate change, land restoration models are critical for helping highly vulnerable communities adapt to climate change and improve their agricultural productivity and food security. Land restoration also has important environmental co-benefits, such as restoring vital ecosystem services, conserving biodiversity and mitigating climate change through carbon sequestration. In addition, our programs help equip communities to effectively restore and manage natural resources like soil, water and forests, which can help reduce the potential for conflict and may lead to shared gains.

Transforming Livelihoods and Landscapes also connects farmers to government and private sector services and initiatives, and helps farmers influence decision-makers. Building bridges between communities and government decision-makers, CRS supports co-creation of knowledge and policy-setting to support and drive local action and farmer-led restoration. By 2030, these efforts will result in one million farming households using restoration practices, 1.6 million hectares of restored land, a 50% increase in yields and \$126 million invested in land restoration. Currently, scaling efforts are focused on Lesotho, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Niger, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Honduras, with additional activities in Ghana, India, Timor Leste, Uganda, Zimbabwe and Haiti.



Disaster Risk Reduction

Since 1943, CRS has provided humanitarian assistance in the wake of disasters such as earthquakes, tsunamis and climate-related hazards. Our disaster risk reduction (DRR) approach begins before a disaster strikes, in the *preparedness phase*, and is employed throughout our *response* and *recovery*. It is also a component of our longer-term development programs.

CRS utilizes its expertise and innovation in digitally-enabled solutions to disburse cash and vouchers to project participants. With our *Cash and Asset Transfer* platform, field teams can directly make cash and voucher transfers to provide immediate



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[Photo by Nancy McNally /CRS]

and effective financial assistance. After the response phase, our Community Led Disaster Risk Management (CLDRM) approach helps communities identify risks, assess vulnerability, and create and monitor risk reduction measures. CLDRM, updated in 2017, incorporates climate considerations throughout and includes guidance on how to adapt each step to rural, urban and peri-urban settings. Through this process, CLDRM helps create community action plans that are integrated with government plans for disaster preparedness, response and recovery. CRS also works with all levels of government to build their capacity to effectively manage disasters and meet the needs of the most vulnerable communities.



Water Security and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)

Aquifer over-extraction and pollution of surface and groundwater, combined with climate change, threaten ecosystems and freshwater availability. Our *Water Security Strategy 2030* focuses on three areas critical for mitigating negative impacts on water supplies associated with climate change: water in sustainable landscapes, WASH, and governance and finance of water and sanitation. Water in sustainable landscapes is focused on watershed protection and supporting farmers in adopting climate-smart agronomic practices and proven water management techniques. CRS also implements equitable and inclusive market-based

WASH programs and offers innovative water finance and governance solutions to spur investments in the sector. Lastly, humanitarian WASH projects engage communities and create local governance structures to ensure access to quality water supplies and sanitation facilities, while promoting better hygiene practices.



Urban Resilience

By 2030, half of the world's population will live in cities, many located near coastal areas, which are especially vulnerable to climate change. Cities require different approaches for mitigating, managing and adapting to disaster impacts, due to higher population densities and more complex infrastructures. To build urban resilience to climate change, CRS supports local governments in using climate information for planning and decision-making, leveraging climate finance, and strengthening resilience through nature-based solutions. In 2021, CRS and partners began a five-year project in six Philippine cities to advance urban resilience. The *Climate Resilient Cities* project will strengthen the capacities of these cities to mitigate, manage and adapt to the impacts of climate change. Project activities are designed to enhance stakeholders' understanding of climate change for planning and decision-making purposes, improve their ability to access and manage climate finance,



[Photo by Sam Phelps for CRS]

and broaden adaptation and mitigation measures by implementing natural climate solutions.

Cross Sectoral Approaches

At CRS, we take a cross-sectoral approach for addressing climate change through private sector engagement, accessing private and public climate finance, justice and peacebuilding, as well as policy, advocacy and campaigning.



Private Sector Engagement

Engaging the private sector is central to CRS' ambition to catalyze transformational change at scale by improving program effectiveness and sustainability, while also incentivizing new participation and investment by private sector enterprises. Addressing climate change requires working with and through the private sector to create inclusive, green jobs and greening supply chains, while helping to ensure that the interests and safety of vulnerable communities are protected.

CRS seeks to co-create with enterprises projects that are both lucrative for business and promote greener, more circular economies. This includes working with companies that can process the waste generated by emergency distributions. We also provide business development services for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) to help them increase their resilience and help them establish climate change action plans to implement more environmentally-conscious business models. Finally, we work with large corporations that have significant

reach, influence, resources and expertise to support mitigation and adaptation priorities.



Accessing Private and Public Climate Finance

CRS works with local partners, including government and civil society organizations, to demystify the available opportunities for climate finance, including multilateral, bilateral and national climate funds. CRS facilitates relationships with or investments from financial institutions and impact investors. It also influences stakeholders across sectors and geographies to prioritize impact investment and innovative finance mechanisms that serve the poorest and most vulnerable. CRS co-designs practical financing strategies based on targeted outcomes, including climate change mitigation. Finally, CRS designs and manages blended financing vehicles tied to humanitarian and development objectives by developing and leading the structuring, management and expansion of investment vehicles in diverse sectors like water and agriculture.



Justice and Peacebuilding

Climate change has the potential to exacerbate underlying tensions and conflicts in fragile environments, generally defined as having a history of conflict, injustice, weak governance structures, corruption, structural violence and/or a lack of social cohesion. When these factors are present, it is difficult for societies to be resilient and adaptable in dealing with the impacts of climate change. Instead, climate change often aggravates existing inequalities and injustices, leaving the poor and marginalized most vulnerable. Our justice and peacebuilding programs engage civil society and the public and private sectors to foster inclusion, equity and accountability.¹³



Policy, Advocacy and Campaigns

Our climate change policy and advocacy work focuses on influencing the government of the United States and multilateral organizations to help ensure that people who are living in poverty, and are therefore most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation, can manage risks, recover and build their resilience. Our advocacy promotes policy reforms that improve United States' foreign assistance programs. Specific priorities include:

¹³ CRS and the HDP Nexus (2022).

- Encouraging Congress to allocate financial resources to the Green Climate Fund and other multilateral and bilateral development accounts that support adaptation, clean energy and sustainable landscapes, alongside climate-smart agriculture, water, sanitation and hygiene.
- Urging Congress to reauthorize the Global Food Security Act (GFSA) by 2023, to codify the multisector and localized approaches incorporated in the updated Global Food Security Strategy, so that forthcoming legislation would acknowledge and prioritize climate risks, mainstream climate-smart agriculture, integrate nature-based solutions, and include resilience building measures to improve the lives of smallholder farmers, by managing weather-related risks and tackling global hunger and malnutrition.
- Advancing policies that strengthen the ability of the poorest and most vulnerable to adapt to a changing climate.
- Promoting policies that enable people to survive the immediate impacts of climate change and build

resilience to withstand the next disaster-related shock or stress, and that address secondary impacts such as displacement, loss of livelihood and conflict.

- Advancing policies and approaches that ensure that WASH facilities are climate-resilient to disaster-related shocks and stresses.
- Making the case to donors for supporting holistic programs that work across the humanitarian-development continuum, effectively incorporating peacebuilding to transform crises and conflicts into sustainable peace.

Making a Difference

CRS and its partners are currently implementing 43 projects to strengthen climate resilience and reduce vulnerabilities in the following regions: Asia, South Africa, West Africa, East Africa, Central Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Europe and Middle-East. A detailed breakdown by region follows.

Now is the time for the global community to join forces and take bold action to address climate change.

CRS Active Climate Change Projects by Region

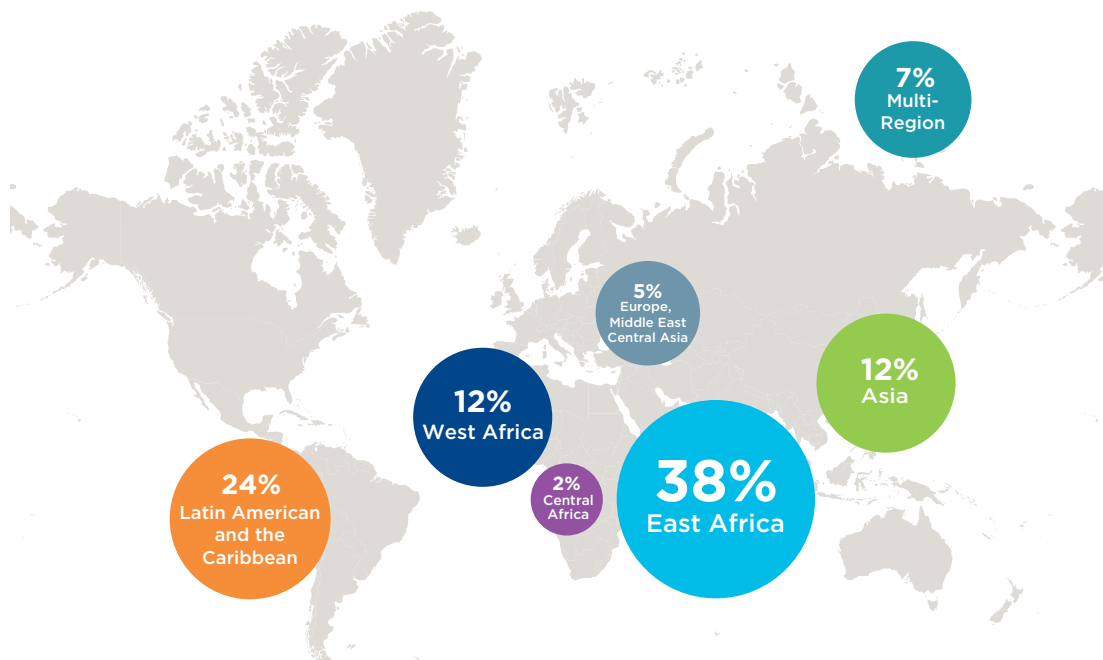


Figure 1. This chart shows the distribution of CRS active climate change projects by regional office. "Active" means currently underway, as of June 2022. These projects and programs cover various climate change aspects including, but not limited to, agriculture, environmental protection, emergency, capacity strengthening, food security and WASH.