TURNING UP THE HEAT

Activating NGO Climate Leadership at a Time of Crisis

Lindsey Doyle

InterAction

TURNING UP THE HEAT

Activating NGO Climate Leadership at a Time of Crisis

Lindsey Doyle

LETTER FROM THE CEO

Dear Members and Partners,

I remember the first time I realized how climate extremes affect human beings and what that meant for the future of development.

In 1995, during a program visit to Tarija, Bolivia, the region was experiencing a severe drought, resulting in large numbers of families experiencing protracted hunger. During that same trip, I flew into Guayaquil, Ecuador, peering over a landscape that was submerged from a massive flood, inundating the city and leaving communities with no way out.

Seeing extreme drought and extreme flooding a short flight apart quickly brought into focus precisely what climate change means for people around the world with the fewest resources, and with voices that are consistently silenced.

Decades later, we are experiencing both the subtle and stark effects of global climate change. A significant uptick in extreme weather events, disruptions in crop yields, new insidious diseases of epidemic proportions, and climate-induced displacement are all clear and devastating evidence of a rapidly changing climate.
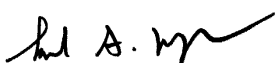
Climate change is eroding decades of development progress and is exacerbating existing humanitarian crises.

Today, standing in solidarity with the broad environmental movement, affected communities, scientists, and NGOs that have fought to draw attention to the biggest crisis of our time, InterAction and its membership are calling for urgent organizational and collective action.

We are working on expanding and accelerating our fight against climate change through Board and CEO commitments, the development of a community-wide compact, and reducing our own carbon footprint.

We invite you to collaborate with your peer organizations and InterAction to work faster and go farther than we ever have before.

Sincerely,

Sam Worthington, President, InterAction

Photo by Migue Roth

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABOUT THE WORKSHOP

As part of InterAction's expanding work on addressing climate change and improving environmental sustainability, in November 2019, InterAction convened a group of 26 member and partner NGOs for Part I of a workshop intended to galvanize our members' leadership in this area. This was followed by Part II in March 2020 with 19 NGOs.

The workshop series was designed for NGO policy advocacy and program managers and directors who are currently exploring how to better integrate an understanding of climate change and environmental sustainability into their operations, organizations, and advocacy.

What follows is a summary of the findings and five case studies related to change management in this topic area.

Make it personal.

Make a personal change in your life that demonstrates that you are committed.

Get angry.

Get angry at those who bear the responsibility for the mess we're in.

And finally, take action.

-Mary Robinson
Chair of The Elders &
Former President of Ireland

WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS

Part I + II

30 Member NGOs & Partners

Action Against Hunger

Oxfam America

Food for the Hungry

World Vision US

Lutheran World Relief

Global Health Council

ONE Campaign

Trickle Up

Bread for the World

Church World Service

Save the Children US & International

PATH

International Rescue Committee

Habitat for Humanity International

Solidarity Center

CARE USA

Global Communities

Center for American Progress

The Hunger Project

World Resources Institute

Mercy Corps

World Wildlife Fund US

Americares

The Nature Conservancy

Islamic Relief USA

The Chicago Council on Global Affairs

American Red Cross

Relief International

Photo by Kumar Judhajit Dey

CLIMATE CHANGE THREATENS DEVELOPMENT & HUMANITARIAN PROGRESS

Climate change is upon us. A significant uptick in extreme weather events, disruptions in crop yields, new insidious diseases of epidemic proportions, and climate-induced migration are all clear and devastating evidence of a rapidly changing climate. It is eroding decades of development progress and exacerbating humanitarian crisis from Brazil, to Vietnam, to the Lake Chad Basin, to our very own rural and urban areas in the U.S.

People around the world with the least amount of power and fewest resources are and will continue to bear the brunt of climate change—from small island nations that face submersion, to cities hit with debilitating heatwaves, farmers facing unpredictable rain patterns and flooding that repeatedly destroy crops and economic livelihoods, to the millions who are experiencing unbreathable air and the wider proliferation of disease and famine.

Not only is climate change presently affecting the communities that NGOs serve, but it also threatens previous gains. It is estimated that the past 50 years of progress made on global health will be reversed by climate change if left unaddressed. Alongside violent conflict, climate change-related weather extremes are driving global food insecurity, contributing to the chronic food deprivation currently experienced by 821 million people. In 2017 alone, climate change was the leading cause behind 124 million people experiencing acute food insecurity and hunger. In total, climate change is estimated to cost the world economy 20% of global GDP by the end of this century.

A POLITICAL EMERGENCY

Despite initial commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Paris Agreement, and other national and international policies on climate, global leadership is failing us at a time when we need it most.

Although the U.S. is the world's top carbon-emitting country after China, the Administration has not been participating in global efforts to mitigate climate impacts. In November 2019, the current U.S. Administration officially initiated the process to withdraw from the Paris Agreement. It has remained largely silent on how international development efforts will be affected by climate change.

These actions run contrary to the silent majority of Americans who believe the U.S. government should be taking action. In a national survey, the Yale Program on Climate Communication found in April 2019 that 69% of Americans believe that climate change is happening.

Moreover, the Pew Research Center found that 67% of Americans "believe the government is doing too little to reduce the effects of climate change." According to The Chicago Council on Global Affairs' September 2019 study, 54% of Americans regardless of their political party affiliation consider climate change to be a "critical threat." Forty-nine percent (49%) of Americans across all political parties believe that "we should begin taking steps now [to address climate change] even if it involves significant costs."

The U.S. government's own Fourth National Climate Assessment in 2018 found that "climate change is expected to cause growing losses to American infrastructure and property and impede the rate of economic growth over this century." The report estimated that climate change will cost the U.S. economy hundreds of billions of dollars as well as "exacerbate existing vulnerabilities in communities across the U.S., presenting growing challenges to human health and safety, and quality of life."

As the U.S. Federal government continues to pull back from climate action despite the evidence, traditional avenues for NGO engagement have narrowed, and parts of the sector are self-censoring as a result of this pressure.

Photo by Kelley Lynch

As a community, we are in an emergency situation that requires collective action to address the political dynamics inhibiting change; to prevent the known, human-made causes and impacts of climate change from escalating further; to support those with the fewest resources who are hardest hit by the changes; and to safeguard the very ecosystems and environment that we need for survival now and that can bring us back from the brink.

THE TIME TO LEAD

In the face of lackluster and even harmful action from the current U.S. Administration, the InterAction community has a moral, operational, and business imperative to lead. In a 2019 survey of InterAction's CEOs, 54 percent of the 72 responding CEOs said that climate change will have a significant impact on or fundamentally change their organization, and an additional 37 percent of CEOs said that it will have some impact on their organization going forward.

In the 2020 CEO survey, 71 percent of the 70 responding CEOs reported that climate change and environmental degradation were their top "organization priority actions" out of 14 possible choices. When given the same set of thematic choices and asked to prioritize seven, 80 percent of CEOs identified addressing climate change and environmental degradation as the top priority.

NGOs working on international development and humanitarian assistance risk irrelevance and loss of credibility if they are not working to mitigate and address the effects of climate change operationally, organizationally, and politically.

AREAS OF FOCUS

Operations

Operationally, existing in-country humanitarian response and development programs are already experiencing the effects of climate change, resulting in overwhelming case loads and program disruptions. Effectiveness will at best wane and at worst backslide if we are not responsive to these dynamics. Donors and corporate sponsors are beginning to see weaknesses in this area, resulting in new requirements and resource implications for our organizations, affecting our bottom line and ability to function.

Organizations

Organizationally, our reputation and level of credibility in the eyes of many different stakeholders will suffer if we are not taking responsibility for the carbon footprints generated by our work through environmental sustainability practices. Absent any change, organizations risk alienating the current and next generation of staff and leadership who will be dealing with climate change for years to come.

Politics

In 2021, whether the current Administration continues or a new administration begins to lead, we must find a bipartisan strategy for addressing climate change. Next generation leadership is critical to closing the political gap that currently exists on this issue.

Photo by Momo Mustafa

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite being aware that climate change is a global challenge, many InterAction member NGOs are grappling with how to make it a strategic priority across their policy advocacy, programs, and operations. As it stands, addressing climate change and reducing greenhouse gas emissions is not yet part of the overarching strategies of most development and humanitarian organizations.

InterAction identified a trend whereby directors and managers within NGOs often want to act, but face internal roadblocks to foster organizational buy-in and operationalize their intent to address climate change. They are seeking ideas about how to talk about climate, make it urgent for leadership and peers, and make the business case for it.

To begin to tackle these challenges, workshop participants were asked to articulate the internal roadblocks stopping them from accelerating their work to address climate change. They also identified their organizations' existing assets that could be utilized to meet the challenge and seize opportunities for progress. The following are the key findings and recommendations from this process.

RECOMMENDATION 1

Find a common message and return to our roots as poverty-focused organizations.

External Credibility, Communication, and Values

Many feel that the language being used to talk about climate change does not reflect a set of shared definitions and can, in fact, inadvertently contribute to political divisions. Some thought that NGOs' messaging becomes incoherent or inconsistent as climate change worsens, resulting in a loss of credibility.

While NGOs might seek to maintain their credibility in the eyes of some by omitting or talking around certain issues, these omissions allow harmful narratives to be normalized at scale, making the community's work in the long run much more difficult.

More specifically, U.S.-based offices of federated NGOs that are experiencing the politicization of climate can become part of the problem by not using more accurate and explicit language to talk about climate change and the need for conservation, biodiversity, and related work. NGOs with headquarters in places with local economies that depend in part on fossil fuels are understandably resistant to change.

These challenges highlight that the NGO community and other advocates do not yet have a unified message that appeals to constituencies across the aisle in the U.S. —the climate is a messaging problem worthy of more exploration.

To get us closer to a more effective message, discussants suggested returning to the core values of our community as one that is focused broadly on addressing poverty and supporting the people it affects.

Looking at poverty as the absence of money and power, it becomes easier to make the case that climate change is disproportionately affecting those who lack money and power.

> As organizations that care about sustainable development, we will become **irrelevant** if we are not working on climate.
>
> *-Fatema Sumar*
> *Vice President of Global Programs*
> *Oxfam America*

Many organizations cited their global reach as an asset in trying to tackle and talk about a truly global problem like climate change; they felt they were better equipped than other types of NGOs to communicate this message. Some organizations have the added credibility of being on-the-ground implementers of efforts to help communities mitigate and adapt to climate change, and should continue to channel stories from in-country teams to make the case.

As additional recommendations, the group emphasized the need to think about the messenger and message separately. While the message can be crafted by organizations of any ideological leaning, the perceived profile of the messenger by the audience is critical to ensuring that the message is heard, especially among skeptics. This involves partnering and building coalitions with organizations of different ideological backgrounds. Several cited that being or partnering with faith-based organizations and leaders was an important source of moral credibility underpinning their message.

Messages should frame the case in ways that allow the NGO community to remain true to their values and credible among a wide spectrum of stakeholders; terms such as "clean energy" were highlighted as useful examples. Speakers encouraged the group to collaborate with the parts of the current administration that are still working towards the environmental agenda, even if these offices are using different language.

In addition, different messages are needed depending on the goal. For example, the language of "crisis" and "emergency" as it relates to climate change is helpful for advocacy purposes but not for programs when working directly with people on their livelihoods.

Moreover, not every problem that NGOs are seeking to solve is the result of climate change. Messengers should seek to make those distinctions to maintain the credence of the message. NGOs must work to understand and adapt to these new ways of making the case and make it everyone's job to communicate them, regardless of the sector.

> The NGO community should stand strong in its long-held values to support and advocate for the world's poorest and most vulnerable citizens and should talk about climate as just another dynamic affecting **the people we have always cared the most about**.

Photo by Sudipto Das

RECOMMENDATION 2

When it comes to donors, we must move beyond fear.

Resource Mobilization, Donor Relations, Capacity, and Efforts to Prioritize the Environment

Many NGOs expressed a deep-seated fear that if they begin to use the language of climate change to describe their aspirational or current programs and more explicitly call out the problem set, this will have an adverse effect on their ability to get funding in other sector areas or, in some cases, other parts of their federation. Many NGOs feel that they would risk alienating large, multi-million-dollar, repeat donors if they shift their focus toward climate change.

Meanwhile, organizations report a lack of staff time and bandwidth to do this work as a significant challenge; this issue is directly tied to resourcing and prioritization. Many organizations do not have dedicated climate or environment-focused staff and expertise, and feel that this is necessary to ensure that change happens.

Many of the same organizations self-reported struggling to generate consistent funding levels that are needed to prioritize, start, and maintain full-time employee positions and programs related to environmental sustainability or mainstreaming, revealing a circular "chicken-and-egg" problem.

They emphasized that it is challenging to engage donors on this topic if the donors are not already involved in funding environmental work, or if the donor is not explicit about their views on climate change and whether they fund it at all, even if quietly. Some NGOs thought that donors also lacked knowledge and awareness about the problem set, and believe that a paradigmatic shift will not happen until donors explicitly ask implementers for these changes.

Organizations also have unique challenges to face that may pose larger questions of organizational identity. Some organizations are funded by the charitable foundations of fossil fuel companies and will need to consider how this might impact their ability to be credible when drawing attention to climate change. These organizations do not necessarily see another way of funding critical, life-saving work on a global scale. As such, some organizations may need to undergo more systematic changes than others, depending on their history and stakeholders.

In spite of these challenges, some NGOs already have dedicated funding to support work in this area and have at least one staff person whose full-time job is to focus on climate and environmental issues. They have an existing track record of work on the environment that is ongoing. Likewise, certain donors are insisting on "climate-smart" practices and internal sustainability procedures, which serve as a forcing function for implementers to develop them.

To begin to break the cycle of donor mistrust and lack of funding, speakers emphasized the need to overcome fear by making the case to leadership about how they risk losing relevance when the politics change, as well as by moving incrementally, being strategic in the pursuit of that funding, and capitalizing on changes in donor priorities that create openings for this kind of work. Part

Photo by Corinna Robbins/Mercy Corps

of the strategy of pursuing such funding is to ensure the climate is included, but not highlighted upfront, and to do research on which donors may be open to a focus on the environment, even if not publicly stated.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Knit together executive-level leadership and staff-level leadership.

Internal Leadership Across the Generations

Leadership qualities can be found among the newest, junior staff to the most seasoned members of Boards of Directors. Connecting leadership across all generations and positions within NGOs is needed to achieve measurable outcomes on environmental sustainability.

Beginning with Boards of Directors, participants generally felt that it is a challenge to get board members to agree to work related to addressing climate change. Mid-level leadership perceived that they would lose Board support if they raise the issue, yet this degree of fear is often unfounded, as multi-million dollar NGOs have made similar changes and lost only one board member in the process—a "price" that organizations may be willing to pay.

Connecting leadership across **all generations and positions** within NGOs is needed to achieve measurable outcomes on environmental sustainability.

One level below boards, executives within NGOs sometimes think that adding a focus on the environment would result in greater costs to the organization, without any cost-savings, and that they are faced with a zero-sum choice between financial sustainability and environmental sustainability. This sometimes results in a lack of progress on environmental work. Participants mentioned a disconnect between leadership seeking to "sell" the NGOs' work to donors in ways that shy away from the language of climate change, as alluded to previously, and otherwise positive efforts to improve internal sustainability practices. Amidst these change processes, staff sometimes perceive that leadership will favor saving money over investing in environmental sustainability, whether or not that perception is true to reality.

Even when executives do not help create the best conditions for change, staff at organizations are finding ways to work on climate and environmental issues. Certain offices within organizations may be supportive of addressing climate even if the executives are not initially; those particular offices play an important role in pushing other offices or locations to advance. Staff at U.S.-based offices of federated or decentralized organizations feel they are "playing catch up" with other country or regional offices that are already on board and trying to work on the issue.

Other organizations report having support and encouragement from their senior management and executives to consider how climate change will impact individual workstreams, such as in agriculture, livelihoods, and natural resource management. These executives have a critical role to play in influencing their peers at other, perhaps more resistant, organizations.

Structurally, participants cited siloed teams within organizations as a major barrier to integrating climate and environment into other sectors. Some felt that both staff and executives lack training and education in this area, making integration even more difficult. Nonetheless, some organizations self-report a high degree of interest in innovation and research that can be channeled toward this problem set.

Some directors and managers have led the establishment of "Green" Teams or staff groups dedicated to internal sustainability. These responsibilities are taken on in addition to the core functions of an individual's job and can signal to staff at multiple levels that climate and sustainability are areas of interest. Often, Green Teams are based exclusively in headquarters and do not necessarily impact what happens in the field, or there is no field equivalent. Nonetheless, these groups play a critical role in increasing the visibility of the issue set, even if executives are not yet resourcing that work.

Although not specific to climate, the level of exhaustion, apathy, lack of knowledge, and hopelessness around issues of global scale among staff inhibits further action and integration. Leadership at multiple levels is needed to encourage and inspire others to rise above these sentiments and challenges and make progress where they can.

Younger generations are eager to see a response in this arena; this will continue to be an important driver of change. Although junior and mid-level staff are very interested in addressing this issue within the NGOs where they work, workshop participants reported that they are not necessarily empowered or supported to help lead change. There is a major risk that executives in their 50s and above are not feeling the same level of urgency around this problem as mid-level leadership and staff in their 20s to 40s due to differences in life experience and the timeline on which climate change is progressing.

The fastest way to organizational change is having champions among executives who can cultivate leadership among mid- and junior-level staff to make it a communal issue. Absent this, organizations have to wait for executive roles to change hands and prioritize elevating individuals who are open to working on it.

Lastly, with the many levels of leadership needed, change agents should consider the internal vertical (board- and executive-facing) and horizontal (staff-facing) coalitions needed within organizations that will drive the agenda.

RECOMMENDATION 4

In a politically fraught environment, meet skeptics and silent majorities where they're at.

Creating Space for Bipartisan Advocacy

NGOs that are exclusively focused on U.S. Congress- and Administration-facing advocacy perceive that there are few other avenues to pursue until the political landscape changes. Within the NGO community, many believe that climate has become defined politically, and is not a topic that is collectively owned. Many report that there is little appetite for work on climate within the U.S. Congress; continued pressure from Republican offices to omit climate change language in legislation means that NGOs conducting advocacy have to choose between making

gains in the short-term by compromising their language or maintaining a focus on the pressing issue of calling climate change what it is.

However, external factors may play in advocates' favor over time, even if those factors are not yet manifesting among the stated positions of legislative offices. U.S. citizens are increasingly attentive to this issue, as certain media outlets increase their coverage of how climate change is affecting constituencies in the U.S. Extreme weather events are affecting a range of communities, creating a window of opportunity for advocates to draw attention to the changes in a bipartisan way and to link a domestic agenda to an international one.

> Environmental, development, and humanitarian organizations **can no longer work separately** from one another.
>
> *-Anita Van Breda*
> *Senior Director*
> *Environment & Disaster Management*
> *World Wildlife Fund*

Many NGOs in InterAction's membership have robust relationships with Members of Congress and their staffers on related issues such as food security and agriculture; water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH); migration; conflict and fragility; and global health that can serve as starting points for conversations about the evident consequences of climate change. Many organizations also make these connections through their faith-based mission.

NGOs are exploring how to normalize advocacy on climate, with a concerted focus on framing and champion-building. Solution sets can often be agreed on across the aisle without the problem being stated in terms of climate, such as was the case with solar and wind power solutions implemented through Power Africa.

Another source of power to help shift the U.S. political landscape on this issue is among corporations. NGOs engaging with private actors reported that companies know that they are failing to operate in environmentally sustainable ways, yet that they are also at a loss for solutions. This creates an opening for NGOs to advise on issues such as fixing supply chains, procurement, oversight, and more.

Consumers are also voters. Purchasing power was identified as a key lever of change, with the suggestion that NGOs should be working to influence consumers to put pressure on corporations around environmental and labor issues that they care about. This can have the added benefit of shifting broad political perspectives on this issue, particularly among younger generations, that can affect who is voted into office.

RECOMMENDATION 5

For programs, start small, iterate, and get help.

Integrating the Environment Into Current and Future Development and Humanitarian Programs

Programmatically, there is an urgent need for NGOs to adapt to the changes that global warming is generating. Speakers encouraged the group to consider whether their organization was relevant to the conversation happening today around climate and how programs are already being affected.

In some cases, organizations are already doing some environment-related work, but they are not classifying it as such or thinking about it during the program life cycle. Even posing the simple question of how the environment or nearby ecosystems may be impacted positively or negatively as a result of a proposed project can help design teams begin to integrate it early on with little effort. As environmental considerations get added, program teams should work to understand and address unequal power dynamics at play to ensure that changes are sustained. This effort may require partnerships with sectors that are more accustomed to this, such as conflict management or democracy, rights, and governance fields.

Some organizations are apprehensive that they will not implement environmental programming correctly. The guidance in response to this was to just start, iterate, and

learn as you go, integrating standards and due diligence along the way and drawing on the knowledge and skillsets of outside environmental experts.

To break down silos, organizations were advised to begin including climate as part of job descriptions for staff working on programs in food security, disaster risk reduction, WASH, global health, peacebuilding, and more. Tying the topic to job descriptions and performance review cycles will create an incentive to focus on it. Multi-mandate organizations discussed how having many sectors under one roof provides the opportunity for addressing the climate to be fully integrated.

Photo by Mithail Afrige Chowdhury

CASE STUDY 1

The Nature Conservancy

NGO with Global and U.S. Grassroots Reach Shifts From Environmental Conservation to the People-Planet Connection

Historically, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) had focused on conservation to protect habitats and cultivate biodiversity through programs ranging from $45-500 million in places such as the Great Humbug Swamp and the Adirondacks. Over time, motivated by the SDGs, TNC has complemented this work by also examining the intersections between environmental needs and human needs through a shared conservation agenda of protection, addressing climate change, food and water, and cities.

Lessons Learned

- What is challenging to the environment—climate change, land transformation, and pollution—also generates challenges for humans—accessing water, food, energy, and reducing personal risk. As a result, nature is an essential part of the solution to climate change.

- Advancing health, development, climate, and environment outcomes all at once requires accelerating a low-carbon, clean air, environmentally low-impact energy future for all, and transforming the global food system for climate, health, and sustainability.

- This will allow for economic, social, and environmental win-win benefits for people and nature. Examples include the creation of zero-deforestation supply chains in agriculture while improving soil health and reducing food waste.

Energy Challenges

Diagram 1 indicates that changes in the system of energy generation, distribution, and access, that are linked—either positively or negatively—to other aspects of human development, exemplified by the SDGs.

Food Challenges

Likewise, Diagram 2 indicates how transforming the global food system is linked to many other development areas.

1 NO POVERTY

15 LIFE ON LAND

14 LIFE BELOW WATER

13 CLIMATE ACTION

11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES & COMMUNITIES

10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES

ENERGY CHALLENGES

Air pollution is linked to ~5-7 **million deaths** globally, with pollution from energy being the largest anthropogenic source.

100 million more people projected to experience **extreme poverty** by 2030 due to climate impacts.

2.7 billion primarily Africa, **lac** to clean, energy se

32% of freshwat species are alrea **at risk** from dam tied to hydropow and other uses.

Expansion of **renewables** is projected to become a **top risk for terrestrial species**, with expected growing impacts for marine species.

Energy sources, dominated by **fossil fuels**, produce **73% of global greenhouse gas emissions** causing anthropogenic climate change.

Diagram 1

Photo by Taylor Jashinsky

Photo by Jake Lyell

Diagram 2 (Food Challenges)

1 NO POVERTY

2 ZERO HUNGER

3 GOOD HEALTH & WELL-BEING

5 GENDER EQUALITY

6 CLEAN WATER & SANITATION

10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES

12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION & PRODUCTION

13 CLIMATE ACTION

14 LIFE BELOW WATER

15 LIFE ON LAND

FOOD CHALLENGES

Approximately **1/3 of all food** produced is lost or wasted.

59% of terrestrial species are at risk from habitat loss for cropland, and **29%** from conversion and management for livestock.

78% of marine species are at risk from **unsustainable** fishing practices.

40% of freshwater species and **38% of marine species** are at risk from agricultural pollution.

Agriculture and connected land use change are the second leading sources of **greenhouse gas emissions**.

Women account for an average of **43% of agricultural workers** in developing countries, yet gender inequality constrains their full opportunities and contributions.

69% of global water withdrawals are for agriculture.

Micronutrient deficiencies and obesity affect billions of people globally.

Unhealthy diets are a leading risk factor, causing **11 million deaths** each year.

Diagram 1 (partial, left side)

3 GOOD HEALTH & WELL-BEING

5 GENDER EQUALITY

6 CLEAN WATER & SANITATION

7 AFFORDABLE & CLEAN ENERGY

...n people, ...in Asia and ...k access ...modern ...rvices.

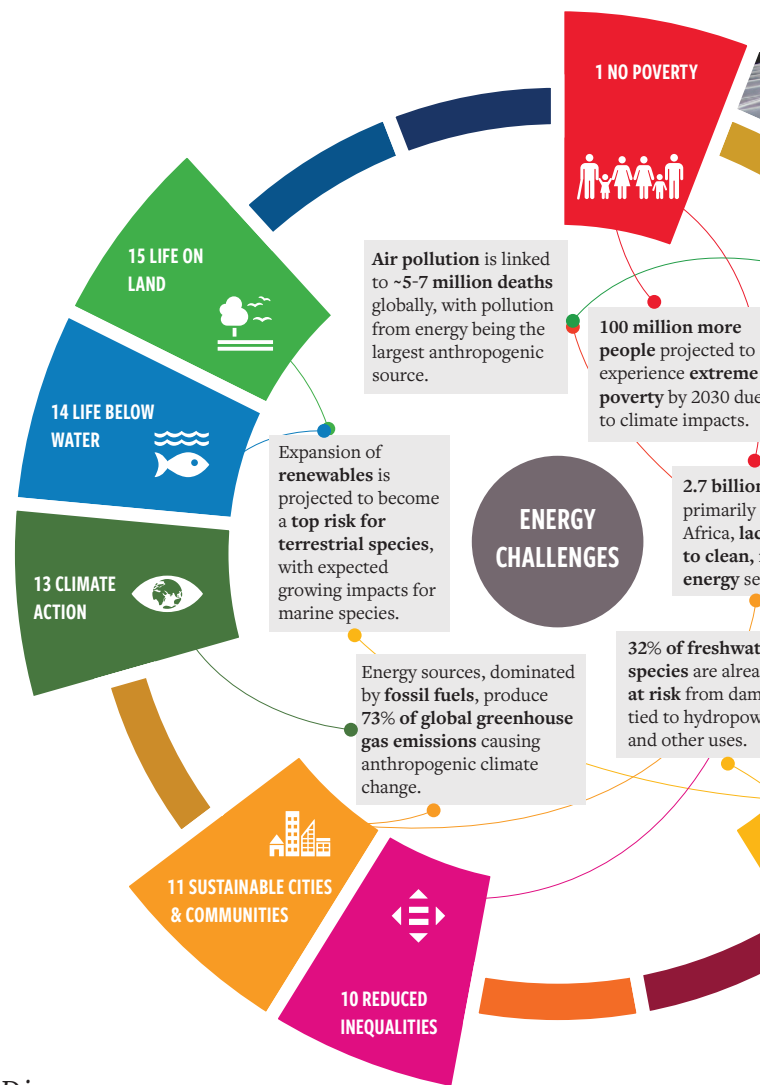*Diagram 2*

Diagrams adapted from Goldstein, et al., Bigger Change Faster, The Bridge Collaborative & UNDP

CASE STUDY 2

Save the Children International
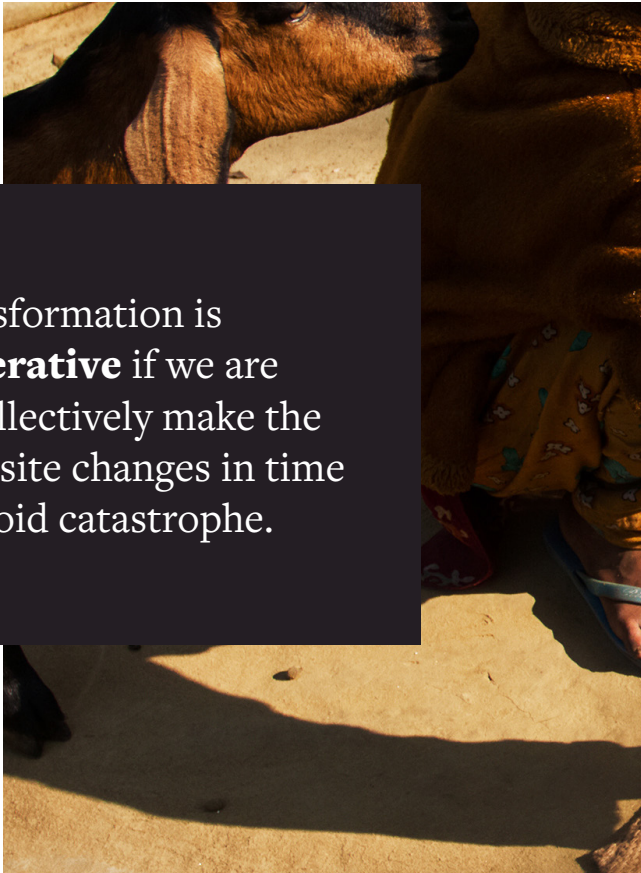
Children's Rights Federated NGO Introduces an Environmental Sustainability and Climate Change Policy

Save the Children International (SCI), and its country headquarters, at one point did not have an environmental and climate change policy. Efforts to raise the issue of climate change and environmental protection internally were initially unsuccessful until the organization was audited externally by the Core Humanitarian Standard, which pointed out a lack of environmental safeguards. Staff who had already been working on it were then prepared to respond when leadership sought ways to improve their score.

Rather than making marginal changes through one particular tool, the organization developed and adopted a new organization-wide policy in May 2019 to improve their environmental performance by reducing the harm they cause and by contributing positively to environmental sustainability and climate action. The policy commits SCI and its country offices to understand their footprint on the environment, reduce it, and report transparently and publicly on their progress. Key themes of the policy are environmental and intergenerational justice, climate action, and biodiversity.

> Transformation is **imperative** if we are to collectively make the requisite changes in time to avoid catastrophe.

Lessons Learned

■ Planning, or over-planning, can turn into a delay tactic. Organizations should just get started, learn, and iterate as they go.

■ The strategy and framework are owned by the CEO, which is critical to demonstrate senior leader buy-in.

■ The policy applies to all staff and all functions, including operations, programs, advocacy, and partnerships. It is broad and comprehensive enough to serve as a response to the ever-changing external environment.

■ There are benefits of staff finding ways to learn about climate change and organizing from the bottom-up before senior-level executives adopt a new approach. The approach worked because there was a small team of dedicated staff with the right expertise in change

management, knowledge of the subject matter, access to leadership to secure support, and time to execute.

■ The change happened at the "right time," although they were not aware of this at the moment. The team was working on the new policy framework from the second half of 2018 onwards, and this period coincided with rapidly escalating public attention on the political crisis facing the environment.

■ It does not stop with policy creation. Since the policy was adopted, many staff have come forward with a personal interest or professional background in environmental protection who are volunteering time and ideas to implement the policy.

■ Policies and high-level frameworks provide space for oftentimes messy, yet productive conversations about the way forward on an issue. They situate these issues squarely within the formal remit of the organization's mission and mandate, thereby ensuring that, when facing internal opposition, interested staff can make the case to their managers that the issues directly relate to their job in the organization.

■ Creating an overarching policy is one way to start, but it may not be an approach that fits the culture of other organizations. The key is to create space in which

Photo by Mohammad Saiful Islam

all parts of an organization at all levels can begin to engage.

- If your organization is not considered an expert in environmental and biodiversity issues, then partner with others who can help guide.

- In the beginning, it seemed wildly audacious to aim for a policy, and one year later, staff working on the issue feel that it is not enough. Transformation is imperative if we are to collectively make the requisite changes in time to avoid catastrophe.

CASE STUDY 3

CARE USA

Gender Mainstreaming Over the Century and What It Can Teach Us About Climate Mainstreaming

CARE began focusing on women's empowerment in the 1970s in response to the women's right's movement, which was advancing faster than NGOs own policies and procedures were. In the mid-1970s, CARE began to expand its international presence amidst skepticism about women in development. In the 1980s, affected communities and their advocates began highlighting that women and girls should not be responsible for ending poverty and injustices that they themselves did not create. This period of time was characterized by a heightened awareness and professionalization of the international development field and the study of the role of gender as part of the sector's work.

In the 1990s, CARE began purposefully focusing on women and girls using a rights-based approach. In the 2000s, CARE started emphasizing women and girls in public campaigns with messages such as, "I am powerful. She has the power to change her world. You have the power to help her do it." In the 2000s-2010s, CARE developed its Gender Equality Framework, and continues its work today.

Through the process of elevating gender as a critical area of importance to achieve development goals, CARE faced challenges related to getting donors to care about women and girls rather than "poor people" as a group. They ran up against private individuals using a deficit or the "charity" model of thinking toward women and girls' in the global south as wives, mothers, victims, and not

as empowered individuals. Stakeholders worried that "women's empowerment" was seen as a partisan issue that would alienate donors and supporters from across the political spectrum.

Today, challenges persist around framing the issue as "gender in development" yet keeping women at the center of those discussions.

Lessons Learned

- In the case of gender mainstreaming, the key ingredients of change were 1) strong leadership, 2) internal and external political will, 3) funding, and 4) the pressure and interest from the external political environment to see a change happen.

- Making progress on paradigmatic issues requires that executive leadership fully understands and believes in the issue.

- Appealing to different audiences is important, though ultimately, values should not be compromised and not all stakeholders will be happy with change.

- Creation of an advocacy team and donor relations teams can help donors and policy makers understand the importance of the issue at hand.

- External factors, such as the degree to which an issue is receiving broad public attention, will play a role in whether an issue is taken up—as seen in gender equality and climate. NGOs do not have control over what is trending, though they can be important voices as a ground-swell occurs. These trends are cyclical.

- There is more work to be done to explore how addressing climate will also advance gender equality.

CASE STUDY 4

Americares

Disaster Response and Global Health NGO Starts a Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability Workstream

For over 40 years, the health-focused relief and development organization Americares has saved lives and improved health for people affected by poverty or disaster. Recently, Americares has begun considering how climate change will impact its work. From increased incidence

and severity of extreme weather events to wildfires, heatwaves, and drought, the climate crisis is threatening human health and well-being, especially for the most vulnerable populations at the center of Americares mission. Staff began asking whether, as an organization, Americares might respond to the climate crisis with the same urgency that it responds to other emergencies.

In addition to aligning with Americares mission, responding to the climate crisis would also have a business case, some argued. As with sustainability initiatives in the corporate sector, being more climate-conscious as an organization could potentially have added benefits, such as lowering costs through more efficient energy usage, or motivating and attracting staff who share concerns about the environment and a warming planet.

Initial conversations about how Americares might take action on the climate crisis led to the creation of a sustainability working group. This internal group focuses on four key issues: 1) incorporating climate change adaptation, resilience, and mitigation into Americares emergency preparedness and global health work, 2) identifying efficiencies to reduce emissions across the organization's supply chain, facilities, and other operations, 3) shifting investments to environmentally and socially responsible investment portfolios, and 4) building partnerships in the local community and among local-global NGO peers to align our voices and share technical resources and best practices.

Lessons Learned

- Their approach was to start small and get early, quick wins toward their goals. With time and experience, move on to bigger and more impactful projects.

- One of the sustainability working group's first actions was to measure the carbon footprint of the organization's supply chain, which delivers shipments of medical aid by air, land, and sea to countries around the world. This provided a useful starting point and baseline against which to measure progress.

- The group assessed how Americares programs are already linked to climate change impacts, and how strategically addressing those impacts can be incorporated into their disaster relief and ongoing community health work globally.

- A key challenge is how to "sustain sustainability." What incentive systems should be established to keep the attention high and focused on the issue at

multiple levels of an organization? What are the costs associated with becoming a more environmentally responsible organization, and as a nonprofit, how should those costs be borne by the organization and reported to donors?

■ This case study reiterated that having engaged staff is critical and that the climate crisis is so significant and all-encompassing that any organization in the health, humanitarian, and sustainable development sectors should make addressing climate change part of their mission.

> The climate crisis is so significant and **all-encompassing** that any organization in the health, humanitarian, and sustainable development sectors should make addressing climate change part of their mission.

Photo by Abu Wahed Nurul Momen Talukdar

CASE STUDY 5

InterAction

Multi-sectoral NGO Coalition Integrates Climate and Environmental Considerations Into Its Approaches and Internal Operations

In January 2019, InterAction developed an overarching donor-facing strategy to accelerate its efforts to address climate change. This strategy was focused on member engagement and advocacy toward the U.S. government and U.S. Congress. The strategy soon evolved to include the idea that "walking the walk" and operating according to the same standards to which members would be held would be critical for overall success.

Although initially written for a donor audience, an internal decision was made to advance aspects of the strategy using unrestricted funds before pursuing external funding to urgently explore what InterAction's value-add could be on the issue. InterAction built upon its existing Climate Working Group that grew out of previous work on the SDGs, began engaging its Board of Directors and CEOs at regular meetings, working with staff through the workshop described in this report, engaging bilaterally with members, and collating and sharing learning resources. This began building momentum and appetite for change at multiple levels within InterAction and among stakeholders.

In parallel to this process, InterAction staff at multiple levels began voicing interest in improving InterAction's environmental sustainability practices, at first with a focus on waste management. This effort, coupled with increasing interest and attention among leadership, resulted in the creation of a Green Team in which nearly half of InterAction's staff participate. In discussion with mid-level management, leadership decided to provide the Green Team with an annual budget to advance many areas of sustainability, starting with an environmental audit to measure and monitor InterAction's greenhouse gas emissions, followed by changes to procurement, energy sources and usage, transportation, divestment, sustainable events practices, and more.

Lessons Learned

- It took multiple attempts over a decade (2010-2020) to get climate change and the environment to rise to the top of the NGO sector's agenda, particularly for organizations that were not already focused on it. This groundwork, including regularly convening a Climate Working Group since 2015, was critical to accessing experts within member and partner NGOs to advise InterAction's and the coalition's efforts.

- The pressure generated from the media, social movements, researchers, scientists, and other exogenous players and factors served an important function by motivating staff and leadership to explore what was a relatively new arena.

- Although not necessarily the experts on the issue, coalitions that bring peer organizations together provide platforms for discussion, a low-pressure learning environment, and access to experts, moral authority figures, like-minded businesses, and key government officials that can be useful when seeking to mainstream a topic.

- Leadership should seek to build upon staff-led efforts, particularly on climate and the environment, because it allows for staff of all levels, age groups, and backgrounds to participate and take ownership, which ultimately makes the effort more successful.

- Continued networked learning and exhancing of resources will be needed to advance this topic among non-envrionment-focused NGOs.

> Leadership should seek to build upon **staff-led efforts** because it allows staff of all levels, age groups, and backgrounds to participate and take ownership.

Photo by Brad Zerivitz

CASE STUDY 6

Relief International

Humanitarian and Development NGO Integrates Environment and Climate Change Actions Across Its Health-Nutrition, Economic Opportunity, Education, and WASH Programs

Relief International in 2018 developed its Policy Approach to Environment, Social Impact, and Sustainability which was approved by its CEO and Senior Management Team (SMT). Many of the items in the policy approach were not new, but consolidating them into one document and referencing global standards and best practices in a holistic manner had not been done previously. Yet, environmental issues, and specifically climate change, were still overwhelming for our country teams operating in fragile settings and dealing with pressing humanitarian needs. The environment and climate change policy felt like another specialized demand on teams. A different approach was needed.

In 2019, the Policy Approach document was updated to provide sector-specific guidance with an emphasis placed on mainstreaming and integrating the environment and climate change across RI's main sectors (economic opportunity, education, health/nutrition, and WASH). Integration across sectors was already done in the majority of Relief International's programs, so integrating the environment rather than treating it as a specialization became the emphasis. What we found was that field teams were already taking environmental and climate change actions, yet too often did not label the actions under an environmental or climate change heading. We had more to build upon than first thought.

Lessons Learned

- Helping staff and project participants recognize activities they are already doing under health, livelihoods, education and WASH banners that protect the environment and address climate change can generate enthusiam to learn more and take additional actions.

- Make climate change and environmental issues relevant. Remember to ask, what's in it for me, my family, and my community. Protecting the

environment and taking climate change actions can seem abstract if not presented on a personal basis for specific community contexts and pressing problems.

- Promote effective environmental and climate change actions, but use multiple "selling points" for the action to get needed buy-in from different actors. A highly effective climate change program which reduced greenhouse gases from dairy cows and increased milk production did not emphasize climate change with the farmers. Instead the project's "selling point" with the farmers was increased milk production and animal health gains which increased poor farmers' incomes by over 45%.

- Start with approaches and tools your teams already uses and add environment and climate change issues and questions to those tools. For example, Relief International integrated environmental and climate change issues into its Systems Approach in Fragile Settings Tool and Training Module.

- Don't reinvent the environment and climate change wheels. There are excellent resources, tools, and training materials already developed for community, field workers, and headquarter levels. Invest in a good secondary review first.

Protecting the environment and taking climate change actions can seem abstract if not presented on a **personal basis** for specific community contexts and pressing problems.

Photo by Elie Gardner/Relief International

OUTSTANDING QUESTIONS

The following are the outstanding questions that workshop participants identified at the end of the day. These questions will continue to drive InterAction's efforts to serve member interests.

Internal Change Management

- What incentives or standards should we utilize to create pressure for internal change (i.e. green business certifications, pass/fail of Core Humanitarian Standards)?

- If an organization's mandate is focused on people, how do we take a "long view" to also focus on nature and biodiversity?

Advocacy

- What are the trends in U.S. government funding for climate-related activities over the years?

- How can we fund climate and sustainability advocacy globally, change management, and implementation?

- Are there a few things we can advocate for within the NGO community and separately toward the government to create change to have unity of purpose across organizations?

- How do we advocate from a bipartisan framework?

- How can we talk about climate change with both political actors and donors who self identify as Republican or conservative?

- What can membership-based organizations do to get buy-in from members and their grassroots?

NGO Coordination & Coalition-Building

- How can diverse NGOs better collaborate on climate-related work?

- How can we jointly push funders to take on climate change as a component of their approach?

- How should we differentiate the roles and responsibilities of addressing climate change, such as what is considered a humanitarian versus development role, or operations versus program roles?

- How can we better link to social movement on climate in the U.S. and abroad?

- How can we better engage faith-based organizations and actors to make the case to address climate change?

- Can we get access to a set of shared resources to help us make change internally, such as other NGOs' existing internal climate policies or climate scorecards?

Program Design & Implementation

- What tools are available or need to be created to improve gender equality and address climate change in programs simultaneously?

- How will localization affect INGOs' ability to have a say in how climate change is addressed?

- Are carbon offsets an allowable cost on federal programs?

COMMITMENTS

At the end of the workshop, individual members committed to:

- Accelerate internal environmental sustainability in our office.

- Work to understand my organization's policies and approaches on sustainability and to learn climate-related terminology and definitions.

- Brief our COO and senior management about internal sustainability systems and attempts to have our office be zero waste.

- Work on better messaging to motivate staff to be "green" internally.

- Work on reducing the carbon footprint of my organization.

- Finish measuring our organization's carbon footprint and create resources on metrics to reduce that footprint.

- Draft an environmental sustainability and climate change policy, and push my organization to adopt and implement it.

- Better understand internal opportunities and barriers.

- Learn about other organizations' existing internal policies and identify steps to improve my own organization's policy.

- Establish a working group to examine integrating climate into the program lifecycle.

- Change my personal diet to eat less meat.

- Learn more about how to integrate an understanding of climate change into other core issues that my organization works on.

- Work with our CEO to better establish our climate change working group.

- Learn more about the existing climate change working group at my organization and identify the role I can play in policy.

- Work with each other via InterAction to make improvements to the environmental sustainability of our programs, operations, and finances.

Photo by Khant Zaw

"