

Recommendations on Addressing the Global Climate Crisis for the Biden-Harris Administration

Save lives, protect human rights, and bolster U.S. credibility by responding to development and humanitarian implications of climate change

Climate change is **exacerbating inequality and poverty** and keeping human rights and development out of reach for many. An estimated **120 million people** will slip back into extreme poverty by 2030 if we fail to tackle climate change. Left unaddressed, **nearly 200 million people** could require international humanitarian assistance for climate-related disasters by 2050, roughly double those in need today. Meanwhile, developing countries will bear an estimated **75–80%** of the cost of climate change. The world's most vulnerable people have been the first and hardest hit by climate change, are least responsible for the crisis, yet bear an enormous cost to address it. COVID-19 has both compounded these challenges in addition to revealing opportunities for progress.

In this context and after years of absence, credibility lost, and just 10 years to dramatically reduce global greenhouse gas emissions, the U.S. Government must determine how to lead. This means acknowledging how climate change worsens global inequality, exacerbates humanitarian crises, and erodes decades of development progress. It requires prioritizing climate action throughout U.S. development and foreign policy to preserve long-standing U.S. investments in foreign assistance, critical partnerships, goals, and values. It also means centering the voices, perspectives, and human rights of frontline communities while holding multilateral institutions and partner governments to account.

There are serious generational, racial, and socioeconomic implications for anything short of transformative change and full resourcing. **Nearly 90%** of those who fall ill due to climate change are children under five, and by 2040, almost **600 million children** will live in areas with extremely limited water resources. At current greenhouse emission rates, for example, in just 30 years, **1.2 billion people** will live in intolerable heat, with developing countries experiencing the worst of it. Climate change is also complicating already-challenging disaster recovery. Fragile countries are being hit with extreme climate-induced events in rapid succession. As examples, two of the largest cyclones to ever touch ground in sub-Saharan Africa hit Mozambique just **six weeks apart** in 2019, and multiple locust swarms invaded East Africa and Southeast Asia in 2020 and despoiling food systems. Complex crises exacerbated by climate change are the new normal.

Families affected by these changes will either have to adapt or be forced to move. From Central America and Mexico alone, by 2025, 700,000 climate-induced migrants are expected to arrive at the U.S. border every year due to environmental pressures. That number rises to **1.5 million annually** by 2050. **Left unchecked, the effects of climate change will continue to play out according to these existing, unequal distributions of power and resources that directly impact the United States. With concerted, collective action, climate mitigation and adaptation have the potential to vastly reduce climate risk for hundreds of millions of people, enabling them to thrive.**

The Biden-Harris campaign aptly made numerous international climate commitments, including to help developing countries better manage the adverse effects of climate change. InterAction's Climate Advocacy Working Group proposes the following recommendations to support follow-through on those commitments.

- Take immediate, path-clearing actions to provide hamstrung agencies with initial room to maneuver.
- Hit the ground running on multilateral climate engagement, prioritizing key, credibility-enhancing financial contributions, elevating adaptation, and amplifying vulnerable voices.



- Expand, accelerate, and improve the application of The U.S. Agency for International Development’s (USAID’s) international climate mitigation and adaptation policies, programs, and practices.
- Use the U.S. Treasury’s full leverage to improve international climate mitigation and adaptation efforts among multilateral development banks (MDBs) and multilateral climate funds.
- Champion nature as a key part of addressing the climate crisis.

Recommendations

Take immediate, path-clearing actions to provide hamstrung agencies with initial room to maneuver.

- **Lift Executive Order 13783 that supplanted the 2013 U.S. Climate Action Plan.**
- **Reinstate a series of Executive Orders on preparedness and climate in U.S. international development.** These include Executive Orders 13653 on Preparing the United States for the Impacts of Climate Change, 13677 on Climate-Resilient International Development, and 13693 on Planning for Federal Sustainability in the Next Decade. These do not require legislative or judicial action and can be updated later.
- **Begin developing an interagency strategy to address climate change internationally—led by the Special Envoy on Climate (czar) via the National Security Council—that focuses on at-risk communities.** This process can explore climate security issues, such as the relationship between climate change and armed conflict, and devise plans to address protection of civilians, migration issues, and more. It can include a plan to address and support the predicted influx of climate-induced migrants into the U.S. and climate-induced migration anticipated globally. The January 2019 GAO report, “[Climate Change: Activities of Selected Agencies to Address Potential Impact on Global Migration](#),” provides a starting point. Utilize existing agency processes, such as the Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (QDDR) at the State Department, to advance climate integration. Apply the Biden-Harris campaign commitment of a Western Hemisphere climate approach to other high-risk regions of the world. Establish a strong consultative mechanism with civil society to ensure broad input and buy-in to a strategy.
- **Apply climate considerations to any future COVID-19 stimulus packages in the U.S. and encourage other countries to do the same.** There was more than \$10 trillion spent in 2020 on COVID-19 recovery packages worldwide. Very few used these enormous investments to advance climate mitigation and adaptation goals. With less than 10 years to cut global emissions by 45% compared to 2010 levels, these packages can do so much more than support economic recovery for the next 18 months. They hold the potential to bend the emissions curve for the next 10 years, all while supporting economic recovery from COVID-19.
- **Request that the U.S. Senate ratify the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol.** The F.Y. 2021 Appropriations Act secured a domestic phase-down of hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs)—a type of greenhouse gas that is 140 to 11,700 times more potent than carbon dioxide and can remain in the atmosphere for more than 100 years. Having done the hard work of ushering this change through the U.S. Congress, the Administration is well-placed to secure a quick win by ratifying the Kigali Amendment that requires such a commitment. This amendment is predicted to reduce global HFC consumption by 80% by 2047, thereby avoiding up to a 0.5 degree Celsius increase in global temperature by 2100.

Hit the ground running on multilateral climate engagement, prioritizing key credibility-enhancing financial contributions, elevating adaptation, and amplifying vulnerable voices.

- **Establish and submit a 2030 U.S. Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) through the United Nations (U.N.) Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) that includes international efforts, consults with directly-affected communities during the process, and is released well ahead of the November 2021 U.N. Climate Change Conference (COP26).** U.S. leadership was essential to achieving the 2015 Paris Agreement and remains paramount to motivating the largest and most recalcitrant emitters to release new NDCs consistent with the Paris Agreement’s goals. The U.S. NDC can include international support for climate mitigation and adaptation in addition to critical domestic efforts.
- **Dramatically increase overall U.S. international climate finance through contributions to the Green Climate Fund (GCF) and other multilateral climate mechanisms, and use full U.S. leverage to maximize their impact via the U.S. Treasury.** The international community has fallen short of its \$100 billion annual climate finance goal under the Paris Agreement. Part of renewing U.S. leadership in Paris is honoring past commitments the previous Administration shirked and establishing a higher trajectory for global climate finance. Significant U.S. contributions will enable the U.S. to lead on how resources are allocated, shape implementation, and broaden U.S. impact. In addition, the NGO community has recommended doubling annual bilateral and multilateral foreign economic, health, and humanitarian assistance by 2025. As part of this effort, fulfill the U.S. government’s outstanding pledge of \$2 billion for the GCF and contribute to future replenishments. Pledge annually to the Least Developed Countries Fund (LDCF) administered by the Global Environment Facility (GEF). The LDCF is dedicated to assisting low-income, high-risk countries— especially Small Island Developing States and Least Developed Countries— to develop and implement national adaptation plans to reduce the risks of climate change and build resilience. Use the U.S. voice and vote at each of these institutions to ensure a more efficient and streamlined process to expedite and improve project or program delivery.
- **Utilize the March 2021 Biden-Harris Global Climate Summit to highlight impacts on vulnerable people and generate additional adaptation financing.** Currently, global financing for climate adaptation lags behind that of climate mitigation. Announce at the Summit a dramatic increase in **bilateral adaptation assistance** in the F.Y. 2022 budget that currently supports USAID programming. Explore making an initial \$100 million contribution to the multilateral Adaptation Fund, which would constitute the largest single contribution to date and propel the U.S. into fund leadership. In subsequent years, annual contributions to the multilateral Adaptation Fund should be requested in the President’s Budget to crowd in additional partner resources and improve their consistency. Given the requests from Least Developed Countries for additional financing for loss and damage, the credibility of this Summit and the U.S. opening salvo after seeking to rejoin The Paris Agreement hinges on the level of the U.S. financial commitment to international climate adaptation efforts and that of other high-income, large emitters. Robust U.S. investments would motivate other countries to follow suit.
- **Utilize the U.S. seat at COP26 and the UNFCCC to support the human rights of women, children, youth, and Indigenous Peoples as agents of change, especially through other countries’ NDCs.** As one indication of gender inequality in global climate policy, less than 10% of most G7 countries’ adaptation finance considers gender equality as a key objective. As a start, the U.S. can support all five priority areas of the **UNFCCC Gender Action Plan** adopted at COP25. When working with counterparts, emphasize the need for them to engage women in developing and executing national plans for climate mitigation, adaptation, resilience, disaster risk management, and preparedness planning. Likewise, less than 50% of NDCs reference children or youth. Children should be put at the center of global climate change strategies and disaster response plans by explicitly addressing children’s needs and incorporating their input. **Child-sensitive climate policies** should be ambitious and urgent, rooted in children’s rights, multi-sectoral in approach, and informed by consultation with a diverse group of children and youth. Get involved in the UNFCCC Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples’ Platform (LCIPP) and draw attention to these efforts.



- **Expand and fund climate-focused multilateral entities that the U.S. helped create.** Key institutions that the U.S. co-founded include the UNFCCC, IPCC, U.N. Environment Program (UNEP), and the Climate and Clean Air Coalition (CCAC) on Short-Lived Climate Pollutants. These entities facilitate multilateral climate negotiations and research, channel multilateral funding to fragile and high climate risk countries, and reduce methane and other potent pollutants. Where relevant, advocate within these agencies for increased financing to flow to the local level and streamline inclusive procurement processes. In the area of methane reduction, join and take a greater leadership role in the U.N. Environment’s Global Methane Alliance (GMA) to expand participation among all coal-producing countries. The U.S. can also champion approaches emerging from the NGO sector on new, scalable approaches to meeting the vast global food need while reducing livestock and manure emissions.
- **Develop long term “Adaptation Compacts” for the most climate-vulnerable countries and emphasize locally-led adaptation.** Currently, many climate-vulnerable and fragile countries **receive little adaptation finance**, with most of them receiving less than \$20 per person per year in climate change adaptation financing from 2010-2017. Take a diplomatic leadership role in ensuring climate-vulnerable countries are prioritized by bolstering coordination between multilateral donors, climate funds (especially the GCF), and other bilateral donors to ensure that no one is left behind. Support Principles for Locally-Led Adaptation through the Global Adaptation Commission.
- **Join global networks and initiatives advancing climate adaptation.** Strategic areas for the U.S. Government involvement include the Adaptation and Resilience Track of the U.N. Climate Action Summit and the Risk-Informed Early Action Partnership (REAP). The U.S. can also support the Least Developed Country (LDC) Initiative for Effective Adaptation and Resilience (**LIFE-AR**).
- **Deepen the empirical evidence of the impact of climate change on forced migration and armed conflict as a frequent push factor to strengthen related policies.** Climate change impacts migration and violent conflict in myriad ways that are not all fully understood by policymakers. Invest time and resources in ensuring the U.S. Government gains this understanding, in collaboration with the academic community and civil society.
- **Address the humanitarian protection gap for climate-induced refugees, emphasizing the differentiated needs of vulnerable groups, especially women and youth.** Under the 1951 Refugee Convention, people displaced as a result of climate-related events are not legally classified as “refugees.” This omission creates a protection gap that may grow increasingly problematic with time as climate impacts intensify. Current efforts within the UNFCCC Taskforce on Displacement, Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, and the High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement have proposed **ways to address this issue**. This Administration can champion this conversation within the U.N. Security Council, UNFCCC Warsaw International Mechanism on Loss and Damage, the Global Compact on Migration, the Global Compact on Refugees, and the U.N. Human Rights Council Ruling. Given that some parts of the world will be uninhabitable, planned relocation should also be part of a global approach to adaptation that considers voluntary migration to be a viable coping mechanism and bolsters structures to facilitate it.
- **Marshal an ambitious climate integration agenda through the G7 and G20 and U.N. (Secretary General’s Agenda, High Ambition Coalition, and the Financing for Development Agenda).** G20 countries account for about 80% of global emissions. After the Administration reviews existing climate and energy initiatives, possible areas of progress highlighted in **partners’ recommendations** include “Support to developing countries for green recovery from COVID-19 in part through debt restructuring, repurposing fossil fuel subsidies to support just transition and clean energy investments, mandatory adoption and enforcement of the Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosure (TCFD) protocols through financial regulators, and phasing out investments, trade, and export credit practices that drive deforestation and ecosystem loss.”

- **Support the decarbonization of U.S.-funded development and humanitarian work by building on efforts by the U.N. International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and U.N. International Maritime Organization (IMO) to reduce emissions in the aviation and shipping industries on which the NGO sector depends.** Build on what has been adopted in ICAO, strengthen targets to require a trajectory consistent with achieving net-zero aviation emissions by 2050 and at least a 30% reduction from 2019 levels by 2035, and work through the IMO to set emissions caps for ships and ports. Hold these industries accountable for researching and creating low-carbon fuel, fleet, and operational efficiency while sticking to standards and emissions caps.

Expand, accelerate, and improve the application of USAID's international climate mitigation and adaptation policies, programs, and practices.

- **Draft and implement a USAID Climate Strategy in response to White House-led whole-of-government efforts to address climate change.** The last standing climate strategy at USAID lapsed in 2018. A new strategy, for example, can outline how climate consideration will be integrated into regular planning and existing sectoral strategies, especially Country Development Cooperation Strategies (CDCS) that are up for renewal, the Global Food Security Strategy, USAID Nutrition Strategy, the forthcoming USAID Water Strategy, USAID approach to gender, and the Global Fragility Strategy, among others.
- **Deepen the integration of climate within [USAID's Environmental and Natural Resource Management \(ENRM\) Framework](#) and increase the use of an updated version of the framework across the Agency and USAID Missions.** Launched in November 2019, the ENRM is an Agency-wide guiding document that seeks to integrate environmental considerations into all USAID programs and investments. It does not consider how climate change will impact the environment or USAID programs. Update this framework, in conjunction with a new USAID Climate Strategy, and deepen its application especially through the new Associate Administrator for Relief, Response and Resilience (A.A. R3/AID) that includes the Bureau of Conflict Prevention and Stabilization (CPS), Bureau of Resilience and Food Security (RFS), and Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (H.A.).
- **Implement and report on climate adaptation programs.** USAID receives funding for climate adaptation annually, though reporting, transparency, and accountability for programs must be improved. The July 2020 GAO Report, "[USAID is Taking Steps to Increase Projects' Resilience, but Could Improve Reporting of Adaptation Funding](#)," highlights several key areas of improvement. Adaptation efforts should pay particular attention to increasing resilience for the services that children depend upon most, such as water, health, education, and nutrition.
- **Strengthen climate risk management (CRM) practices at USAID.** USAID has an existing [climate risk management approach](#) that has been shallowly applied. An [October 2020 evaluation](#) of current climate risk management practices found widespread support within USAID for the Agency to take more proactive measures to address climate change. However, there are also several barriers to improved implementation of climate risk management, primarily the lack of technical expertise and adequate USAID staffing.
- **Rebuild USAID, MCC, and The Department of State's technical expertise on climate change.** Increase the number of staff at Embassies, USAID Missions, and headquarters dedicated to addressing climate change and ensuring environmental protection throughout the program lifecycle beyond the design phase. The minimum requirement of preventing environmental damage due to USAID programs in-country is often a box-checking exercise for implementers and their local partners. As a result, the process is often ineffective. Beyond this "floor," many parts of these agencies are still far from aspirational efforts to address the climate crisis for both people and the environment through their programs, regardless of whether they have environmental goals at their core. As strategies and frameworks are implemented, increase the number of technical experts experienced in climate, resilience, climate adaptation, disaster risk reduction, and gender & climate. Hire staff in regional bureaus and offices who specialize in regional-specific climate impacts. Create professional incentives for Embassy and USAID

Mission staff and counterparts at headquarters overseeing projects to prioritize both environmental protections and cutting-edge climate mitigation and adaptation approaches. Enhance basic training on climate change across the Agency.

- **Require greenhouse gas emission accounting for USAID-funded projects and add emission reduction studies and practices as allowable costs for implementers.** Reducing emissions in projects is sometimes cost-neutral or cost-saving, though in initial stages can incur costs. USAID can accelerate the decarbonization of development and humanitarian work sector-wide by allowing these types of costs to be included in grants and contracts.

Use the full leverage of the U.S. Treasury to improve international climate mitigation and adaptation efforts among multilateral development banks (MDBs) and multilateral climate funds.

- **Reinstate and expand U.S. guidance on fossil fuel financing at MDBs to include additional fossil fuel types.** Treasury issued [guidance](#) in October 2013 that ended U.S. government support for public financing of new coal plants overseas, with rare exceptions, making the U.S. a global leader on climate. In 2017, however, this was reversed and replaced with guidance that included [support](#) for fossil fuel projects. At the same time, the rest of the world moved ahead. Efforts by the [European Investment Bank](#) in 2019 and the World Bank in 2017 to phase down are useful examples. Restore and expand the 2013 policy to include other fossil fuels, and apply this to all MDBs in which the U.S. participates. This will promote the much-needed global energy transition and take advantage of the steadily declining cost of renewable technologies relative to fossils, even absent a global price on emissions.
- **Oppose the use of budget support loans to finance fossil fuels, and establish exclusion lists and screening processes at the MDBs to align them with Paris Agreement goals.** MDBs rely on quick-disbursing “development policy finance” (DPF) or “policy-based loans” to provide budget support to borrowing countries, especially to respond to economic crises such as those brought on by COVID-19. However, such loans remain largely exempt from the MDBs’ environmental and social standards. While the U.S. has fought in the past to reverse this exemption without success, global attention to the climate crisis now brings stronger standards within reach. Use the U.S. vote to support the establishment at each MDB of 1) an exclusion list that bars support for programs or policy changes that are inconsistent with the World Bank’s climate commitments, including any policy that will promote fossil fuel use with very few exceptions and 2) a screening process to bar support for programs or policy changes likely to negatively impact a country’s environment, climate, forests, biodiversity, and other natural resources. Encourage the World Bank to conduct a long-overdue review of its DPF policy.
- **Join the [Coalition of Finance Ministers for Climate Action](#).** The Coalition, for which the World Bank serves as [Secretariat](#), was established in 2019 to bring together fiscal and economic policymakers from [over 50 countries](#) to lead the global climate response and secure a just transition toward low-carbon, resilient development. All members signed on to the six [Helsinki Principles](#) that promote national climate action, especially through fiscal policy and the use of public finance. The Principles are designed as aspirational and non-binding. Nevertheless, U.S. membership would send a strong signal of the U.S. commitment to shared global action on climate.

Champion nature as a key part of addressing the climate crisis.

- **Support the 30x30 agenda internationally to protect 30% of land and waters, and weave it into U.S. diplomacy and development assistance.** Building on the domestic 30x30 effort, the U.S. can apply an analogous commitment to foreign assistance. Explore joining the U.N. Convention on Biological Diversity.
- **Prevent deforestation and encourage reforestation and restoration of other natural ecosystems that naturally absorb carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases.** If kept intact and fostered, the world’s forests can reduce greenhouse gases by one-third. Increase foreign assistance to support programming that protects forests in ways that support the human rights of these ecosystems’ custodians, especially Indigenous Peoples.



Request increased funding for the bilateral Biodiversity and Sustainable Landscapes in the annual State and Foreign Operations (SFOPs) Appropriations bill. Such an approach could complement the U.S. NDC that will focus on domestic climate mitigation efforts.

- **Support additional nature-based solutions to achieve both adaptation and mitigation.** As an example, include support and screening for infrastructure projects to ensure they mitigate climate risks and nature-based adaptation co-benefits such as planting mangroves to protect coastlines, sink carbon, and support livelihoods based on fishing. Build on work by the Global Commission on Adaptation around nature-based solutions.

For additional recommendations on integrating climate into the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (DFC), please see: [Recommendations on the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation for the Biden-Harris Administration: Fully Realizing the DFC Development Mandate and NGO Partnerships](#).

About the Climate Advocacy Working Group

InterAction's Climate Advocacy Working Group generates greater understanding of how climate change impacts development and humanitarian goals and urges the U.S. government, the U.S. Congress, United Nations, and international financial institutions to take aggressive steps to mitigate climate change and support vulnerable communities to adapt to its effects.

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About InterAction

InterAction is a convener, thought leader, and voice for NGOs working to eliminate extreme poverty, strengthen human rights and citizen participation, safeguard a sustainable planet, promote peace, and ensure dignity for all people.

