Philanthropy for Climate Protection

A Brief Guide

Prepared by the World Resources Institute

What is Climate Change?

The atmosphere is made up of gases that trap the sun's rays, acting like the glass of a greenhouse and warming the planet. The main "greenhouse gases" are carbon dioxide (CO_2) and methane (CH_4). The presence of these gases in the atmosphere maintains the Earth's average temperature at about 60ºF, allowing life on the planet as we know it. Over the last 250 years, however, the concentrations of carbon dioxide, methane, and other greenhouse gases have increased dramatically. Due to energy use and agricultural and forest practices, concentrations of CO_2 have increased by nearly 30% and those of CH_4 by over 100% since 1750.

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a group of 2,000 of the world's leading scientists dedicated to understanding the science and potential impact of global warming, the increase in concentration of greenhouse gases is causing fundamental physical changes in the atmosphere, oceans, and the Earth's surface.

Unusual and extreme weather events, rising sea levels, thinning polar ice, and changing precipitation patterns can already be seen. The effects climate change has on ecosystems include trees budding a week or two earlier in the Spring, birds laying eggs earlier, and butterflies moving up mountains and towards cooler polar regions.

What Does Climate Change Mean?

Climate Change is irreversible and will severely impact the poor.

Irreversible: Many of the effects of climate change will be permanent. Changing environmental conditions will result in numerous plant and animal extinctions. Decades of work to save coral reefs, protect forest ecosystems, ensure freshwater supplies, and improve humanity's health around the world may be undone by climate change.

Impact on the poor: Climate change will have the greatest impact on populations that depend directly on natural resources for their livelihoods, precisely the populations with the least resources to adapt. Developing countries will feel the consequences acutely. For citizens of island nations and low-lying lands, such as Bangladesh, there may simply be no place to retreat as the sea rises. Agricultural and water supply disruptions will have severe effects on the health of the poor.

What Can Be Done to Slow Climate Change?

The solutions are well known. Humans must shift from the use of fossil fuels (carbon, oil, and gas) to renewable sources (solar, wind, hydrogen fuel cells). We must also use energy more efficiently and instill more sustainable agricultural and forestry practices. The politics of such changes will not be easy. With leadership and action, however, we can adapt and implement these solutions at the international, national, local, institutional, and individual levels. We can respond to climate change:

- **internationally** by aligning economic needs with global responsibilities, maintaining pressure on the U.S. and other industrialized countries to finish the Kyoto Protocol negotiations, and assisting developing nations by sharing emissions-reducing technology;
- **nationally** by implementing long-term sustainable strategies in the energy, agriculture, and forestry sectors;
- **locally** through sound transportation and urban planning;
- **institutionally** by asking industry to commit to emissions reductions and the manufacture of products that are less carbon intensive (for example, BP Amoco and Shell Oil have both set corporate targets and timetables for emissions reductions and energy efficiency improvements);
- **individually** by choosing energy-efficient and recycled products, opting for public transportation, and avoiding energy waste in our homes.

What Should the Goals Be?

The world's countries, through the climate treaty, have set the goal of stabilizing greenhouse gases at a level that would "allow ecosystems to adapt naturally to climate change, to ensure that food production is not threatened, and to enable

economic development to proceed in a sustainable manner" (UNFC-CC, Art. 2). Absent action now, Earth is heading toward at least a tripling of CO_2 over pre-industrial levels. The goal, therefore, is to quickly and decisively transition to a more efficient energy economy based on hydrogen, solar, and wind energy. This transition must start now in order to avoid the most serious impacts of climate change.

Specific goals should include:

- Ratifying and implementing the Kyoto Protocol to the Climate Change Convention, even without the U.S.;
- Reducing the U.S. contribution of greenhouse gases (currently between 20-25 percent of the global total);
- Engaging the private sector to lead reduction efforts and to move toward greater sustainability in their products, practices, and services;
- Creating incentives that spur the development and adoption of energy-efficient and alternative-energy products;
- Transferring technology to, and building technology in, developing nations so they can meet their sustainable development needs.

How Can Private Philanthropists Help?

Philanthropy is vital to protecting the climate. The problem is too long-range in nature and too political for either business or government, alone or in coordination, to fully address. While the solutions to climate change are within our reach, making the changes necessary to implement these solutions will take many years. Non-governmental organizations are playing a crucial role in linking the issue of climate change to domestic issues like energy policy, transportation, and agriculture. However, they need financial support to provide the continuity required to achieve real reductions now and to build sustained political support for the steeper greenhouse-gas cuts to come.

Climate-protection advocacy and policy analysis are relatively under-funded compared to land and species conservation efforts. The irony is that climate change itself could undermine those ecosystem- and species-protection causes. Philanthropic support for climate change can:

- Foster public engagement and mobilization by educating citizens to demand governmental action on averting dangerous climate change;
- Support new ways of delivering services such as heat, electricity, and transportation while limiting emissions of greenhouse gases;
- Develop creative solutions for driving governments toward the ratification of the climate-change treaty;
- Encourage the private sector to reduce emissions;
- Build capacity in developing countries; and
- Support developing-country initiatives that promote climate protection and economic development.

Where Can You Go to Learn More?

Many international governmental organizations and nonprofit groups strive to further our understanding of this issue. Included below are a few leaders in the field who also have particularly informative websites.

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
www.unfccc.int

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
www.ipcc.ch

Union of Concerned Scientists
www.ucsusa.org

Center for International Environmental Law
www.ciel.org

Climate Action Network
www.ClimateNetwork.org

Environmental Defense
www.edf.org

Foundations for International Environmental Law and Development
www.field.org.uk

World Wildlife Foundation
www.worldwildlife.org/climate

Natural Resources Defense Council
www.nrdc.org

Pew Center on Global Climate Change
www.pewclimate.org

World Resources Institute
www.wri.org/climate

To help you make your own sound choices:
www.safeclimate.net