



Briefing Paper, 2021: Responding to the Climate Crisis

Context

The climate crisis presents the single biggest threat to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030¹. But while climate change is expected to affect every country in the world, its impact is disproportionately felt in communities in which GOAL works – communities which have contributed least to this acute global problem².

The devastating effects of climate change are adding to existing environmental, social, health, political and economic challenges. The UN predicts that the climate crisis will push an additional 120 million people into poverty by 2030³, further increasing global inequalities and undoing the last 50 years of progress in development, global health, and poverty reduction.

2021 provides an opportunity for the global community to adopt a cohesive and coordinated approach to the climate and COVID-19 crises. The delayed 26th UN global climate 'Conference of the Parties' (COP26), originally scheduled for 2020 and now taking place in November 2021 in Glasgow, is an important milestone for countries to present accelerated action towards the 2015 Paris Agreement. At the same time, COVID-19 recovery plans provide opportunities to integrate climate objectives and SDG targets - putting the health and sustainability of the planet and its most vulnerable people at centre stage.

This briefing paper highlights the impact of the climate crisis on the communities GOAL works with across 5 key areas: Humanitarian Crises; Global Health; Food and Nutrition Security, Livelihoods and Gender Equality. It also makes recommendations to tackle the issues.

About GOAL

GOAL is an international humanitarian response agency established in Ireland over 40 years ago, with operations in 13 countries in Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America. GOAL believes in a world in which poverty no longer exists, where vulnerable communities are resilient, where barriers to well-being are removed and where everyone has equal rights and opportunities. GOAL programmes focus on Health, Nutrition, Livelihoods and GOAL is currently applying its unique expertise in Emergency Response to the global COVID-19 crisis.

1 See <https://www.un.org/development/desa/en/news/sustainable/sustainable-development-goals-report-2020.html>

2 See <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Poverty/Pages/ClimateChange.aspx>

3 See <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/06/1041261>



Dropoff from UK Aid in landing track of Puerto Lempira, Departmental capital in Gracias a Dios (La Moskitia), November 2020

Hurricane response in Honduras in 2020⁴

Scientists have linked more frequent hurricanes in 2020 with the climate crisis⁵. GOAL works in Honduras where over 3.3 million people were affected by Hurricanes Eta and Iota in November 2020. Severe flooding and landslides left thousands displaced. Water sources were damaged, and 700 roads destroyed, making assistance and access for rescue even more difficult.

In the GOAL-supported La Moskitia region, located in the Gracias a Dios department, over 41,000 people were affected by the Hurricanes. It is home to 80,000 people and four different indigenous groups. The region is remote, comprising almost a fifth of Honduras' territory. Land is only reachable by plane or boat. Homes are largely made of wood, and few have been left standing.

The communities of La Moskitia rely mainly on subsistence agriculture and artisanal fishing for their livings. Thanks to the storms, many lost not only their homes, but also their livelihoods. In addition to emergency response, GOAL is taking a disaster risk reduction and climate adaptation approach, preparing to put in place critical early warning and response systems. It is also initiating climate mitigation projects to help protect and restore coastal ecosystems and coastlines and to treat polluted waters.

5 Key Areas affected by the Climate Crisis

1. Humanitarian Crises

In fragile and conflict affected states climate change is the ultimate 'threat multiplier'. It is heightening already existing vulnerabilities and risks to peace and security⁶. This is true in many countries GOAL works including Niger, Syria, South Sudan, Ethiopia, and Haiti⁷. In 2019, almost half of the 836 million people globally who were living in extreme poverty were based in fragile contexts, and a 2018 OECD report estimates that this will rise by 80 percent by 2030⁸.

Additionally, hundreds of millions of people are facing humanitarian crisis as a result of climate-induced extreme weather events which are increasing in frequency and severity and hitting vulnerable communities disproportionately hard. One in three people are still not adequately covered by early warning systems⁹, especially those in developing and fragile states.

As a result, many countries in which GOAL works are experiencing increasing rural-to-urban and cross border migration as people escape conflict and search for sustainable livelihoods and economic and environmental safety¹⁰. Of the 33.4 million new displacements in 2019, 23.9 million were the result of weather-related disasters, equivalent to more than 60,000 people every day¹¹.

Addressing climate change is key to long-term sustainability and resilience of vulnerable communities with whom GOAL works¹². In addition to climate change mitigation and rapid response to immediate crisis, countries need to be supported in the implementation of disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation. Early warning and response systems are key elements to help forecast and take timely action to reduce disaster risks. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 (SFDRR), an international agreement signed by governments to protect development gains, has helped strengthen the focus on reducing global disaster risk. However, it relies on the state to lead, but in many fragile contexts the state does not have sufficient capacity for the required investment. Targeted approaches, specific to fragile contexts need to be included in the SFDRR.

4 <https://www.goalglobal.org/stories/post-hurricane-recovery-underway-in-honduras/>
5 <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/nov/15/scientists-link-record-breaking-hurricane-season-to-climate-crisis>

6 <https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/sc14260.doc.htm> and <https://www.odi.org/projects/2913-when-disasters-and-conflict-collide-uncovering-truth>

7 <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/policy-summary-nexus-fragility-and-climate-risks-march-2019>

8 https://www.oecd.org/dac/conflict-fragility-resilience/docs/OECD%20Highlights%20documents_web.pdf

9 <https://public.wmo.int/en/media/press-release/state-of-climate-services-2020-report-move-from-early-warnings-early-action>

10 ODI, Migration and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 2017 <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/11826.pdf>

11 <https://www.internal-displacement.org/sites/default/files/publications/documents/2020-IDMC-GRID.pdf>

12 https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/odi_climate_change_conflict_and_fragility.pdf

Cyclone Idai response in Zimbabwe and Malawi

In March 2019, the most powerful storm on record for Southern Africa, Cyclone Idai, caused widespread destruction across two of GOAL's programme countries: Zimbabwe, and Malawi. In Zimbabwe, GOAL responded to the Cyclone within 48 hours with support from the Irish government and UN agencies, reaching 82,663 people with shelter and hygiene supports. In Malawi, GOAL reached over 15,000 individuals in over 20 Internally Displaced Person (IDP) camps with non-food, health and hygiene items, including temporary sanitation facilities. During the recovery phase, GOAL also supported flood-affected farming households, helping them with the winter cropping season.

GOAL's disaster risk reduction approach enables emergency humanitarian interventions transition to longer-term development programming, supporting communities to build back better in the recovery stage and adapt to risks related to climate change at the same time.



Damage to road and surrounding housing caused by Cyclone Idai: Chimanimani District, Zimbabwe, March 2019

2. Global Health

The climate crisis is affecting global health. It seriously impacts food and nutrition security and the rise in temperatures increases transmission of infectious, climate-sensitive diseases such as malaria and diarrhoea¹³ and results in heat-related premature deaths, in particular amongst the elderly¹⁴.

It is also important to highlight the link between the prevention of future pandemics and the climate crisis, with deforestation and large livestock farms increasing greenhouse gas emissions and the risks of germs being shared with other animals and people¹⁵.

The 2020 Lancet Countdown Report on Health and Climate Change calls for a coordinated response to COVID-19 and the climate crisis. In addition to ensuring mitigation of the causes of climate change, there needs to be long-term support to help communities build resilient health systems and infrastructures. This includes investment in strengthening early surveillance and response systems for climate-sensitive health hazards.

3. Food and Nutrition Security

Climate-related threats to food and nutrition security continues to affect many of the countries in which GOAL works. From Niger to South Sudan, and Ethiopia to Malawi, a common challenge is that food systems are failing to provide enough nutritious produce to sustain dependent populations. Globally the impacts of drought, floods and rising sea levels¹⁶ are particularly severe for the 2.5 billion smallholder farmers, herders, and fishers globally who depend on natural resources for food and income. The increasingly warm and dry weather will also result in larger and more frequent outbreaks of desert locust swarms like the swarm seen in the Horn of Africa in 2020. Communities are working hard to adapt to these impacts.

These factors not only present a threat to the availability of food¹⁷ and contribute to growing food costs, they also impact on the quality of food nutrition, putting vulnerable communities at risk of hunger and malnutrition¹⁸.

The 2019 UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and Land report notes that unless sweeping action is taken on climate change, the problem of food and nutrition insecurity for the world's poorest will rise to a disastrous level¹⁹. As well as rapid and flexible funding to respond to food crises and disasters when they occur, communities must be supported to implement locally led climate adaptation measures. Food systems must be equitable, resilient, and sustainable, and contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

13 See [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(20\)32290-X/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(20)32290-X/fulltext) and <https://theconversation.com/climate-change-is-resulting-in-profound-immediate-and-worsening-health-impacts-over-120-researchers-say-151027>

14 See [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(20\)32290-X/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(20)32290-X/fulltext) and

<https://theconversation.com/climate-change-is-resulting-in-profound-immediate-and-worsening-health-impacts-over-120-researchers-say-151027>

15 <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/c-change/subtopics/coronavirus-and-climate-change/#:~:text=We%20don't%20have%20direct,and%20our%20risk%20for%20infections.>

16 See [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(20\)32290-X/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(20)32290-X/fulltext) and

<https://theconversation.com/climate-change-is-resulting-in-profound-immediate-and-worsening-health-impacts-over-120-researchers-say-151027>

17 <https://www.unenvironment.org/news-and-stories/story/locust-swarms-and-climate-change>

18 See FAO, Food Security and Nutrition in the Age of Climate Change, Québec City, 2017

19 IPCC, SPECIAL REPORT: SPECIAL REPORT ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND LAND Summary for Policymakers, 2019 <https://www.ipcc.ch/srccl/chapter/summary-for-policymakers/>

Emergency, disaster risk reduction and climate adaptation approaches in South Sudan

In South Sudan change in weather patterns and the escalation, in local conflict had a profound impact on food and nutrition security in 2020. GOAL is implementing a twin-track programme in Upper Nile and former Unity States²⁰ which link emergency response with long term development and resilience building. Emergency needs are addressed through cash transfer programming, while longer-term initiatives tackle the impact of climate change. They include investment in Climate Smart Agriculture, encouraging the planting of early maturing and drought resistant crop and vegetable seeds. In addition, water conservation, water harvesting, tree planting, plant rotation and flood protection measures are encouraged. This is complemented by community initiatives to support and build sustainable livelihoods. The project is strengthened with early warning weather information.



Farmer Panom Gatluak and his family are weeding their family plot in Wathjack village, Ulang/South Sudan, 2020.

4. Sustainable Livelihoods

The climate crisis threatens to roll back hard-won development gains for the most vulnerable communities across the globe. In countries where GOAL works, most income is through self-employment in the informal sector. Those living in urban settings often work as street traders, while in rural areas work is secured in agriculture or small agri businesses. This workforce is typically excluded from formal government systems, including financial and social protection schemes, making them particularly vulnerable to risk when emergencies such as extreme weather events and COVID-19 strike.

Promoting the development of sustainable and resilient livelihoods becomes increasingly important in these contexts. GOAL's systems thinking means interventions are designed to foster the development of resilient livelihoods by focusing on the capabilities, assets and activities that people require to create and maintain a living. Access to financial services and social assistance in the form of cash or in-kind transfers, are critical in supporting households to invest in economic activities and manage multiple risks reducing their vulnerability.

5. Gender Equality

The climate crisis impacts men and women differently, particularly in the communities with whom GOAL works. Women are 14 times more likely to die through the effects of climate change²¹. A 2015 GOAL research report on the gender and climate impacts in Malawi²² shows a link between gender inequalities and women's and girls' vulnerability to the effects of climate change. Women are more likely to skip meals, engage in transactional sex for food and cash for their families, or be subject to gender-based violence - all of which increase their vulnerability.

An increase in the numbers of women migrating to cities or other countries seeking employment heighten the risks of exploitation, whilst children are often left with elderly caregivers or even alone. As the environment degrades, gender roles often assigned to women necessitate spending even more time on reproductive tasks, leaving less time for education and other activities. In addressing the climate crisis, it is therefore necessary to prioritise the challenges faced by women and girls.

20 Baliet, Melut, Ulang, Rubkona, and Panyinjar) of former Unity and Upper Nile States of South Sudan

21 Trócaire, Women taking the lead: Defending Human Rights and the Environment, 2019

22 GOAL, Floods and Droughts through a Gendered Lens; mitigating strategies for women, girls, boys and men in Malawi, 2015

Fisherman involved in GOAL's MiPesca programme, Honduras



Resilience of the Blue Economy — balancing economic growth and conservation²³

GOAL believes that sustainable fisheries are key to the future of global food security, climate change adaptation and poverty reduction. Marine-coastal areas, and in particular fisheries, are highly susceptible to climate change. By 2025, an estimated 75% of the world's population will live in coastal zone. Approximately 90% of fishers globally are small-scale or 'artisan' and are responsible for 50% of all catches. Small-scale fisheries are a critical source of employment, income, food security and nutrition, with 3 billion people relying on fish as an important source of protein.

However, poverty levels among fishing communities remain high due to weaknesses across the value chain. These economic challenges are exacerbated by social and environmental issues with small-scale fisheries tending to be unmanaged and overfished. There is evidence that these trends can be reversed, and that growth in the blue economy provides enormous potential to improve fishers' livelihoods, conserve marine coastal areas and ensure food security.

GOAL's MiPesca approach recognises the importance and value of small-scale fisheries and addresses the multiple challenges and opportunities presented by the blue economy. The approach works towards developing a sustainable market system that is effective in reducing poverty, resilient to the effects of climate change and contributes to conservation by protecting biodiversity and ecosystems. It integrates economic, environmental and social considerations of small-scale fishing systems applying GOAL's innovative 'Resilience for Systems' (R4S) approach. This draws on best practice in systems thinking, network theory, Making Markets Work for the Poor (M4P), resilience building and stakeholder participation and engagement.

A Global Responsibility

There is a fundamental injustice related to the climate crisis: countries contributing the least to the issue are impacted most. The 50 least developed nations in the world have contributed only 1% to global greenhouse gas emissions. The Paris Agreement in 2015 legally commits all countries to rapidly reduce their emissions to limit the increase in the global average temperature to 1.5°C²⁴ above pre-industrial levels. However, current state pledges are not sufficient, and the world is on track to a 3-4-degree increase, threatening to render the planet unrecognisable from anything humans have ever experienced²⁵.

The OECD has praised Ireland for making climate change a top priority in A Better World, Ireland's policy framework for international development²⁶. Ireland's success in mainstreaming climate action in its programmes is also higher than the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) member average. However, the DAC also highlights the issue of coherence between Ireland's domestic climate policy and development cooperation objectives. It notes the need for proper mechanisms to analyse the impact of its domestic policies on developing countries, to identify potential inconsistencies and produce actions to address these.

In 2019 Ireland was the third highest emitter of carbon in the EU per capita²⁷ and was not on track to meet its EU emission targets by a significant margin²⁸. However, a Climate Action Plan produced in 2019 provides positive steps, and the latest Programme for Government promises more climate action than any previous government programme. The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill 2021 and Climate Action Plan 2021 have the potential to shift Ireland's approach to climate change.

In December 2020, the European Council endorsed a new binding EU 2030 target of at least a 55% net reduction in emissions (up from a 40% commitment) below 1990 emissions.

This higher EU commitment is a step in the right direction but is not in accordance with the scale of reductions needed for the EU to align with

²³ Read more about the MiPesca approach HERE <https://resiliencenexus.org/2020/01/30/goal-mipesca-project-is-benefitting-small-scale-fishermen-on-the-north-coast-of-honduras/>

²⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/international/negotiations/paris_en

²⁵ Summary for Policymakers of IPCC Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C approved by governments

²⁶ See <https://www.oecd.org/ireland/oecd-development-co-operation-peer-reviews-ireland-2020-c20f6995-en.htm>

²⁷ <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-eii/eii19/>

²⁸ <https://www.epa.ie/ghg/indicatorsprogress/targets/>

Paris Agreement objectives.

EU legislation will be proposed and negotiated over the course of 2021, presenting opportunities to further increase EU climate targets in accordance with the Paris Agreement to 65%, and relevant policies and funding programmes all sectors to be brought in line with climate and biodiversity objectives. The European Green Deal, with its objective of making Europe climate neutral by 2050 should be placed at the centre of national and EU recovery plans for COVID-19.

Securing funding for climate adaptation and mitigation-related activities in some of the world's poorest countries remains a challenge²⁹, made even greater due to the inevitable economic fall-out of the COVID-19 pandemic. The 2019 OECD analysis on climate finance states that between 2013 and 2019, 60% of bilateral and 90% of multilateral climate finance were loans³⁰. It is important that the prevalence of climate finance loans, as opposed to untied grants, does not pave the way for worsening inequalities and does not impede ability to respond to the climate crisis. One other important element is the objective of annually raising €100 billion dollars for climate action through the UN Green Climate Fund. Ireland pledged to double its contributions to the Green Climate Fund between 2019 and 2023, however this contribution remains far below that provided by equivalent EU states³¹.

GOAL's recommendations

If the international community is serious about tackling the climate crisis, policy change at national and international levels and global financial commitments must be delivered rapidly. COVID-19 recovery plans should include climate objectives to put the health and sustainability of the planet and its poorest people at centre stage.

GOAL recommends that:

Ireland reduces polluting emissions in accordance with Paris Agreement commitments, with new climate legislation delivering the required emissions reductions across all sectors, recognising that it is the poorest countries who will suffer most from inaction.

Ireland increases its annual climate finance contributions to help vulnerable countries cope with the effects of the climate crisis. Financing for climate adaptation must be in the form of untied grants, and additional to ODA funding, to ensure that resources for sustainable development and humanitarian action are not reduced. This includes Ireland providing its fair share to the UN Green Climate Fund, bringing its contributions into line with that of equivalent EU states.

Ireland supports increasing action at EU level to ensure EU climate targets are increased to 65%, in accordance with the Paris Agreement commitments, by 2030 and to ensure policies and funding programmes across all sectors are brought in line with climate and biodiversity objectives, prioritising resilience for vulnerable groups in the global south.

All Governments ensure a coordinated and just response to both the climate crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic by including climate objectives and UN SDG targets and indicators in recovery plans, prioritising resilience for vulnerable groups.

29 Christian Aid and Trócaire, The Cost of Inaction: Ireland's Responsibilities for Global Climate Finance, November 2019

30 <https://www.oecd.org/environment/climate-finance-for-developing-countries-reached-usd-71-billion-in-2017.htm>

31 https://merrionstreet.ie/en/News-Room/Releases/Minister_Bruton_Delivers_National_Statement_at_COP_25_climate_conference.html#:~:text=The%20Minister%20announced%20that%20Ireland,the%20period%202019%20to%202023

See also 2019 analysis by Christian Aid and Trócaire: <https://www.christianaid.ie/news/ireland-must-increase-climate-finance-contributions-six-fold>

All donors, including the EU and Ireland, release rapid and flexible funding to respond to climate-induced disasters and increase investments in disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation, especially in fragile contexts. Donors should support greater investment in early-warning and response systems infrastructure and forecast-based financing mechanisms, additional to ODA.

Ireland and the EU to support efforts to further strengthen the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 (SFDRR) to be specific to the needs in fragile contexts, ensuring that responding to immediate humanitarian need does not compromise investment in disaster risk reduction efforts in fragile contexts.

Donors, including the EU and Ireland, implement the 2019 OECD DAC Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus recommendations³² to ensure durable solutions are applied to fragile states whose communities are at severe risk of humanitarian crisis as a result of climate change.

Governments and donors commit to long-term investment in building resilient and adaptive national health systems. This should include a multi-sectoral approach to the integration of disaster risk management and public health, and the strengthening of early surveillance and response systems for climate-sensitive health hazards. It must also prioritise universal and non-discriminatory access to medical treatments, equipment, and vaccines.

Community initiatives be put at the centre of adaptation and resilience building measures to the climate crisis to enable communities identify risks and local solutions. Lessons learned from the response to the COVID-19 outbreak show that community engagement is key in making sure interventions are culturally acceptable and reach the most vulnerable³³.

Governments use the COVID-19 recovery to take collective action for food systems that are more equitable, resilient, sustainable and delivering progress on all 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

Donors and governments commit to increased investment in climate adaptation activities aimed at strengthening sustainable livelihoods for the informal workforce sector, include inclusive access to financial services so households can reduce their vulnerability to the effects of climate change.

Ireland and all donors continue to protect the most marginalised and vulnerable girls and young women who already suffer most as a result of the climate crisis. Gender equality should be integrated into climate financing and there must be more gender balance in climate policy and decision-making at national and international levels.

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³² <https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/public/doc/643/643.en.pdf> and [OECD-DAC-Peer-Review-Ireland-2020.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/dac/peer-review/peer-review-ireland-2020/) (dfa.ie)

³³ <https://www.goalglobal.org/stories/how-the-ebola-epidemic-has-prepared-goal-staff-to-fight-covid-19-in-sierra-leone/>