A Just Climate: Our Responsibility To Act

A Paper for Discussion
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Executive Summary

As an international aid and development agency rooted in the principles of Catholic Social Teaching, Caritas Australia has a unique and significant voice to add to the conversation on climate change. It is not only our commitment to create new opportunities for the world’s poorest and most marginalised communities, but also our determination to overcome systematic injustice that calls us to engage in climate change discourse, both in Australia and abroad.

Caritas Australia has identified that climate change poses a significant threat to the authentic human development of our Partners and the vulnerable communities we serve. It is clear that climate change will be of significant detriment to the health, security and livelihoods of the world’s poorest communities, exacerbating existing development challenges in the most susceptible regions. Many of the communities Caritas Australia serve already experience the effects of a changing climate; extensive evidence from our partners and programs suggests a negative correlation between climate change, poverty alleviation and progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

This report seeks to highlight the urgency of action required by the Australian and international community to ensure that the world’s poor are not adversely affected by climate change and environmental degradation. It seeks to forge a pathway of reasoned dialogue, detailing key policy recommendations to assist decision makers in the realisation of this goal.

In addition to the tangible imperative to develop a response to climate change – as evidenced in Caritas Australia’s programmatic challenges - Caritas Australia has a firm theological foundation from which to advocate for climate justice. In the realisation of our mission to pursue God’s just world, in our role as stewards of Creation, and as advocates for the poorest of the poor – Caritas Australia has a mandate to ensure the most vulnerable communities do not shoulder the burden of climate change.

Caritas Australia welcomes an increasing willingness within the Australian and International Catholic Community to engage proactively with ecological justice and climate change related issues. Caritas Australia seeks to build on this foundation and draws strength from the principles of justice and solidarity which it reflects.

Whilst Caritas Australia acknowledges the good work of Australian governments to date, it is important that we continue to strive for improved policies to meet the urgent challenges posed by climate change in poor and marginalised communities throughout the world. We call on political parties of all persuasion to implement policies that will better serve communities in Australia and overseas who are currently struggling with the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation.

Such policies would include:

- Increasing financial and technical assistance to developing countries to enable them to fight poverty, build resilience to disasters and develop in sustainable ways.
- Taking a leadership role in reducing national and global pollution levels.
- Supporting innovative finance mechanisms in order to meet the increased developmental costs of tackling climate change.

In addition to this, Caritas Australia calls on individuals and communities in Australia to achieve ecological conversion in solidarity with the world’s poor by assessing the sustainability of their own lifestyles and actively reducing their own ecological footprint. As an agency, we also wish to pursue greater environmental sustainability of our own internal practises and programmatic approaches, and this paper serves as a roadmap for doing so in the coming months and years.
Climate Change and Social Justice

Introduction

As we work to secure one just world, Caritas Australia seeks to address the developmental cost of climate change as evidenced throughout our programs and supported by widely accepted scientific and economic reports. Ongoing research and observation – including anecdotal evidence from Caritas Australia’s projects - clearly point to the devastating consequences that will result from a failure to respond to a changing climate.

The issues surrounding climate change go beyond the scientific and political: a global, humanitarian approach is needed to ensure that justice and human dignity prevail. The overwhelming consensus on the need for immediate action has rendered climate change an issue for the entire international community. Well-designed policies can both help to address climate change and to protect the most vulnerable. But it is only through real collaboration - forged in the spirit of solidarity and respect for creation - that we can establish a just and lasting response to climate change.

Caritas Australia’s expertise lies in our integrated programmatic approach to sustainable human development, effective coordination of humanitarian emergency responses and in the active realisation of the fundamental principles of partnership and subsidiarity which inform all dimensions of our work. We do not claim to be scientific or economic experts with regards to climate change. Many of our partners, however, do have a high degree of expertise in these fields, and this report has drawn on their knowledge, in addition to the lived experiences and observations of the communities we serve.

This report has also been informed by the conclusions of leading scientific bodies including the Australian Academy of Science1 and CSIRO2, and the work of respected economists and intergovernmental bodies, including the 2010 Garnaut Climate Change Review3, The Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change 20064 and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) 4th Assessment Report5.

With reference to the collective assertions of these sources, Caritas Australia recognises the urgent need to find adaptive approaches to climate change in the poorest communities, whilst working to reduce carbon emissions both in Australian and abroad.

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Climate Change: A threat to authentic human development

‘We urge Catholics as a matter of conscience to cooperate in facing global warming as one of the major issues of our time and take roles of responsibility proper to them. Several times we have addressed environmental issues and recently called for ecological conversion. We now urge Catholics, as an essential part of their faith commitment, to respond with sound judgements and resolute action to the reality of climate change.’

- Australian Catholic Bishops Conference

First and foremost, Caritas Australia believes that effective development is founded in our duty to be good stewards of the earth’s resources, in our commitment to the common good, and in our determination to protect human dignity in the most vulnerable communities with which we work in partnership.

The Catholic Church more broadly has a long history of promoting reasoned and well-informed dialogue on the issue of environmental justice and climate change, and the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC) has, for many years, spoken out on the need for a change in our attitude towards the environment. Earth is a gift from God, and God’s plan for humanity is to know God through the world of matter – the Earth and human life are intrinsically linked.

In line with these teachings, Caritas Australia believes we have a personal and national responsibility to preserve the sacred gift of creation and choose the path of dialogue, solidarity and cooperation to ensure ecological sustainability of the earth’s and its resources. Marginalised communities and future generations should not bear responsibility for our mismanagement of shared environmental resources; we strive for intergenerational justice that ensures the authentic human development of all peoples.

But intergenerational justice will not come without a cost. It is anticipated that extra funds required for climate change adaptation and mitigation, will cause a significant shortfall in financial resources needed to achieve the Millennium Development Goals’ (MDGs). Should the global community fail to respond to climate change, then the devastating consequences for vulnerable communities are likely to undermine the progress already made towards the MDGs over the past decade.

There is significant evidence that, in spite of contributing the least to climate change, the poorest of the poor are the most vulnerable to its consequences. Their limited capacity to adapt, heavy reliance on agriculture and their geographical location often places them at greater risk than more economically developed communities. In particular, low-lying small island countries in the Asia-Pacific region will be exposed to the livelihood, health and security threats of a warming climate and rising sea, whilst communities across Africa and South Asia will increasingly experience extreme weather events, such as cyclones and drought, that threaten food and water security.

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7 Stern, op.cit., p 555.
8 In 2000, 189 world leaders joined together and committed to a global action plan to halve global poverty by 2015 - the Millennium Development Goals; Visit www.blueprintforabetterworld.org for more information.
Theology and Catholic Social Teaching

As the international aid and development agency of the Catholic Church and guided by the principles of Catholic Social Teaching (CST), Caritas Australia is called to actively engage with the theological questions of climate change as they pertain to the world’s poor and to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

Pope John Paul II said, “We cannot interfere in one area of the ecosystem without paying due attention both to the consequences of such interference in other areas and to the well-being of future generations.”

This affirms that all of creation is part of the “common good” to be shared by all. Each individual has the right to enjoy the fruits of the development that has taken place in our world. Of course, with this, comes a responsibility to be stewards of this creation; to protect nature’s gifts beyond our own lifespan and safeguard them for future generations. This is the covenant between God, humankind and all of creation.

Stewardship is a guiding principle in Christianity, encouraging us to live within our means, and to live sustainably. The Church teaches that God’s hopeful plan for the human race within Creation is authentic development, involving the social, spiritual, ecological and economic dimensions of our existence. It is a plan that originates within God’s love and one that, to be realised, depends on our free will.

Pope Benedict has stated: “If the protection of the environment involves costs, they should be justly distributed, taking due account of the different levels of development of various countries and the need for solidarity with future generations.” This deepens our understanding of the relationship between human dignity, sustainable development and care for the environment.

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9 Pope John Paul II, ‘Peace with God the creator, peace with all of creation, message for the celebration of the World Day of Peace’, no.6, 1st Jan, 1990.
Climate Change: Current and Future Consequences

Caritas Australia’s work focuses on long-term, participatory development in the world’s poorest communities. In the face of a changing climate, our vision for development incorporates targeted programming initiatives which enhance vulnerable communities’ capacity to adapt to climate change, as well as promoting mitigation initiatives which encourage communities in Australia and abroad to reduce their contribution to global warming. It is vital that Caritas Australia continues to look at climate change not in isolation, but rather builds on the long-term resilience and capacity of communities to address its impacts.

To achieve holistic and sustainable development outcomes, all development activities should address key issues vital to human development, such as the protection of human rights, gender equity, good governance, environmental sustainability, access to healthcare, and other relevant factors that directly impact on human development in a particular context.

These issues should not be considered in isolation, but rather addressed as integrally related components of a broader development framework. The same is true for climate change, whose impacts must be considered and addressed across a range of differing sectors. The following is not an exhaustive examination of these, but rather an attempt to highlight some of the key sectors identified by Caritas Australia’s partners as most pressing for the communities we serve.
Natural Disasters & Risk Reduction

People living in poverty are more vulnerable and marginalised within their societies due to poor quality housing, overcrowding and a lack of alternative livelihoods. They are consequently more exposed to the impact of natural disasters, losing their homes, their land and, in many cases, their lives. Natural disasters have always been a part of human and natural history, but climate change alters both the intensity and frequency of natural disasters.

Increasingly communities in wet tropical, mid-latitude and dry tropical regions will experience natural disasters including destructive cyclones, fire, flooding and prolonged drought. In part, the escalation of these disasters is attributed to the rising impact of climate change and global warming.

The increased likelihood and severity of these disasters will place further stress on communities with limited capacity and resources to respond; the lives and livelihoods of millions of people will be threatened by climate-related disasters. Within these communities effective Disaster Risk Reduction must be a key component of all development programming.

Year to year, Caritas Australia and its partners successfully respond to natural disasters the world over. However in our pursuit of lasting development, Caritas Australia also works in vulnerable communities to build resilience and reduce the risk of multiple and varied hazards.

Through Disaster Risk Reduction programs in the most vulnerable regions, the Caritas confederation is integrating the risks associated with climate change into its DRR framework. Caritas Australia has been at the forefront of this initiative, funding innovative DRR and Climate Change Adaptation (CCA) pilot programs across the world. As well as working within the Caritas network, we are collaborating within the INGO sector to ensure cross-learning and dissemination of best practices in DRR and CCA.
Rebuilding Lives in Samoa.

Caritas Samoa identified a need to ensure they had the skills, systems and support to be able to effectively respond to disasters, some of which can be causally linked to climate change.

Staff and volunteers have been provided with first aid training, climate change adaptation workshops and have been working closely with the National Disaster Management Office to develop a Disaster Response Plan.

Caritas Samoa also facilitates a youth Disaster Risk Reduction program, which uses sporting activities to encourage young people who live in rural and remote areas to play an active and positive role in their communities, especially during disasters.

In September 2009 a tsunami hit the South Coast of Upolu Island killing hundreds of people, devastating local industries and destroying communities. Caritas Samoa staff were among the first on the ground distributing water and food, and launched the largest NGO-funded rebuilding program.

After the 2009 Samoan tsunami one member from each affected family was chosen to help rebuild the village. Kose was chosen by his family.

“Now people know what to do and where to run,” Kose explains. “I really thank the Caritas people. We’re lucky our family has a place to live again. I have knowledge now on how to build houses. I’ll help my family build a shelter at our plantation so we have somewhere to stay if tsunamis keep coming.”
Food Security & Livelihoods

We live in a world where an estimated 925 million people are at risk of chronic hunger. This figure is in danger of rising even further, as climate change continues to compromise the regularity and extremity of agricultural cycles and weather patterns globally.

As the climate continues to change, subsistence farmers will become more vulnerable to food shortages, and the livelihoods of many communities, who lack the knowledge and resources required for adaptation, will be threatened.

Even seemingly minimal local temperature increases of between 1-2°C are expected to increase the risk of hunger in seasonally dry and tropical regions. Predicted increases in the frequency of droughts and floods will negatively affect local crop production, whilst inundation and increased salination will have a detrimental effect on many coastal and fishing communities.

The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) predicts that climate change will adversely affect approximately 200 million people and their families worldwide whose livelihoods depend on fishing and aquaculture.

Many of the communities that Caritas serves have already reported that prolonged drought and flash flooding have affected crop yields, productivity, and rising levels of salination due to sea level rise and storm surges have contributed to the destruction of farmland and compromised fresh water supplies.

Whilst decreasing crop yield productivity is an issue affecting the food security of farmers and their immediate families, it also contributes to increases in regional food prices, which hit the urban poor hard. In recent years, the soaring costs of food prices have been partially attributed to climate-related disasters. Recent research from the World Bank states that the increase in food prices since mid-June 2010 has led to an estimated 44 million net addition to the number of the global poor, highlighting the significant need to monitor the macro impacts of climate change as it relates to the livelihoods and food security of the world’s poorest communities.

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No crops, no food.

Livelihoods in Bangladesh

The small coastal village of East Jelekhali in the far South West of Bangladesh is located in one of the most vulnerable areas in the world. Rising sea levels, coupled with catastrophic cyclones are killing off the fertile land that this densely populated region of Bangladesh heavily relies on. Most people here are very poor, relying on subsistence farming for their survival. No crops mean no food, and just a short time ago that was the fate Gusto Gulpa and his family faced.

"My fields were OK. We were growing rice and vegetables and had household livestock.... Then Cyclone Aila struck on May 25th 2009. There was a huge tidal surge and for the first time our land flooded with sea water, contaminating all our fresh water supplies in our pond and the canal. We were lucky to escape with our lives.'

Following the cyclone, Gusto noticed that dramatic changes on his land. His rice and vegetable gardens stopped producing and due to the lack of fresh water, he had to sell of all his livestock.

Rising sea levels contaminate fields and fresh water supplies as saline water seeps through the soil at high tide. Cyclones and storm surges dramatically speed up that process, wiping out housing, eroding the land, salinating fields and canals, and contaminating the drinking water.

"I knew it was the salinity that was killing my land but I didn’t know how to reverse the effects," says Gusto.

Fortunately, Gusto was selected by Caritas Australia for training in climate change adaptation. Launched in July 2008, the project teaches farmers about climate change and its impacts on their land. They are taught to flush their land before planting to reduce salinity and to raise the dykes to stop any saltwater intrusion during any cyclones. Raising the dykes also gives them enough soil to grow vegetables.

Farmers are also taught to use natural fertilisers and pesticides and shown new techniques, which allow them to use the same fresh water to grow rice and farm fish in one field. With the assistance of the Government, Caritas also ensured that over 3km of a contaminated canal was excavated and restored. Today it supplies the fresh water so critical to many farmers and households along its length.

Now, Gusto’s small plot of land wouldn’t look out of place on a boutique gardening show. Perfectly kept, lush green vegetables patches with an assortment of crops sit high on the levy banks overlooking the symmetrically and beautifully patterned rice fields and fishpond below.

"I was once frustrated that nothing could be produced in my area but now I’m hopeful," says Gusto,
Water Security

Water is essential to sustain all life, and yet today 700 million people in 43 countries live below the water stress threshold (of 1,700 cubic metres per person per year), including one quarter of the population of Sub Saharan Africa.17

As a result of climate change, it is expected that by 2050, wet tropical areas will experience between 10-40 percent increases in the availability of water, whilst in dry regions, water will become between 10-30 percent scarcer.

Water scarcity already presents a significant development challenge in drought-ridden, mid-latitude and dry tropical regions; the likelihood of increasingly prolonged drought will drive water insecurity to critical levels in these vulnerable communities.18

The IPCC highlights the African continent as a highly vulnerable region, particularly in relation to increased water stress19, reductions in agricultural productivity and related increased risks of disease and other health issues.

In Australia’s own region, it is expected that approximately 1 billion people will face increased risks from reduced water supplies20.

Conversely, extreme weather patterns are expected to increase the frequency and scale of heavy precipitation events, heightening the risk of flooding and inundation in many regions. Whilst flood-affected communities will experience increased availability of water, the effects of salination and the contamination of potable water supplies will heighten water insecurity and vulnerability in flood-affected communities.21

In the face of an escalating water crisis, those communities most vulnerable to its effects must have the opportunity both to understand and to address the climatic challenges that threaten their human dignity.

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18 IPCC, Summary for Policymakers, op.cit., p 11.
19 It is predicted that by 2020, somewhere between 75 and 250 million people on the continent will be exposed to increased water stress due to climate change, ibid., p13.
21 IPCC, op.cit.
Stricken with drought.

Since 2007, Caritas Australia’s partners in Zimbabwe have urgently appealed for our help. Not only because theirs is a nation plagued by political instability, economic crisis and debilitating poverty, but because Zimbabwe is also a nation stricken with drought.

For the past decade, Zimbabwe’s poorest communities have struggled with a scarcity of crops and safe drinking water, as rains grow increasingly sparse and inconsistent. As the relentless dry spell continues to engulf the country, there is a shortage of both safe, clean drinking water and water for livestock. The water table for boreholes and protected wells has rapidly diminished and what remains of potable water sources evaporate in the high temperatures.

When the skies do open, they deliver devastating floods, contaminating water and wiping out crops. Over the past two years, flooding has demolished vital water and sewage infrastructure in the poorest villages and the risk of water-borne disease continues to mount.

Beginning in 2009, Caritas Australia ran a series of partner-led workshops across all eight dioceses it supports in Zimbabwe.

Initially, the workshops not only enabled Caritas Zimbabwe’s staff to more fully understand the impacts of climate change, but also empowered them to develop adaptation techniques in the grassroots programs they manage.

Following a ‘train the trainer’ community education model, Caritas Zimbabwe has sown the seeds of broad attitudinal change, and has achieved a high adoption rate of its climate change adaptation initiatives in some of Zimbabwe’s poorest agricultural communities.

As rural communities begin to more fully understand what is happening to their water, crops and livestock, new and sustainable farming techniques will take the place of old.

As Caritas and our partners harness the opportunity to address new development challenges, we will also continue to re-imagine our projects not only in response to a rapidly changing environment, but also in concert with the evolving needs of more skilled, knowledgeable and empowered communities.

Training Trainers in Zimbabwe
Migration & Displacement

Environmental migration is not a new phenomenon. However, the economic and physical risks accompanying global climate change will likely place additional pressure on many of the world’s poorest communities, increasing human movement both within countries and across borders.

As warming temperatures contribute to sea-level rise and coastal erosion, low-lying regions and coastal communities will be subject to inundation. Compounded by human-induced pressures on coastal areas, modelling to 2080 suggests that changes in sea level will expose millions to flooding every year\(^\text{22}\).

Whilst a significant proportion of the world’s densely populated low-lying communities will be exposed to increased flooding and inundation, the communities at greatest risk will be those with the least adaptive capacity\(^\text{23}\).

Migration and internal displacement will become a grave reality for many small island communities, some of whom are already forced to consider permanent relocation\(^\text{24}\). Significant numbers will also be affected throughout the developing communities of Africa and Asia.

The international community must act to strengthen frameworks, both legal and humanitarian, for responding to the needs of the poorest communities displaced by climate change. Urgent action must be taken to mitigate pressure on global migration movements, through reduction of global carbon emissions and adoption of ecologically sustainable practises.

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\(^\text{22}\) IPCC, Summary for Policymakers, op.cit., p12.

\(^\text{23}\) Ibid.

When Father Michael McKenzie addresses an audience there’s no denying him. Perhaps he owes his command of the room to his tall stature and resounding voice, but on the topic of climate change and its impact on his country - Kiribati - he mesmerizes with simple, stark and sobering truths.

“When we look at the climate change issue, for us it’s a life issue – people are trying to cope with it day by day. We are living on low-lying atoll islands and our islands are very narrow. In some places you can stand in the middle and on one side you see the ocean, on the other side – the lagoon.”

The Republic of Kiribati is a nation consisting of one island and 32 low-lying atolls in the Pacific Ocean. Most of Kiribati’s land is less than three metres above sea level and on average only a few hundred metres wide.25

“When the coastline from the lagoon started eroding, people started moving in – but the more you move in, the more you end up in the ocean. Those people on the ocean side, when they move in, they’ll end up in the lagoon.”

For Father Michael there’s no doubt that coastal erosion and the rising sea level represent a real and immediate threat to communities in Kiribati.

“Most people rely on well-water,” Father Michael explains, “so the intrusion of salty sea-water into our land causes a big problem for our fresh water – it affects our people and our plants as well.”

It’s not only salination that poses a risk to fresh water supplies; when ocean water floods into wells it carries with it the waste and contamination of its journey. For many families this means the runoff from their pigsties will end up in their drinking water.

Of all the challenges climate change poses to communities in Kiribati, most startling is the prospect that the islands will eventually be submerged.

“We have the idea of leaving the country – the idea has been introduced to the Kiribati community, but who’s going to take us, and are our people willing to leave?” Father Michael questions.

“People have the idea that we were born here, we grew up here, so we’re going to die here. Even though they see the signs of changes they can’t believe the extreme that one day we’re going to leave the island.”

“We are training people and perhaps it will be the first information they hear about climate change. But people are really experiencing the sea level rise. Some of the islands have already been submerged so I think now people are ready to hear and to understand.”

Father Michael, his families and his friends may be forced to relocate from their homes in Kiribati; each day until then they must continue to struggle against the grave and ongoing risks climate change poses to their most precious resource - water.

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Health

Climate change is an emerging and significant threat to the health of the world’s poorest communities, with projected climate change related exposures predicted to adversely affect the health of millions of people globally.

Climate change will affect, in profoundly adverse ways, some of the most fundamental pre-requisites for good health: clean air and water, sufficient food, adequate shelter and freedom from disease... The most severe risks are to developing countries, with negative implications for the achievement of the health-related Millennium Development Goals and for health equity - World Health Organisation 26

Projected food insecurity is expected to see the rates of malnutrition rise in the most vulnerable communities; child development and nutrition-related illness will be significant health challenges 27. Similarly - when coupled with warming temperatures - water scarcity, contamination, and flooding are likely to increase the distribution of water and vector-borne diseases and contribute to increased rates of diarrhoeal disease.

New patterns of risk will emerge, with humans, plants and animals becoming exposed to new pests and diseases that flourish only at specific temperatures and levels of humidity, posing new risks for food security and human health 28. The WHO highlights particularly vulnerable groups, concluding that women and children within the poorest communities are likely to bear most of this increased disease burden resulting from climate change 29.

Increasingly, those communities vulnerable to the impacts of climate change will experience deaths, disease and injury as a result of severe weather events, heat waves, droughts and fires 30. But long term systemic impacts must also be considered; additional burden will be placed on already overstretched health systems in developing countries, as they struggle to meet new and emerging health challenges.

26 WHO, p.6.
27 IPCC, Summary for Policymakers, op.cit.
28 FAO, op.cit.
29 WHO, op.cit., p.2.
30 IPCC, Summary for Policymakers, op.cit.
In the end, it’s all connected

Seeking Sustainability in Indonesia

Since 2004, Caritas Australia has supported Yayasan Mitra Tani Mandiri (YMTM), the Foundation for Partnership with Independent Farmers in West Timor, Indonesia.

The organisation was founded more than twenty years ago by a group of university students who believed their study of agricultural science should be applied to the pursuit of social justice. The group operates in 98 villages across five districts in West Timor and Flores, which include promotion of adaptation and mitigation initiatives to address the impacts of climate change on the health and livelihoods of local farmers and communities.

In the face of changing weather patterns and unpredictable crop cycles, YMTM are working to build secure food supplies and foster resilience in agricultural communities. They teach farmers to adapt to diversify crop sources, adjust planting times to match changing weather patterns, and develop irrigation methods which utilise rainfall and water more efficiently. They also promote more efficient use of energy and conservation of land.

With the support of YMTM, communities have embraced terraced farming, which limits the pollution intensive practice of slash and burn farming, and increases crop security through reduction of landslides and erosion. Tree planting is also widely encouraged as a means of improving the carbon storage capacity of the soil and assisting to reduce the atmospheric levels of carbon dioxide.

For its work in some of Indonesia’s most vulnerable communities, YMTM was awarded the UNDP’s Equator prize for poverty reduction and environmental conservation in 2010. Its entrepreneurial programs coupled with innovative agricultural techniques and irrigation methods have enabled poor communities to transform once dry, barren land into productive, agricultural farmland.

“We are proud, because there are very few NGOs which can do good agricultural work in dry areas, but we have been very successful…we work in areas that used to have hunger and nutrition problems, but now have food security,” says Yoseph Asa, YMTM Program Coordinator for Belu District.

The strength of YMTM’s approach lies not only in their scientific expertise, but also in the spirit of authentic partnership which underpins their work. Based within the communities they serve, YMTM’s staff are intimately connected with the unique needs and experiences of each village. They understand that the health and livelihoods of these communities are integrally linked to the health of the land and local environment.

“We are working with the poor to address the many challenges they face with a range of activities, including health and environmental education, agricultural training, development of farmer institutions and advocacy to local government,” says Vincent Nurak, Director of YMTM. “In the end, these issues are all connected.”
Disability & Marginalised Communities

Climate change threatens to undermine current and future development in the world’s poorest communities by disproportionately affecting people with disabilities and other marginalised groups. More than a billion people, or about 15 percent of the world’s population, are estimated to live with some form of disability. Persons with disabilities (PWD) are known to have poorer health outcomes, lower educational access, lower economic participation and higher rates of poverty than people without disabilities, typically resulting from difficulties experienced in accessing services, such as health and education, lack of income and social exclusion. These difficulties are exacerbated in the poorest communities, with the World Bank estimating that persons with disability constitute between 15 -20% of those living below the poverty line in developing countries.

Caritas Australia believes that policy development and interventions concerning climate change must address the holistic needs of the world’s poorest communities, including those most marginalised within them. Current impacts on PWDs must be considered, as well as emerging challenges resulting from likely increases in the prevalence of many disabling impairments as a result of events and processes accompanying global climate change, such as increased natural disasters and adverse health impacts. Disability advocates have expressed concern that, whilst marginalised communities will likely be disproportionately affected by climate change, there has been little examination of the enhanced vulnerability of PWDs. Key areas of concern have been identified, including reduced access of PWDs to infrastructure, shelter, basic services, migration pathways, however it is noted that key international reports have not specifically identified such needs or proposed recommendations regarding enhanced inclusion of PWDs in adaptation or mitigation initiatives.

Caritas Australia believes that persons with disabilities are in the best position to understand their own situations and to form solutions to the unique problems they face. Therefore, as the international community moves to address the emerging risks posed by climate change, it is essential that PWDs are provided with meaningful opportunities to highlight both their strengths and particular vulnerabilities, and that their views are considered in emerging strategies and research.

Policy Recommendations

The devastating consequences for the world’s poor of inaction on the issue of climate change necessitates that the global community join together to develop a robust and cohesive response.

Whilst immediate moves towards mitigation are essential, it is well understood that even the most dedicated efforts will not prevent further impacts of climate change in the coming decades. This makes adaptation essential, particularly in addressing short-term impacts in those communities most vulnerable to the effects.35 But the response cannot be focused on adaptation alone. If left unmitigated, climate change will likely exceed the capacity of natural, managed and human systems to adapt.

At present, there are considerable environmental, economic and social barriers to the widespread implementation of adaptive schemes. In the countries where Caritas Australia works, the unavailability of resources for building adaptive capacity presents a particular challenge.

There is, therefore, value in a mixed approach to climate change strategy that includes mitigation, adaptation, finance, and technological development and transfer. This could combine policies with incentive-based approaches, and encourage action at all levels from the individual citizen through to national governments and international organisations.36

Caritas Australia believes the four building blocks – as used in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) process in seeking agreement on an international post-Kyoto climate change framework – provide a useful structure upon which CA’s strategy to address climate change can be developed. These building blocks include mitigation, adaptation, finance, and technology transfer.

a) Mitigation

Mitigation refers to actions that are aimed at reducing the level of greenhouse gas emissions released into the atmosphere, and so addressing the root causes of climate change. This can be achieved, for example, by reducing consumption levels and switching to renewable energy sources.

Caritas Australia support the IPCC focus and United Nations (Copenhagen and Cancun) agreement on holding temperature increase to 2°C or less above pre-industrial levels. In achieving this goal, it is vital that developing nations, who are most at risk of the consequences of climate change whilst often bearing the least responsibility for its causes, be allowed to participate meaningfully in the international debate.

Beyond this, developed countries must accept that they have drawn on the Earth’s resources since Industrialisation at the expense of the world at large, and must therefore take the lead in mitigation efforts. Australia, the United States and Canada remain the highest per capita emitters of greenhouse gases, and are slowing the global mitigation effort.37 In view of this, Australia has a responsibility to exercise global leadership in the mitigation effort by implementing efficient means of reducing emissions through policy innovation.

36 Ibid.
b) Adaptation

Adaptation refers to actions taken to prevent or respond to the impacts of climate change already being experienced, such as disaster preparedness and agricultural diversification, irrespective of all mitigation efforts.

The serious consequences of a warming planet discussed earlier in this paper include increased frequency and severity of natural disasters, threats to livelihoods and food and water security, climate-related migration and displacement, and increased health risks. It is crucial that the international community implement strategic plans to assist people to adapt to a changing climate.

The poorest of the poor have few resources to respond to these increased threats, and there is a global responsibility to ensure that plans for adaptation include assurances that these vulnerable people have the capacity to adapt to their changing environments. Activities to assist vulnerable communities should be based on participatory development models, building on local, traditional knowledge where possible. Many of the communities that are already feeling the effects of climate change have valuable ideas to offer the rest of the global community, and a sincere exchange of knowledge and experiences is a vital step towards effective international adaptation.

It is imperative that all adaptation efforts accompany – rather than replace – ongoing development programs, and that funding is not reallocated from the achievement of development goals towards climate change response.

It is also vital that plans for adaptation include a commitment to the mitigation target of keeping the global mean temperature as far below 2°C as possible, thus rendering more substantial adaptation initiatives unnecessary in the future.

c) Finance

Finance refers to sourcing funds for implementing strategies around mitigation, adaptation and technology transfer, and establishing the mechanisms, delivery, and governance of these funds.

There are enormous financial costs associated with a changing climate, and billions of dollars will be needed to assist developing nations implement adaptation and mitigation strategies. As developed countries have attained post-industrialised success through the depletion of shared global resources, the financial burden of climate change mitigation and adaptation should therefore rest with these wealthier countries.

Caritas Australia welcomes innovative financing options that secure reliable funding to address climate change. To this end, we recognise the potential role of new international taxation structures, such as Tobin-style taxes, and the potential of effective carbon pricing mechanisms as highlighted in the Garnaut Climate Change Review Update. We welcome current efforts in Australia to introduce a price on carbon emissions designed to address the costs of environmental degradation and discourage excessive pollution, but assert that this mechanism must be measured closely in terms of outcomes delivered for the world’s poorest and most vulnerable communities.

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39 Garnaut, op.cit., p.11.
d) Technology Transfer

Technology transfer encompasses the development, transfer and sharing of climate-friendly technologies between nations. Access to innovative technologies will be crucial for communities in developing countries, as they seek to balance efforts to fight extreme poverty with the protection needs of the natural environment on which their future depends.

Garnaut highlights that increased investment in low emissions technologies, from both the public and private sector, will translate to reduced material costs for Australia’s overall mitigation efforts. Other key recommendations include increased investment in research, and the removal of regulatory barriers which stifle technological innovation and investment in developing communities\(^\text{40}\). As with all recommendations within this paper, Caritas welcome such innovative policies which aim to enhance protection for the world’s poorest.

In addition, Caritas Australia affirms that all cultures bring different knowledge, behaviours and practices to the field of climate change technology – whether simple or complex. The methods by which cultures around the world are endeavouring to cope with environmental changes can provide valuable insight to all in the global community. It is therefore essential that transfer efforts are accessible and afford community ownership and participation in mitigation and adaptation projects.

These four building blocks form a strong basis from which Caritas Australia has formed its climate justice campaign. As part of the A Just Climate campaign, we are asking the Catholic and broader Australian community to take action by asking the Australian government to:

- Increase funding to developing countries to assist with both adaptation and mitigation initiatives; i.e. increase funding and technology transfer to developing countries so they can fight poverty, build resilience to disasters and develop in sustainable ways.
- Take a leadership position\(^\text{41}\) on climate change to reduce global carbon emissions, both by implementing more effective policies to reduce our national greenhouse gas emissions and instilling a care for creation at international climate negotiations\(^\text{42}\).
- Support innovative finance for dealing with climate change i.e. Tobin-style taxation mechanisms, in order to meet the increased developmental costs of tackling climate change.

In addition to this, Caritas Australia is calling on Australians to:

- Achieve ecological conversion in solidarity with the world’s poor by assessing the overall sustainability of their own lifestyles and finding ways to actively reduce their own carbon emissions and broader ecological footprint.

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\(^{40}\) Ibid. p2.

\(^{41}\) ‘Leadership’ would mean Australia is at minimum, in the top 10 countries in terms of reducing our carbon emissions.

\(^{42}\) The next meeting of the United Nations Conference on Climate Change is due to take place in Durban, South Africa, in December 2011. More information can be accessed at: [http://www.cop17durban.com/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.cop17durban.com/Pages/default.aspx).
Conclusion

At the heart of its mission, Caritas Australia works towards the creation of a world that God desires to be just and compassionate. In our pursuit of this justice we commit to work for the protection of human dignity and for the promotion of healthy, empowered and resilient communities. For the international Caritas movement, authentic human development is integrally linked with stewardship for our Earth’s resources and thus, in the pursuit of genuine social justice, we must seek to redress the very real threat of climate change in the communities we serve.

Caritas Australia encourages Australians to answer our call to action – to take a stand for climate justice and help to reduce emissions in this country. As we work to enable the poorest communities to transition to more sustainable livelihood practices, we encourage our nation’s leaders to bolster support for climate change mitigation in the vulnerable communities it supports.

Caritas Australia recognises that climate change poses a real and dynamic challenge to the development community, and threatens to undermine the integrity of existing community development programs in the poorest reaches of the world. Caritas Australia’s staff, our program partners and the people we serve have seen first hand the devastating impact of rising sea levels, prolonged drought, flash flooding and severe weather events. From our experience in the field, we know that climate change poses a mounting challenge to community health, livelihoods, and food and water security, as well as increasing the threat of natural disaster and further marginalising already vulnerable communities.

As we work in solidarity with the poorest of the poor, Caritas Australia continues to innovate and deliver grassroots climate change adaptation programs, empowering communities to confidently face challenges of a warming climate. We urge the Australian public to act with us in solidarity: to urge our our political leaders to support climate justice, and ensure that the burden of climate change adaptation lies with those who have the greatest capacity to respond.

*If we are to achieve a just world, we must first achieve a just climate. Join Caritas Australia today - let us take a stand together.*
References


World Health Organisation(WHO), 2009, Protecting Health from Climate Change: Connecting Science, Policy and People,WHO, p6