

# **Environmental Protection and Environmental Justice Policy**

**MARCH 2020, VERSION 3**

## 1. Introduction

This policy should be read in conjunction with Union Aid Abroad - APHEDA's Climate and Energy Policy (2018).

The world faces a series of related environmental crises which disproportionately impacts Union Aid Abroad - APHEDA's global south constituencies through environmental in-justice. These crises include:

### 1.1 Climate Crisis

Union Aid Abroad - APHEDA recognises global warming as a fundamental threat to the health, rights, livelihoods, democracy and peace for workers and, in particular, low-income communities globally. Union Aid Abroad - APHEDA acknowledges the unique time-bound nature of the climate crisis whereby a small window of opportunity exists to undertake a fundamental shift in the world's energy system to avoid catastrophic climate change into the future. The burning of coal, natural gas, and oil for electricity and heat is the largest single source of global greenhouse gas emissions and provides the most pragmatic and efficient focus for pollution reduction.[i] The next five years are crucial for the world to transform its energy system away from fossil fuels and drastically reduce carbon pollution in line with science. Union Aid Abroad - APHEDA approaches the climate crisis as a core global justice issue and recognises the historic responsibility that global north countries have in creating and benefiting from the crisis. In the global south, women, workers, low-income communities and first nations groups have contributed least to carbon pollution nor benefited from the fossil fuel economy. Yet currently and into the future, it is these groups that are most impacted.

### 1.2 Waste Crisis

Growing global waste is an increasing public health and environmental threat. Without urgent action, global waste will increase by 70 percent on current levels by 2050.<sup>1</sup> Although they only account for 16 percent of the world's population, high-income countries combined are generating more than one-third (34 percent) of the world's waste. The East Asia and Pacific region is responsible for generating close to a quarter (23 percent) of all waste. By 2050, waste generation in Sub-Saharan Africa is expected to more than triple from current levels, while South Asia will more than double its waste stream. Plastics are especially problematic. If not collected and managed properly, they will contaminate and affect waterways and ecosystems for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. In 2016, the world generated 242 million tonnes of plastic waste, or 12 percent of all solid waste.

#### 1.2.1 Asbestos waste

Union Aid Abroad - APHEDA supports the campaign to ban asbestos across Asia. Continued asbestos use will produce tonnes of hazardous waste into the future and place a heavy burden of safe disposal on countries and communities with limited space and resources. In addition to the public health and occupational safety impacts of asbestos, we must urgently support bans to prevent the creation of further industrial waste disasters on a large scale.

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<sup>1</sup> "What a Waste 2.0: A Global Snapshot of Solid Waste Management to 2050" *World Bank* (2018)  
<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/30317>

### 1.3 Biodiversity depletion crisis<sup>2</sup>

Ecosystems, species, wild populations, local varieties and breeds of domesticated plants and animals are shrinking, deteriorating or vanishing. The essential, interconnected web of life on Earth is getting smaller and increasingly frayed. This loss is a direct result of human activity and constitutes a direct threat to human well-being in all regions of the world. Nature is declining globally at rates unprecedented in human history with 1 million animal and plant species now threatened with extinction, many within decades, more than ever before in human history

The average abundance of native species in most major land-based habitats has fallen by at least 20%, mostly since 1900. More than 40% of amphibian species, almost 33% of reef-forming corals and more than a third of all marine mammals are threatened. The picture is less clear for insect species, but available evidence supports a tentative estimate of 10% being threatened. At least 680 vertebrate species had been driven to extinction since the 16th century and more than 9% of all domesticated breeds of mammals used for food and agriculture had become extinct by 2016, with at least 1,000 more breeds still threatened. The five direct drivers of change in nature with the largest relative global impacts so far in descending order are

- (1) changes in land and sea use;
- (2) direct exploitation of organisms;
- (3) climate change;
- (4) pollution and
- (5) invasive alien species.

## 2 Framework and Definition

2.1 We abide by the Australian *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). Consistent with the definition in the EPBC Act, the following aspects of the 'environment' must be considered:

- ecosystems and their constituent parts, including people and communities
- climate and natural systems and processes
- natural and physical resources
- qualities and characteristics of locations, places and areas, and
- heritage values of places; social, economic and cultural aspects of the above, including those related to indigenous peoples.

2.2 Environmental Justice defined:

The Australian government defines environmental justice as “the just distribution of environmental risk and benefits amongst the population and the right of all to meaningful participation in environmental decision-making”.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> UN Report: Nature's Dangerous Decline 'Unprecedented'; Species Extinction Rates 'Accelerating' (<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2019/05/nature-decline-unprecedented-report/>)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice>

However in the context of the Global South, the domination of subsistence agriculture for livelihoods broadens the definition of environmental justice to ‘the collective struggles of rural working people to democratise access, ownership, and control of land, water and other natural resources’.<sup>4</sup>

### 3. Purpose of the policy

The purpose of this policy is to ensure Union Aid Abroad - APHEDA implement programs that promote environmental justice through:

3.1 An ecological sustainable development process which supports people's relationship to nature and each other, while maintaining future options through conservation of natural resources and biological diversity.

3.2 A movement building approach which supports communities experiencing environmental injustice to confront the power structures which oppress them and their environment for the creation of a harmonious ecological commons.

### 4. Scope

This policy applies to all employees, volunteers, contractors, consultants, members of the Board or any person who is engaged in representing Union Aid Abroad - APHEDA in any undertaking including study tour participants, and other visitors to projects, including DFAT personnel. The Policy also applies to implementing partner organisations of Union Aid Abroad – APHEDA.

### 5. Principles

5.1 Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA will apply the following principles from Australian government’s “Environment Protection Policy for the Aid Program”<sup>5</sup> to our projects:

- Principle 1: Do no harm
- Principle 2: Identify, assess and manage environmental and social impacts
- Principle 3: Engage effectively with stakeholders
- Principle 4: Work effectively with partners
- Principle 5: Promote improved environmental and social outcomes

5.2 Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA is committed to the principle of *Movement Building* as a response to the environmental in-justice experienced by the working classes and marginalised people in the Global South. We seek to help build democratic civil society, social justice movements, and representative organisations – whether they be of workers, women, farmers, young people, people with disabilities, refugees, and others - so they can define and fight for their rights and against power structures that seek to oppress them. Organised movements of people make change possible, by exerting political pressure for just solutions. Including solidarity across borders which targets the perpetrators of such environmental in-justice, who are often based in the global north.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.tni.org/en/agrarian-environmental-justice>

<sup>5</sup> DFAT, 2018, <https://dfat.gov.au/aid/topics/aid-risk-management/Pages/environmental-and-social-safeguards.aspx>

5.3 As an Australian Council For International Development (ACFID) Signatory organisation, we also commit to *Sustainable Change* as a quality principle and to the promotion of environmental stewardship and sustainability.<sup>6</sup>

5.4 Australia and Country Offices environmental practices will include:

5.4.1 Absorption of environmental costs. Where possible, practical and effective, Union Aid Abroad - APHEDA will pay to mitigate potential environmental harm caused by the organisation. This may occur in the procurement of resources or sourcing of social owned renewable energy for example.

5.4.2 Sustainable practices and waste reduction. Union Aid Abroad - APHEDA recognises that energy use and waste creation will occur as part of any regular activities. Where possible staff will implement systems, and consciously plan activities according to principles of sustainability.

5.4.3 Sharing knowledge. Union Aid Abroad - APHEDA will communicate clearly with partner organisations about the implementation of this policy and support them in sustainable practices.

## 6. Policy Guidance

The Executive Officer must issue guidance under this policy, which establishes the processes for the detailed obligations, roles and responsibilities for the integration of environmental protections against negative impacts and for environmental justice, including but not limited to the following:

- a) Organisation-wide risk management
- b) Project risk management and mitigation
- c) Periodic Assessment
- d) Due diligence management
- e) Training
- f) Partner organisation responsibilities

## 7. External: Legislative and Regulatory Framework

Environmental and social safeguard for the aid program, DFAT, January 2018

Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act)

Environment Protection and biodiversity conservation regulations, 2000

Paris Climate Change Agreement (UNFCCC) 2015

## 8. Document Control

Version	Revision Description	Approved by Board (date)
1	<i>Policy on Environment and Development Original</i>	
2	Renamed Environment Policy and updated	March 2012
3	Renamed Environmental Protection and Environmental Justice Policy and updated	March 2020

<sup>6</sup> Australian Council For International Development (ACFID), "Code of Conduct," (revised 2019), [https://acfid.asn.au/sites/site.acfid/files/ACFID\\_Code\\_Dec%202019\\_published\\_high%20res\\_0.pdf](https://acfid.asn.au/sites/site.acfid/files/ACFID_Code_Dec%202019_published_high%20res_0.pdf)

