

CONCERN
worldwide



POLICY DOCUMENT

Environment Policy

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1. Introduction

The mission statement of Concern Worldwide reads: “We work with people living in extreme poverty to achieve major improvements in their lives which last and spread without ongoing support from Concern. Informed by the priorities of affected communities, we go where the needs are greatest, and work to save lives, protect and develop livelihoods, support recovery and build long-term resilience.”

Sustainable development should meet the needs of the present without compromising the needs of future generations. This requires careful environmental stewardship alongside social and economic development. To ensure that no one is left behind and that we contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Concern, as part of its mission, seeks sustainable solutions by working with communities on positive environment management and climate change adaptation.

There is only one planet. We all rely on it to sustain our futures. The threat of global warming is an existential one for mankind. It cannot be ignored and we need to act right now, with a sense of urgency. Concern sees the negative impacts of climate change on the poorest people in the world and we have a duty to them to lend our voice to the many calling for more responsible policies and behaviours to reduce global emissions. Our advocacy will use scientific evidence around mitigation needs linked to the ‘climate justice’ principle that those most hard hit by the impacts are those who are contributing least to global emissions. Our advocacy will contribute the added value of our experience in fragile and conflict affected contexts of adaptation needs and how they can be supported in those contexts. But we will also practice what we preach. If we are calling on others to reduce emissions, then we need to reduce our own as much as possible without compromising the purpose of Concern. Every tonne of greenhouse gas that we emit directly through our operations contributes to climate change. As such, we have a moral duty to cut down or avoid emissions of greenhouse gases.

2. Why Environment?

Concern understands extreme poverty to mean a lack of assets or return on those assets, reinforced by inequalities and risks and vulnerabilities. The natural environment represents a key asset, and its ongoing destruction is contributing to increased vulnerability of the extreme poor, as well as an eroded asset base with increasing desertification and likely impacts on agriculture and food security.

Climate change is currently regarded as the most serious global environmental threat. It threatens, indeed undermines, our entire mission. Poverty, hunger, displacement and conflict interact with and are negatively impacted by climate change, climate variability and extreme events in multifaceted ways. We recognise that climate change is a poverty multiplier, with its impacts expected to increase the total number of people living in poverty. We also view climate change as a major cause of the increasing occurrence of natural disasters and as an increasingly significant factor in many of the conflicts which are the key driver of humanitarian crises. Climate change is also expected to be a key driver of migration and displacement in the coming decades.

In order to reduce vulnerability to climate change and other shocks and stresses, we recognise that this requires efforts across all sectors (livelihoods, education, health, water and sanitation). We also recognise that women are disproportionately affected by climate change and disasters, owing in particular to gender inequality in access to resources and lack of opportunity to participate in the decision-making processes.¹

Addressing extreme poverty, inequalities and vulnerability requires the essential natural resources and eco-system services provided by the environment to be protected. Caring for our environment is one key aspect in our work with people experiencing poverty to achieve lasting improvement in their lives.

3. Global Environment Policy

Nearly four decades after the 1972 UN Conference on Human Environment, the 2015 *UN Sustainable Development Summit (2030 Agenda)* recognised climate change as one of the greatest challenges of our time as part of the *17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)* aimed at eliminating extreme poverty, endorsed by 193 UN member states. In 2018, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) stated that ‘[c]limate-related risks to health, livelihoods, food security, water supply, human security, and economic growth are projected to increase with global warming of 1.5°C and increase further with 2°C.’

The link between sustainable development and limiting global warming to 1.5°C is recognised by the SDG for climate action (SDG 13), which seeks to combat climate change and its impacts. Protection of the environment, while arguably linked to all of the SDGs, is explicitly addressed in SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), SDG 14 (Life below Water) and SDG 15 (Life on Land).

Importantly, the 2030 Agenda also led to the historic adoption of the *Paris Agreement* at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)’s Conference of Parties (COP) 21 in which the 196 state parties to the Agreement announced quantitative commitments to reducing their greenhouse gas emissions and to supporting adaptation efforts. In the same year (2015), a global blueprint for disaster risk reduction (DRR) and a more systematic focus on stronger risk management was achieved through *the Third UN World Conference for Disaster Risk Reduction (WCDRR) - the Sendai Framework for DRR 2015–2030*.

Although these global developments have represented positive signs of an emerging global consensus on the need to take action, actual implementation of commitments made remains very slow relative to the huge challenges faced. Emission reduction commitments made by countries in the 2015 Paris Agreement to stave off the worst effects of climate change are not on track. We should be promoting the change necessary to limit warming. As such, we need to ensure that our operations are consistent with a low-carbon world.

1. UNFCCC

4. Definitions

Concern takes the 1972 *Stockholm Declaration (Conference on the Human Environment)* definition of the *environment* as “the natural resources of the earth, including the air, water, land, flora and fauna and especially representative samples of natural ecosystems”.²

We also recognise the UNFCCC definition of *climate change* as: “a change of climate which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and which is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods”.³

5. Concern’s Principles of Environmental Sustainability

Building programmes that contribute positively to sustaining and restoring the natural environment.

- Minimising unintended negative impacts on the natural environment arising from our programmes and support operations, including our supply chain.
- Ensuring that environmental protection activities do not increase inequalities, especially those that would further marginalise people affected by extreme poverty.
- The provision of humanitarian assistance in emergency contexts, such as large-scale refugee crises, may sometimes have unintended adverse effects on the environment. We commit to identifying and working to mitigate the potential environmental impact of our emergency responses.
- Promoting the adoption of renewable energy and IT technology in our offices and operations to ensure carbon neutral development pathways.
- Enhancing capacity of Concern staff, partners and communities to act responsibly towards conserving the natural environment.
- Advocating for improved environmental governance and management, in both policy and practice.

6. Scope of the Policy

This policy covers all of Concern’s operations. We will continuously promote climate change adaptation and examine the environmental impacts of our country programmes and in our support offices in Ireland, the UK, the United States and South Korea, adapting our work and behaviour as necessary and feasible.

This policy on protecting the environment should be viewed alongside our other organisational policies – of particular relevance are the *Approach to Emergencies* (2018) and *How Concern Understands Extreme Poverty* (2010)

2. See Principle 2 in the [Declaration of the UN Conference on Human Environment](#), Stockholm 1972

3. [United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change](#)

papers. It should also be seen within the context of Concern's focus on fragile contexts, and alleviating extreme poverty and hunger.

During all stages of programme design, implementation and evaluation, as well as in organisational behaviour and practice, Concern commits to seek to understand and limit the potential for our programmes to unnecessarily damage the environment. We will take responsibility for and are committed to managing environmental standards in our operations and supply chain processes (such as managing waste from our supply chain in line with legislation and internationally accepted best practice).

With regard to the key hazard of climate change, Concern will actively support communities across our country programmes to adapt to its impacts and work to minimise any negative effects on climate change arising through our operations and programmes.

7. Policy Aim

To protect and sustain the natural environment as a means of protecting the foundation of livelihoods of the communities we work with, so that people living in extreme poverty can achieve major improvements in their lives which last and spread without ongoing support from Concern. This will include programme activities such as supporting communities and local institutions on positive environment management, community resilience and climate change adaptation. It will also include reducing the carbon footprint of our organisational activities.

Concern is an international, humanitarian, non-governmental organisation dedicated to the elimination of extreme poverty and the reduction of human suffering, primarily in fragile countries and our focus will remain on emergency responses and getting people out of extreme poverty. We acknowledge that we have to protect and sustain the environment if we are to address poverty's root-causes and get people out of poverty in the long-term. While we are ambitious in addressing the climate crisis and environmental degradation, we will have to be realistic about how much we can spend solely on environmental action.

8. How We Implement this Policy in Concern

In our long-term work and where applicable in our humanitarian work, Concern is committed to integrating environmental aspects in all operations and programming through:⁴

Programmes

- Increased focus on climate change adaptation programmes in our countries of operation and related advocacy/policy influencing.
- Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) considerations in programme design. The DRR approach can highlight challenges in the overuse of natural resources and point toward appropriate solutions. It can also contribute to reducing exposure to disasters and seeks to enhance community preparedness and resilience to shocks and stresses.

4. This commitment is reflected in [Concern Strategic Plan 2026–2030](#).

- Minimise negative impacts and build in protection of the natural environment through mainstreaming environmental sustainability in all programmes.

Operations and Organisational Behaviour

- To reduce the negative environmental impact of offices, structures and assets in each Concern country of operation through identifying and implementing appropriate measures to reduce our carbon footprint and resource waste. We will also explore minimising negative environmental impacts in the choice of suppliers and in our purchasing decisions.

Advocacy and Communications

- Contribute to policy, strategy and implementation changes that create a more sustainable environment and which are balanced with protecting the needs of people affected by poverty. Concern will bring the added value of our experience and analysis of climate change adaptation and reduction in fragile and conflict affected contexts.

Funding

- To identify and mobilise funding opportunities to support the implementation of green practices across Concern offices and climate action across Concern programmes, ensuring transparency towards external stakeholders.

9. Key Performance Indicators

From the following:⁵

1. Number of Country Strategic Plans indicating commitment to mainstreaming environmental sustainability activities. Proportion of evaluations reporting adaptation to climate change.
2. Carbon footprint reduced, measured by Carbon Audit.
3. Increased green behaviours by staff
4. Solutions and evidence focused papers on climate change adaptation interventions in fragile states
5. Active engagement in climate and environment coalitions, forums and relevant clusters.
6. Increased levels of financing from “green finance”.

5. See the Environment Strategy for a longer list of KPIs against seven objectives. This list is illustrative only.

10. Ownership and Accountability in Concern for Environmental Protection

All Concern staff, as employees and as individuals aligned to our core values, will play a central role in implementing this policy. However, the following Concern personnel have overall responsibility for ensuring that the environment is taken into account throughout Concern's work:

- The Concern Board is responsible for the approval of policies, and, on a three-yearly cycle, for monitoring and evaluating implementation of these.
- The Concern CEO is ultimately responsible for the implementation of policy.
- The International Programmes and SAL Directors are responsible for overseeing the implementation (annually) and the monitoring of this policy (every three years).
- Senior Management will monitor the implementation of this policy through strategy development and implementation. The SMT will delegate the operational management of the environment strategy to a cross-organisational Steering Committee led by a SMT Champion.
- The strategy will identify leads on specific actions across the organisation and these will be members of the Steering Committee.
- The Strategy, Advocacy and Learning (SAL) and Emergency Directors are responsible for technical support to humanitarian and development programmes to implement this policy.
- Country Directors are responsible for implementing this policy in country offices and programmes.