



Change the climate:

An action guide for creating equitable solutions to the climate crisis

While least responsible for causing climate change, poor people bear the brunt of its impacts. As an international relief and development organization dedicated to finding lasting solutions to poverty and injustice, Oxfam America is undertaking a campaign to create equitable solutions to the crisis. We are asking that the US cut greenhouse gas emissions and provide financial assistance so that the most vulnerable communities can adapt. For more information, go to www.oxfamamerica.org/climate.


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Cover: A woman harvests potatoes in Chongoene, Limpopo Valley, Mozambique. To combat increasing climate change-related drought, Oxfam and local partner organizations are helping the community plant smaller gardens and diversify their crops. *Joel Chiziane / Oxfam*

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▶ Yum Yeara, 55, of Cambodia, says, “When I was a girl, I never saw a flood. I worry about my grandchildren and how they will deal with the floods.” *Jim Holmes / Oxfam*

The human impact of climate change

You know that global warming is a reality for our entire planet: natural resources, wildlife, and people. But did you know that climate change affects the world’s poorest people first and worst?

For many people living in poverty, human-induced changes in weather have already caused an increase in hunger, water shortages, and disease. If climate change continues at the current rate, hundreds of millions of people worldwide could be displaced. Reports suggest that international conflicts are likely to intensify as a result of increased competition for scarce natural resources.¹ Given these predictions, Oxfam America and other like-minded organizations believe that climate change will significantly undermine the fight to end poverty and injustice.

But there is hope. The US has the opportunity to lead the world in tackling the climate crisis. To do so, the US must make a concrete commitment to reducing its greenhouse gas emissions—and helping developing countries reduce their own emissions through clean energy technologies. The US and other high-emitting countries must provide financing to help vulnerable communities in developing countries adapt to climate change. And, through US climate change policies, companies producing greenhouse gas emissions must contribute to helping poor people here and abroad.

Now is the time for us to change the climate of the debate and ask US lawmakers to do their part. A number of legislative proposals dealing with climate change are moving through the US Senate. The possibility is increasing for a House proposal. And we have a chance to engage voters in the 2008 election and work closely with the new presidential administration.

This short guide will give you the information you need to promote these issues in your community. Join us now in the effort to create equitable solutions to the climate crisis.



Key messages: Climate change

When you talk about climate change with the general public, it's important to speak plainly and simply. Put these key messages and killer facts into your own words when you talk with friends, relatives, reporters, legislative aides, and members of Congress.



Seedlings grow through the cracked earth in Gaat Teidouma, Mauritania, where Oxfam helped villagers build a dam to provide water for crops and irrigation. *Ami Vitale / Oxfam*

How does climate change affect the world's poorest people?

People in developing countries, who are least responsible for causing climate change, are more than 20 times as likely to be affected by climate-related disasters as people in the developed world.² And they are least able to cope with these disasters.

- Accelerated global warming has been observed, and the impacts of this warming are proceeding much faster than predicted in the 1990s.³ In the last two decades alone, the total number of natural disasters—mostly floods, cyclones, and storms—quadrupled. Over the same period, the number of people affected by disasters increased from around 174 million to an average of over 250 million a year.⁴
- As of August 2007, some 248 million people were affected by flooding that year in 11 Asian countries.⁵ Extreme floods are common in South Asia, but climate change models predict even heavier monsoon rainfall—and intense rain in unlikely places.⁶ In Bangladesh, where scientists have warned that a rise in sea level may flood 20 percent of the land, typhoons and floods have already increased in severity.⁷
- Between July 2007 and October 2007, Africa's worst floods in three decades hit 23 countries from Senegal to Somalia. Nearly two million people were affected.⁸
- By 2020, up to 250 million people across Africa could face more severe water shortages.⁹ In some countries, yields from rain-fed crops could be halved during the same period.¹⁰
- According to a report by a panel of retired US generals and admirals, climate change acts as a “threat multiplier for instability” in some of the most volatile regions of the world.¹¹

What can the US do?

As the largest economy in the world, as well as one of the largest historical producers of greenhouse gas emissions, the US has a responsibility to provide international leadership on climate change. We must start reducing our emissions to achieve an 80 percent reduction from 1990 levels by 2050. We must start providing funds for poor and vulnerable communities in developing countries to adapt to a changing climate. And we must create policies to ensure that companies producing greenhouse gas emissions are helping, not harming, poor people at home and abroad.

What does it mean to “help poor people adapt”?

In our work on the ground, Oxfam America has learned that communities must take early action to reduce their vulnerability and build their resiliency to climate-related risks. Coping with climate change can mean upgrading hurricane early warning systems; raising community awareness about severe weather events; building new flood-proof homes and schools; testing and growing drought-tolerant crops; or installing efficient, low-cost irrigation systems. By investing in projects like these, above and beyond existing development funds, the US can lead the world in tackling the climate crisis.

Why is US climate legislation important?

Congress must act now to lead on the issue of global warming. Even as cities, states, and some companies begin to reduce emissions, without federal legislation, global warming pollution will continue to rise in the US. Federal legislation might also give the US the chance to influence global negotiations on climate change, a move that could strengthen our relationships—and reputation—abroad. Finally, poor people are already feeling the effects of climate change, and if we wait to act, the cost of solving the problem will be even higher. For example, if global greenhouse gas emissions are not cut fast enough, steeper reductions will be required down the line.¹²



What you can do

Here are some ways to spread the word about the human impact of climate change.



Oxfam representatives at the recent UN Climate Change Conference in Bali, Indonesia, dressed as polar bears to call attention to the human impact of climate change. Climate change affects our entire planet—wildlife, natural resources, and people.

Laura Rusu / Oxfam America

Write your members of Congress

During the next year, Americans have an extraordinary opportunity to create equitable solutions to the climate crisis. All we need now is your voice! Ask your members of Congress where they stand on climate change by sending them handwritten letters. They'll pay close attention to personal notes from constituents.

Seven steps

- 1. Get the format right.** Address your letter to the member of Congress in this way:
The Honorable [Jimmy Stewart]
In-district address
Dear Senator/Representative [Stewart],
- 2. Begin with your “ask.”** Your “ask” is your primary request of your member of Congress. Start your letter by saying, “As a constituent in your district, I am writing to ask that you support legislation that helps developing countries adapt to climate change.”
- 3. Be concise.** Lay out your arguments in two or three paragraphs.
- 4. Make it personal.** Make sure your letter reflects your views. Talk about the big picture, and then connect it back to your own concerns as a constituent. (Example: “As a socially responsible citizen, I believe that all of us—individuals, communities, and countries—must take responsibility for our part in the climate crisis.”)
- 5. Mention that you are a voter.** Remind your member of Congress of your power.
- 6. End with a clear request.**
“I urge you to support legislation that reduces harmful greenhouse gas emissions from the US and provides assistance for poor people to adapt to climate change. As a world leader, the US has a responsibility to stop adding to the climate crisis and start helping those in need.”
- 7. Get friends and family to write letters.** Show them how easy it is to get involved.

Visit your members of Congress

Better in person? Then schedule a meeting with your members of Congress. You can do the same with a legislative assistant who works on environmental or climate issues, or the appropriate staff member.

Four steps

- 1. Schedule a meeting.** To schedule a visit with your member of Congress, call the district or DC office, whichever is closest to you. For visits to the local office, seek appointments during Congressional recess periods when your member of Congress returns to your district. After you schedule your meeting, send a confirmation letter that includes a list of those who will attend the meeting as well as your contact information.
- 2. Prepare for the meeting.** Meetings generally last about 20–30 minutes. Use this as a road map for planning purposes.
 - Research your member of Congress. You can use the Congressional directories—www.house.gov or www.senate.gov—to find biographical information, committee and subcommittee assignments, and key issues of concern for your member of Congress. Review the voting record of your member of Congress and any publicly stated views or opinions. If your member has not made any public comments, make a note to ask him or her to do so.
 - Determine your agenda and goals for the meeting. If you are meeting in a group, practice your talking points and decide which issues will be raised. Have different people cover different issues, but have one person act as the facilitator for the discussion and deliver the bulk of your message. Be certain everyone agrees on the central message and what will be asked of the member of Congress.
 - Prepare an information packet to leave with your member of Congress. This should include information on your organization, including the group's contact information, as well as a description of your objectives. If you have a business card, you should leave it with the receptionist. You should also include recent articles or reports that you think would be relevant.
- 3. Hold the meeting.** After introducing yourself and thanking the member of Congress for meeting with you, get right to the point.
 - Get your member of Congress talking; ask the member how much he or she knows about the issue. Listen well! You will hear occasional indications of his or her actual views, and you should take those opportunities to provide good information.
 - Ask about his or her positions. How will your member of Congress vote?
 - Do party leaders have positions on the issue?
 - What is his or her influence likely to be?
 - Is the office hearing from people who oppose reducing our greenhouse gas emissions and/or investing in adaptation? If so, what are their arguments and what groups are involved?
 - Does the member of Congress know any other key representatives or senators who should be contacted to get favorable action on climate change legislation?
 - What is the member of Congress hearing from others about upcoming pieces of legislation on climate change?

- Is your member of Congress willing to facilitate contact for further lobby activities?
 - Make sure that when it's your turn to speak, you give a personal testimony about why climate change is important to you, as a voter and a constituent. Emphasize that you would like to see legislation that commits funds to help the world's poorest people adapt to climate change and that reduces harmful greenhouse gas emissions from the US. Use the key messages provided on pages 3–4 of this guide to support your statements.
 - Get him or her to commit to a particular task. Tell your member of Congress you will follow up with him or her.
4. **Follow up.** Thank the member of Congress or legislative assistant. Even if no commitments were made, still follow up to say thank you and provide additional information.

Write a letter to the editor

The Letter to the Editor page of a newspaper is one of the most well-read sections. That's where the opinions and views of the community are shared and debated. It's well worth the effort to submit letters to the editor because they provide the opportunity to educate thousands of people in a community—from your next-door neighbor to your member of Congress.

Nine steps

1. Understand why it's important.

- Letters help editors decide which stories to cover.
- Members of Congress closely monitor letters to gauge the opinions of their constituents.
- Letters encourage a public dialogue.

2. Prep yourself.

- Check your newspaper for guidelines by looking at the opinion section of its web site and the other letters it publishes.
- You can submit your letter via email or fax.
- Include your contact information (name, email, and phone).

3. Be timely.

- Your letter is much more likely to be published if it refutes, contributes to, or corrects a recently published piece from a media outlet.
- After you identify a story or editorial that needs a response, submit your letter as soon as possible—ideally within the same day the article ran, but no longer than three days after it was published. Don't forget to reference the article.

4. Be short and sweet.

- Try to keep your letter under 200 words.
- Stay on topic. Keep your letter brief and to the point. Focus on making one key point in two or three paragraphs, and use just a couple key facts or statistics, or a very brief story, to support your argument.
- Present your experience. Add a personal touch.

5. **Feel free to praise.** Every letter doesn't have to be critical. If a newspaper positively covers the human impact of climate change, write a letter praising or thanking the media outlet for this coverage or support.

6. **Take time and thought.** Organize your letter logically.

- Address the issue.
- Make your statement.
- Present solid evidence. You can refer to the key messages in this guide.
- Keep it positive.
- Demonstrate your reach (e.g., there are X supporters for adaptation funding in this community).
- Close by recapping (i.e., restate your position, make your recommendation, and don't forget the call to action).

7. **Before you finish...**

- Double-check your facts, figures, and all quotations.
- Proofread your letter carefully for spelling, grammar, and punctuation.
- Get feedback.

8. **Make it count.**

- If you want to catch the attention of your members of Congress, mention them by name.
- If relevant, explain the need for a particular piece of climate change legislation.
- Use your credentials. If you have personal experience or expertise in the subject area, mention it. This gives credence and authority to your statements.

9. **Follow up.** Call to make sure the paper received your letter, and then call a few days later to find out if it will be printed.



Other ways you can help

Here are some ways to spread the word about the human impact of climate change.

▲
A third-grade teacher, Esti, shows Sintia Waromi how to use a sanitation kit during a community event in Nabire, Indonesia. Oxfam partners are conducting disaster preparedness and public health training in the region. *Jim Holmes / Oxfam*

1. Join our online Climate Change Action Team.

Want a chance to influence presidential candidates, legislators, and other key actors on climate change? Sign up for our online action team, and become part of an elite group of activists working closely with Oxfam America on climate change issues. You'll receive monthly email updates on our campaign and information on new and creative ways to make a difference.

To sign up, go to www.oxfamamerica.org/actionteam.

2. Host an event.

Spread the word, have fun, and get more people involved—host a house party or a public awareness-raising event in your community.

For instructions, visit www.oxfamamerica.org/climate.

3. Become part of Oxfam America's online community.

Join us in creating lasting solutions to poverty, hunger, and injustice. Sign up for our online community, and receive a monthly email newsletter with the latest about all of Oxfam's work.

Visit www.oxfamamerica.org/join.



Contact Oxfam



It's business as usual as customers and street vendors adapt to life on the flooded streets of Dhaka, Bangladesh. Shifts in rainfall patterns as a result of climate change, combined with water management problems and increasing populations in at-risk areas, make South and Southeast Asia especially vulnerable to floods. *Shafiqul Alam / Oxfam*

Email

Got a good story to tell about your organizing work? Have questions?
Email us: climatechange@oxfamamerica.org

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Go to www.oxfamamerica.org/climate to learn more.

Notes

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