

A Latin American Perspective on Climate Change



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Introduction

As part of the Latin America Partnership Programme Arrangement (LAPPA) signed in 2008, representatives of twelve UK Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) working with civil society in Latin America, along with representatives from the UK Department for International Development (DFID), met on 17-19 June 2009 in Lima, Peru. The purpose of the event was to share experiences from the region and discuss ways of addressing climate change, looking ahead to the United Nations (UN) climate change conference in Copenhagen in December 2009 and beyond.

The LAPPA is DFID's main engagement with UK NGOs working on the ground in Latin America and is a key mechanism by which these NGOs and their partner agencies seek to realise the rights of the poorest sectors of societies in the region and feed lessons back to the international development community.

Latin America contributes relatively little to greenhouse gas emissions — together with the Caribbean, it produces about ten percent of total carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions, while rich countries produce five times that amount, with only twice the population size — but is one of the regions that is most vulnerable to climate change and its impacts.

Threats to the environment and human development are among the effects of climate change already being felt in the region. Hurricanes and tropical storms have increased in intensity, leaving death and destruction in their wake. Sea-level rise has hit coastal areas, particularly in vulnerable parts of Central America, Venezuela and Uruguay, leading to loss of coastal land, infrastructure, and biodiversity. Changes to snow and rainfall patterns have led to problems of flooding in some areas, and drought in others, whilst warming in high mountain regions (particularly in the Venezuelan, Colombian, and Peruvian Andes) is melting glaciers and affecting farming and water availability.

“Changes in temperature and in the frequency and intensity of rainfall have increased the number of floods and droughts, adversely affected food production, the provision of water and the viability of ecosystems and environmental services these provide. Glaciers have receded to levels without precedents in the last 10,000 years. Entire regions have been affected by climate change. Plants and animals have been displaced or perished for lack of adaptive capacity. The increasing intensity of storms and hurricanes and the surge in their destructive forces have affected hundreds of thousands of victims and led to multi-million dollar damages. Climate change has shifted vectors for disease such as malaria or Chagas’ disease to different regions where they previously did not exist”¹.

¹ From ‘Up in Smoke? Latin America and the Caribbean: The threat from climate change to the environment and human development’, The Working Group on Climate Change and Development, 2006

Climate change is also having major consequences on economic development in Latin America, particularly as a result of increases in the intensity and frequency of disasters. Some of the region's key sectors such as agriculture, mining and fisheries are being affected, with major job and investment losses in productive sectors such as tourism also predicted. The Andean Community of Nations (CAN) has suggested losses worth four and a half per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) by 2025, roughly equivalent to Andean countries' annual spending on health.

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the number of additional people at risk of hunger in Latin America is likely to reach five, twenty six and eighty five million in 2020, 2050 and 2080 respectively. Seventy-seven million people are predicted to be under water stress by 2020. Children and youth are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and its effects on their rights to education, health, protection and wellbeing.

Climate change is affecting the poorest and most socially excluded population groups in Latin America the most, as they are least able to cope with the impacts of extreme weather conditions:

“Poorer people are more susceptible to the destruction caused by hurricanes and flooding for a variety of reasons. The poor typically live in substandard housing that is more susceptible to damage from winds, heavy rain and floodwaters. Substandard or non-existent sewage facilities and lack of potable water in poor neighbourhoods can result in greater exposure to water-borne diseases after flooding. Areas that are historically prone to flooding or mudslides are often inhabited by the poor”².

► The Sayaxché community in Guatemala where ActionAid supports indigenous women.
Credit: ActionAid



² From 'It's raining, it's pouring, it's time to be adapting: report of the second AIACC regional workshop for Latin America and the Caribbean', Global Environment Facility, 2004

Peru

Safe schools adapted to climate change

Latin American countries are not standing idly by whilst climate change occurs; they are developing **adaptation** plans and projects to overcome its effects:



Save the Children UK has been supporting a project in the Andean highlands of Peru to reduce the impact of climate phenomena on children's health by raising parents' awareness, training teachers, teaching children about their rights, and lobbying local authorities to include risk management in development plans, with an emphasis on children's rights.

▲ 'Los Andes' education centre, San José de Belén community, Laria district, before insulation.

The project has upgraded fifteen schools in the department of Huancavelica, insulating roofs and walls against the cold to help children avoid acute respiratory infections. The school is now considered an agent of change for addressing climate change, and the project recognises the right of children and adolescents to participate, involving them in practical measures for disaster prevention, adaptation and mitigation.

Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru

Adaptation to the impact of rapid glacier retreat in the tropical Andes



► Huaytapallana glacier in Junin, Peru.
Credit: Gabriela Fontenla/
CARE Peru

With the support of CARE International UK, the governments of Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru are helping to increase the resilience of ecosystems and local economies to the impacts of rapid glacier retreat in the tropical Andes through pilot adaptation strategies that demonstrate costs and benefits.

In its first year of implementation, the project has designed and selected sites for the installation of eight automatic meteorological stations on glaciers in each country. The main work areas include regaining water storage capacity, improving irrigation infrastructure, and sustainable use of water resources for agriculture and human consumption. From the outset, the project has involved local institutions and communities.



Brazil

Reforestation on small rural landholdings in Rio Grande do Sul

This project, supported by CARE International UK, plans to use the carbon market to combat poverty, taking advantage of carbon credits to cover planting and maintenance costs. In the long run, it seeks to transform what began as forestation of permanent preservation areas as part of a sustainable development process, implementing a new production model. It is hoped that this initiative will promote regional dialogue about sustainable development.

Although the project has a thirty-year time frame, it is already evident that the carbon market is not appropriate for small landholdings — in other words, for the poorest people. The recommendation is to set up a financing plan that includes other sources in addition to carbon credits.



▲ Planting trees along watercourses on small farms can add up to a significant level of reforestation overall
Credit: Raja Jarrah/CARE Brasil

Latin America is also implementing good, innovative practices for **mitigation**, to reduce and capture greenhouse gas emissions and thereby reduce the causes of climate change:

Peru

Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) in protected areas, community territory and forestry concessions in the Amazonian region

This WWF-supported initiative involves assessing carbon stocks in the department of San Martín, the most deforested area in Peru. The goal is to quantify the carbon storage potential of twelve types of natural forests, including natural protected areas, communal territories and forestry concessions in a region that suffers the threat of deforestation and degradation.

▲ Aerial view of the Peruvian Amazon.
Credit: Brent Stirton/
Getty Images/WWF-UK



In addition, a national REDD Roundtable has been established with forty-five members including grassroots organisations, national and regional government agencies, and NGOs, which has allowed the incorporation of civil society perspectives. The REDD Roundtable has been set up to steer the development of a national REDD programme in Peru

and to inform the Peruvian government's position in the international climate negotiations. The REDD Roundtable has been acknowledged as a key group for the development of national REDD policies.



Bolivia

Civil Society Platform on Climate Change

The Civil Society Platform on Climate Change is a unique space directed by the five key social and indigenous movements of Bolivia, supported jointly by CAFOD, Christian Aid and Oxfam GB. Established in February 2009, the Platform represents more than one hundred and eighty farming, indigenous and grassroots organisations that recognise the need to join forces nationally, regionally and internationally to lobby for climate justice to guarantee the security of the most vulnerable sectors and demand concrete measures from those who are most responsible for the problem.



▲ P Juan Villca Pujio, aged 66, from Potosí, Bolivia. The photo is taken in the greenhouse that CAFOD's partner CIPE helped him to build. Credit: Karen Luyckx/CAFOD.

The Platform emphasises the need to recognise the value of, promote, and effectively implement knowledge, world views and ancestral technologies as central elements of new development alternatives. The Bolivian Government recognises the Platform as an interlocutor and as a forum for consultation with civil society on climate change issues, and members of this body are currently part of official delegations in international negotiations.

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Latin America places great importance on **civil society strengthening and advocacy** to reduce the causes of climate change and to overcome its effects:

Peru

Civic oversight and climate change proposals



In Peru, Oxfam GB and Christian Aid are supporting the Civic Movement on Climate Change (MOCICC). MOCICC, a network of more than one hundred and fifty civil society organisations, that was publicly launched in Lima in June 2009 at an event in which rural communities described how climate change is affecting their health, access to water and farm production. MOCICC seeks to raise public awareness about the impact of climate change and lobbies to get the issue onto the agenda of national and regional authorities.

MOCICC was launched after a year of organisation that began with the Peru Jubilee Network's Climate Change Commission and continued with the Group to Promote Civic Action on Climate Change. During that time, it lobbied environmental authorities to modify a norm to allow civil society participation in the National Climate Change Commission. This civic network is calling for debate on,

and implementation of, an appropriate national strategy on climate change, with civil society participation.

▲ With global warming, Peru's ice and snow capped peaks are melting, leaving highland communities in Ayacucho with fewer water reserves. Indigenous people are having to find ways to protect their water supply. One way is to build small reservoirs like this one, to capture and store rain and meltwater. Credit: Christian Aid/Hannah Richards



10 principles for action on climate change in Latin America

01 *“Commit to emission reduction and low-carbon development”*

Efforts to support mitigation in developing countries, including Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) actions, are not enough. They must be accompanied by real commitments to implement sustainable development policies (including clean and efficient energy) in rich countries. Latin America should lead the way in demonstrating what low carbon development pathways might look like and how it is possible to achieve growth and prosperity without increasing carbon emissions and environmental degradation.

02 *“Listen to traditional and indigenous knowledge”*

Traditional knowledge of the environment and local observations of climatic change such as changes in temperature and precipitation patterns, can provide important information about climate change science and impacts. It is crucial to listen to local knowledge without romanticising it, and to involve solution-seeking communities in the debate about climate change vulnerability and adaptation. In Latin America, we can learn specific lessons from engaging with indigenous and community partners who have first-hand experience of climate change impacts.

03 *“Ensure sustainable funding”*

Adequate and predictable climate finance, under the control of the UN, is critical to ensure that vulnerable developing countries can make the investments they need to cut emissions and adapt to the impacts of climate change. Latin American countries should advocate internationally for democratic and transparent mechanisms for climate finance and, at a national level, ensure there are robust governance and institutional arrangements for allocating funding.

04 *“Promote corporate social responsibility on climate change”*

There should be binding standards for the private sector in such sectors as energy, logging, mining and water, with a system of independent certification to promote and verify higher social, economic and environmental standards. Latin American countries should promote such standards internationally, regionally and nationally, working with other governments, the private sector and civil society to ensure standards are robust, transparent and implemented.

05

"Promote the participation of civil society"

Broad-based participation of civil society, and in particular those representing socially excluded groups such as children and youth, women and indigenous communities, will maximise the potential future impacts of climate change policy at the local community level. Latin America has a very strong civil society, and simple, transparent mechanisms are needed for listening to their voices in the formulation and implementation of climate change policy.

06

"Create enforcement mechanisms"

The final agreement reached at the UN climate change conference in Copenhagen must be legally binding on all those that agree to abide by them, with sanctions for those who do not comply. Governments should be held to account for their emission reduction targets and their commitments to provide climate finance. Latin American countries should be key signatories on a robust and binding agreement.

07

"Make scientific knowledge more accessible"

If the scientific language used to explain climate change is made more readily usable and accessible, more people in vulnerable developing countries will understand the issue. They can then use that knowledge to reduce their own vulnerability and pressure governments to take action. For example, the impacts of climate change on the Amazon, the importance of the Andean region in terms of water supply and recycling of water from the Amazon, and the knock-on effects for the whole region and globally, are key messages to communicate to the public in Latin America.

08

"Make the rural-urban connection"

Integrated proposals on key climate-related issues such as energy, pollution and water, must take into account urban and rural dimensions. Latin America is a rapidly urbanising society, with an estimated seventy-five percent of the population now living in urban areas. Rural people moving to urban areas often find themselves in a state of urban poverty caused by disassociation from previous ways of life, loss of land tenure, and less capacity to cope with shocks caused by climate change. Connecting urban social movements with rural grassroots organisations would be one way of bringing together the two perspectives.

09

"Call for climate justice"

Some civil society groups are advocating for the formation of an international tribunal on climate justice, and an international compensation fund for the main victims of the effects of global warming. The call for climate justice in Latin America is fair, because those who suffer most from the negative effects of climate change are those who are least responsible for it.

10

"Share responsibility"

Adaptation to climate change is not something to be imposed on vulnerable developing countries. Latin American countries need to be proactive, taking action, with appropriate support (including capacity building, technical cooperation and finance for their adaptation work) from rich countries.

The members of the LAPPA are:

ActionAid International	www.actionaid.org
CAFOD	www.cafod.org.uk
CARE International UK	www.careinternational.org.uk
Christian Aid	www.christianaid.org.uk
DFID	www.dfid.gov.uk
HelpAge International	www.helpage.org
International HIV/AIDS Alliance	www.aidsalliance.org
Oxfam GB	www.oxfam.org.uk
Plan UK	www.plan-international.org
Progressio	www.progressio.org.uk
Save the Children UK	www.savethechildren.org.uk
World Vision UK	www.worldvision.org.uk
WWF	www.wwf.org.uk