

December 01, 2023

USAID's Climate Strategy, 2022-2030

Steven E. Hendrix

Share:



The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has launched its new Climate Strategy (2022-2030). ¹ Climate change jeopardizes the progress made in development and intensifies worldwide inequalities. It leads to greater shortages of water and food, promotes displacement and conflict, and heightens the demand for humanitarian aid. Since 2000, climate-related disasters have affected almost four billion people, with an estimated cost of more than \$2.2 trillion. ² Without urgent action, the World Bank estimates that climate change could push an additional 100 million people into poverty by 2030. ³

The climate crisis impacts every corner of USAID's work. Almost 90 per cent of disasters arising from climate change are related to water, and up to five billion people could face water scarcity by 2050. It is the world's most significant environmental health risk, responsible for six million premature deaths yearly—more than HIV/AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis combined. Air quality is another threat posed by climate change: nine out of ten people across the globe now breathe unhealthy air.

iManage Closing Folders

M&A deals are complex.
Signature page management shouldn't be.

WATCH A DEMO

As custodians of the planet, we have a narrow moment to pursue action. This urgency means that all USAID sectors and partners—working across the U.S. government and international community—must contribute to global efforts to rapidly reduce emissions and build the resilience of communities most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

USAID Administrator Samantha Power noted, “all of USAID is now a climate agency.” ⁴ Climate change touches every corner of global development and prosperity. USAID’s response also presents a massive opportunity to change the world for the better. And every USAID sector and Mission has a role to play in the transformation of global systems like agriculture, energy, governance, infrastructure, and health.

Through the Strategy, USAID is taking strong steps towards a resilient, prosperous, and equitable world with net-zero greenhouse gas emissions. USAID is working with partner countries to implement ambitious emissions reduction measures, protect critical ecosystems, transition to renewable energy, combat the threat of climate change, and promote the flow of capital toward climate-positive investments. Achieving this will require a holistic approach to development. The new Strategy builds on USAID’s previous 2012-2018 Climate Change and Development Strategy, which focused on specific climate change mitigation and adaptation measures. While USAID has been doing all this for decades, it is now really scaling up.

USAID’s convening power, global presence, longstanding partnerships, and breadth of technical expertise position the Agency to help coordinate a whole-of-government effort to tackle the climate crisis. USAID intends to leverage these comparative advantages by working closely with the State Department and other U.S. departments and agencies to complement and reinforce their efforts. Currently, it is coordinating with the State Department on several major initiatives. USAID Administrator Power co-leads an interagency working group on “The President’s Emergency Plan for Adaptation and Resilience,” known as PREPARE. ⁵ Many existing programs and initiatives fall under the umbrella or framework of PREPARE. PREPARE’s goal is to improve the resilience of half a billion people by 2030, which aligns with our Climate Strategy adaptation goal.

Right now, there is a considerable adaptation finance gap—less than two percent comes from the private sector—and that will be an area of focus for USAID moving forward under PREPARE.

At the United Nations Climate Change Conference of Parties (COP26) in November 2021, President Biden announced the Plan to Conserve Global Forests: Critical Carbon Sinks. ⁶ Under the Plan, USAID is involved in over half the programs currently underway. In many countries where USAID works, deforestation is the main source of greenhouse gas emissions. This is especially important for tropical countries, as their pledges to lower these emissions—referred to as nationally determined contributions (NDCs)—are central to the Paris Agreement. ⁷ Under this Plan, USAID announced a new target to support the protection, restoration, or management of 100 million hectares of critical landscapes—an area more than twice the size of California—by 2030.

The Agriculture Innovation Mission for Climate (AIM for Climate/AIM4C) is a joint initiative by the United States and the United Arab Emirates. ⁸ USAID is supporting the initiative with \$215 million over five years to help 200 million people raise agricultural productivity in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa by 25 percent by 2030.

President Biden and European Union President Von der Leyen invited countries to support the Global Methane Pledge (GMP), also launched at COP26 in Glasgow. ⁹ Methane is a powerful but short-lived climate pollutant. It accounts for about half of the net rise in global average temperature since the pre-industrial era. Half of the GMP countries are USAID partner countries. USAID is currently focusing on sectors such as livestock, wetlands, and solid waste management, where there is high potential for abatement.

USAID also works with communities that are disproportionately vulnerable to climate change. The new Strategy elevates equity and locally led solutions as core principles. USAID will center its actions in the context of the diverse communities in which it works, and engage local, marginalized, and underrepresented groups as agents of change. This will greatly increase

USAID's impact in tackling climate change, and it will also go a long way toward making programs more resilient to the climate impacts that are already affecting them.

To operationalize this, USAID is taking an “All Hands-on Deck” approach. For example, in the education sector, USAID is integrating the climate into school curricula and literacy programming to improve awareness of the climate crisis. It is partnering with the public and private sector to train youth for green jobs. And it is making schools and education systems more resilient to climate disasters, so they don't need to close as frequently, which disrupts children's learning.

The Strategy includes targets and goals. As with the COP announcements, these targets are not business as usual: they are ambitious and reflect the importance and urgency of the situation. They also reflect how a whole-of-agency approach can yield much greater results than treating this solely as an “environmental” issue. The Agency is swiftly implementing individual plans of action across its country Missions and bureaus, developing more detailed implementation guidance and building capacity to operationalize the strategy.

The Strategy is organized around two main Strategic Objectives: Targeted Direct Action and Systems Change, and a Special Objective to Do Our Part.

For Targeted Direct Action, the Strategy recognizes the need to prioritize and confront the most urgent demands of the climate crisis in the here and now. USAID will carefully target climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts to the highest priority communities and locations—those with the most urgent needs or most immediate opportunities—in order to maximize its impact.

The Systems Change Objective acknowledges that fully addressing the climate crisis requires long-term, transformative changes that affect every aspect of society. It will be neither easy nor quick. USAID will take a systems approach to these larger transformations—such as transforming food systems to be more resilient, less wasteful, and less environmentally destructive, or transitioning economic systems to be less carbon-intensive—in ways that are

comprehensive, equitable, and locally led. These two Strategic Objectives are mutually reinforcing: many programs and activities will contribute to both, in parallel or sequentially.

The Special Objective to Do Our Part aims to transform USAID's own workforce, operations, and policies to substantially reduce carbon emissions, adapt to the climate crisis, and further climate justice. USAID also expects its implementing partners to strive to meet these goals, and will support them in their efforts. This will include implementing sustainability improvements and strengthening the diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility of the climate workforce.

Embedded in the Strategy are several foundational principles. These are incorporated into all planning and activities, as applicable and feasible. They call for support of sustainable and equitable climate actions that are locally led, owned, implemented and tailored and context-appropriate. The Agency seeks to center its actions in the context of the diverse communities in which it works, and engage local, marginalized, and underrepresented groups as agents of change. USAID will partner with the private sector to expand the scale, impact, and sustainability of programs. It will elevate nature-based solutions as key tools to absorb carbon, reduce disaster risk, support livelihoods, and improve food and water security. And it will support the rigorous research, technology and development needed to identify and deploy effective climate solutions, including those locally known and developed.

USAID's Strategic Framework aims to not only confront the most urgent demands of the climate crisis, but to also transform systems in a way that helps lock in a trajectory for lasting and feasible net-zero and climate-resilient pathways. In all of this, USAID commits to empowering accessible and inclusive approaches through which local communities—and the marginalized and underrepresented groups within them—are meaningfully engaged as climate change agents.

The Strategy also calls on USAID to think about how it can ensure that it reflects on these values internally. This includes reforming its operations in

order to combat and be resilient to this crisis. It also means making the workforce stronger through an enhanced focus on diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility.

Endnotes



1. U.S. Agency for Economic Development (USAID), *USAID Climate Strategy 2022-2030* (Apr. 2022), <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2022-11/USAID-Climate-Strategy-2022-2030.pdf>.
2. Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters Emergency Events Database (EM-DAT), Institute of Health and Society, University of Louvain, <https://www.emdat.be> (accessed Sep. 19, 2023).
3. Jafino, Walsh et. al., *Revised Estimates of the Impact of Climate Change on Extreme Poverty by 2030 (Policy Research Working Paper No. 9417)* (Sep. 2020), World Bank, <http://hdl.handle.net/10986/34555>.
4. Center for Strategic and International Studies, *USAID Administrator Power on the State of Global Food Security and Nutrition* (July 18, 2022), <https://www.csis.org/events/usaaid-administrator-power-state-global-food-security-and-nutrition>.
5. White House, *PREPARE ACTION PLAN, President's Emergency Plan for Adaptation and Resilience (PREPARE)* (Nov. 7, 2022), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/PREPARE-Action-Plan.pdf>.
6. White House, *Plan to Conserve Global Forests: Critical Carbon Sinks* (November 3, 2021), https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Plan_to_Conserve_Global_Forests_final.pdf
7. Paris Agreement to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Dec. 12, 2015, T.I.A.S. No. 16-1104.
8. Agriculture Innovation Mission for Climate, *About AIM for Climate* (AIM for Climate/AIM4C), <https://www.aimforclimate.org> (accessed Sep. 20, 2023).
9. U.S. Department of State, *U.S.-EU Joint Press Release on the Global Methane Pledge Energy Pathway*, (June 17, 2022), <https://www.state.gov/u-s-eu-joint-press-release-on-the-global-methane-pledge-energy-pathway/>.

Authors

**Steven E. Hendrix**

USAID Senior Coordinator

Steven E. Hendrix, USAID Senior Coordinator, State Department Office of U.S. Foreign Assistance (F); and State Department Managing Director - Planning, Performance, and Systems (FA/PPS); Senior Research Fellow, DePaul University College of Law, International Human Rights Law Institute

ENTITY:

INTERNATIONAL LAW SECTION

TOPIC:

INTERNATIONAL LAW

The material in all ABA publications is copyrighted and may be reprinted by permission only. Request reprint permission [here](#).

ABA American Bar Association |

/content/aba-cms-dotorg/en/groups/international_law/publications/international_law_news/2023/fall/usaaid-climate-strategy-2022-2030/