

# Written Evidence Submitted by WaterAid to the International Development Committee inquiry on Climate Change, Development and COP26

## Introduction

- Founded in 1981, WaterAid is a major international non-governmental organisation which promotes water, sanitation and hygiene in 28 countries in Africa, South Asia, the Pacific and the Americas.
- WaterAid is working with Governments in developing countries, supporting them in their response to COVID-19, as well as helping to build resilience and preparedness to future peaks of this virus or any future health or climate related risks.
- The communities where WaterAid works are at the front line of climate change and are struggling to cope. WaterAid is supporting people in Africa and South Asia to boost access to improved water services taking into account increasingly severe environmental impacts such as flooding and drought. We are also working with communities to conduct risk assessments to ensure that people's access to clean water is not jeopardized in the medium and long term.
- Working in partnership with HRH Princes Charles as part of his Sustainable Markets Initiative, we have recently launched the [Resilient Water Accelerator](#), which aims to unlock more climate finance for climate-resilient water and sanitation across the global. This is a joint public / private initiative, which works with the likes of UNICEF, UNDP, multilateral development banks, Deloitte and Governments including the UK and Bangladesh.

## Summary - Climate & Water

- The communities where WaterAid works are at the front line of climate change and are struggling to cope. WaterAid is supporting people in Africa and South Asia to boost access to improved water services considering increasingly severe environmental impacts such as flooding and drought. We are also working with communities to conduct risk assessments to ensure that people's access to clean water is not jeopardized in the medium and long term.
- As we face unprecedented challenges in the short-term, but also long-term threats to supply chains, global governance and public health, global collaboration has never been more important. The Covid-19 pandemic demonstrates all too clearly and tragically that failure to focus on international issues does not keep them from your doorstep. It is therefore vital that we build collaboration on critical issues including pandemics, climate change and the exploitation and destruction of nature.
- Few issues could be more critical than people living without safely managed water or without even basic water supplies. Despite significant progress, around 785 million people still live without even a village water-pump or covered-well close to home and 2 billion people live without a water service free from contamination, putting them at risk of water-borne disease. These people are already struggling to cope and are unable to respond to emerging challenges, such as disease outbreaks or the increasing impacts of climate change.
- As climate vulnerable people experience changing weather patterns, less predictable rainfall, salt-water intrusion and increased exposure to disease, access to climate resilient and inclusive WASH (clean water, decent sanitation and good hygiene) presents a critical line of defence. For these communities, access to clean water can be the key difference between coping and not coping with climate change, and this recognition is currently almost entirely absent from climate discussions.

- At the same time, the people who will suffer most have done the least to cause the climate crisis. It is therefore crucial and the responsibility of major emitters, such as the UK, that enough capacity and resources are available for the poorest and marginalised communities to become and remain resilient to the challenges and uncertainties that climate change brings. This includes prioritising adaptation in climate action and ensuring a significant increase in adaptation finance for the provision of water for people currently forced to live without, thus increasing their ability to cope with the effects of climate change.
- It is time for the formal climate discussions and climate action to show a deeper recognition of the importance of ensuring access to water as a key climate adaptation strategy. Delivering on sources of funding from key climate financial instruments for enabling such access is a crucial building block of any society, and vital to climate resilience. Securing basic services such as water and sanitation, and ensuring these services are resilient and sustainable, will mean billions of people have a firm foundation to thrive and prosper in the face of crises. The UK Government's environmental and climate diplomacy can and should be a rallying point to build new pathways to green prosperity and secure a triple win of poverty reduction, environmental protection, and disaster risk reduction.

### **Case Study: Water & Climate in Nepal**

- 11.3% of the population are without even a basic water service close to home.
- 73% of the population are without a safe water source.
- 44th most vulnerable country in the world to climate change.
- Average carbon footprint per person: 0.3 tonnes, slightly less than a return flight from London to Istanbul (0.37 tonnes).

Due to its geography, Nepal is exposed to a range of climate risks and water-related hazards triggered by rapid snow and ice-melt in its mountains, and intense rainfall in the foothills during the monsoon season. The Dolakha region is particularly prone to climate-related disasters. It was devastated by a landslide in September, following unseasonably heavy rains. While water management issues also affect the area, the Nepalese government has designated it as having 'high' vulnerability to climate change – with communities enduring droughts and flooding.

Govinda Budthapa is responsible for overseeing the water system in the area and coordinating the local community groups who help maintain infrastructure. The community had already dug the new trenches to lay pipes, but COVID-19 interrupted the work. Govinda resumed the work once safety measures were in place, but then a landslide hit, blocking access to water supplies. Govinda told us:

“Due to the landslide and then the flood, one of the water sources was completely covered up by the debris and the other three were badly affected. There was no human casualty, but the landslide destroyed the pipeline and the water sources very badly. If the landslide occurs next year in the rainy season, it will be useless to do any construction. It will be a total waste of time and resources. Once work can start, the plan is to create a gabion wall in which baskets are filled with stones to create a barrier which will help protect the pumps.”

Govinda works with the authorities to ensure water supplies are sustainable and designed to meet the local population's needs long into the future. “Sustainability is another challenge. On the one hand we are quite prone to natural disasters like landslide and floods, and on the other hand there are chances that the water source might dry up or the water flow will become small. In such cases, it will be a big challenge for us to make sure that the water scheme we construct will run for a long time.”

## What the UK Government needs to do

**All International Climate Finance (ICF) must have “reduce poverty” as a central pillar:** The Government agreed with the committee’s previous recommendation on this. However, this cannot be a smokescreen for the fact that ICF should be new and additional to existing flows of finance under the UNFCCC. This is because climate impacts are in and of themselves “additional” to development need, and additionality is core to global agreements on tackling climate change.

Completely separating development and climate finance programmes in the climate emergency is not appropriate – all development projects must take into account climate change, and all climate projects ought to contribute to development goals. However, the finance for ICF must be additional to meet both the UK’s commitments to sustainable development and the Paris Agreement. This is especially relevant in the context of COP26.

**Champion Locally-Led Adaptation:** Despite having contributed least to climate change, many of the world’s poorest and most marginalised people find themselves on its frontline, all too often without the resources or capacity to adapt. This injustice must be addressed through a global effort to mobilise finance, build partnerships and focus our ambitions on equitable development and the delivery of resilient services such as water, sanitation and hygiene, health, education and social protection. At present however, the most vulnerable communities are not prioritised by climate finance, and an assessment by IIED shows that of trackable climate finance only 10% goes to locally-led projects (Soans, 2017).

Enabling the most marginalised to adapt to climate change means reaching them with climate finance and empowering them to participate in the design and planning of adaptation interventions: a locally-led adaptation approach. Climate change is a threat multiplier, increasing all manner of risks at multiple scales, means that those who understand the complexities of how existing threats manifest and are managed must be engaged in adaptation decision making. Given the highly localised way that climate risks manifest, this means that empowering and engaging local people not only in the design, but the implementation of adaptation projects, is critical to their chance of success. Core to entrusting, engaging and empowering local people with the capacity to engage in building resilience to climate risk is getting sufficient, effective, targeted and sustainable finance to those on the frontlines.

The UK Government has signed up to IIED’s Principles of Locally-Led Adaptation (LLA), which is very welcome. At the recent Climate & Development Ministerial event hosted by the UK Government, the importance of LLA was repeated highlighted, which is also welcome. However, real leadership in this area requires the UK Government, in its position as COP26 President, to put significant money behind these commitments. The Least-Developed Countries (LDCs) call for 70% of all ICF globally to go to the local levels. As a matter of urgency, and based on the primacy of adaptation to success at COP26, the UK Government should commit 70% of its adaptation finance to go to LLA as soon as possible – committing 1/3 of its ICF to LLA.

**Get back to 0.7% as soon as possible:** Climate and development go hand in hand. Too often, it is the countries that are most in need of development finance who are also most at risk of the impacts of climate change – be that increased frequency of floods, droughts and extreme weather events, or slow onset crises such as desertification and sea-level rise.

This is both an injustice and bad for global economic prosperity. It is an injustice because it is those who have done least to cause this crisis that are suffering first and most from its effects. Developing countries are in-effect the down-stream communities forced to drink polluted water from the

factory at the top of the hill making profits without having to pay for the pollution they are causing. This also makes bad economic sense, as a failure to address the economic harms of climate pollution leads to an unsustainable global economy, based on the failure to appropriately value the environment which is the basis of all prosperity.

The UK has a strong record on addressing these issues through its international aid budget, but this record is being tarnished by recent savage cuts – including to cut WASH by 80%, resulting in an in-effect 10% reduction in all global bilateral grant-based finance for WASH. To be a climate leader on the global stage the UK must be return to 0.7% as soon as possible.

### Alignment with the SDGs

**Commit more support to basic services:** Adaptation continues to be underfunded compared to mitigation, with a recent study by ODI and WaterAid showing that only 5% of global spend on climate change is allocated to adaptation. This will hurt the poorest communities who have done the least to cause climate change most. Many of these communities already lack access to basic services such as health care, education and WASH. Without access to these basic services, communities cannot build resilience to climate change or any other crisis.

Delivering on adaptation must mean delivering quality as well as quantity. By using the SDGs as a template for what resilient communities need, and aligning ICF with the SDGs, we can see an increase in the effectiveness of adaptation. In particular, more support for basic services is required to give communities the basis from which they can build adaptive capacity and empower them to lead local initiatives to address the impacts of climate change they are already experiencing.

**Primacy of WASH:** You cannot be resilient to anything without access to basic WASH. Building adaptive capacity and resilient communities must have WASH at the core of any approach. However, for the same reasons that SDG6 on WASH is lagging behind, we do not see WASH integrated into approaches to adaptation globally. This is often the result of injustice and privilege. When water becomes scarce due to prolonged dry-spells, or becomes salinized due to rising sea-level, the burden of securing access usually falls to women in many of the poorest and most marginalised communities across the world. Aligning with a pro-poor approach and the SDGs, the UK Government should champion initiatives that seek to get embed support for WASH in climate adaptation programmes, in recognition of the primacy of WASH to climate resilience.

### What we need to see at COP26

**Mitigation:** It is vital that COP26 delivers an adrenaline boost to mitigation actions globally. Recent data from Climate Action Tracker shows that if current commitments are met, the world may hold temperatures to 2.4C this century. This was reported as a success, and it is welcome that new pledges are reducing the expected levels of warming that we will see by 2100. However, 2.4C is devastating for millions of people in the global south. Countries need to urgently get on track to policies aligned with the 1.5C target, and the principle of Common But Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR+RC) which requires those with the greatest means and responsibility to bear the largest share of the responsibility for emissions reductions.

**Adaptation:** Whilst urgent action on mitigation is vital, it all too often grabs the headlines, and adaptation is deprioritised politically and financially. However, **COP26 will succeed or fail based on the issue of adaptation.** This is because many of the most impacted countries are becoming frustrated by the persistent failure of the developed nations to implement policies to get on track to 1.5C warming. In addition, there is a feeling that the adaptation goals of the Paris Agreement are not

being adequately fulfilled. For example, in climate finance, we know that only around 20% of global grant-based climate finance to developing countries goes to adaptation. When you look at total climate finance spend globally, this figure drops to 5%.

At COP26, we need to see new pledges from developed countries to rapidly increase their climate finance, and for negotiations to start in earnest for a more stretching new climate finance goal for post-2025 to replace the \$100bn target. We welcome comments from the COP President Designate at the recent Climate & Development Ministerial that this \$100bn goal is a “floor, not a ceiling”. We need to see more action from the UK Government to ensure that it is doing all it can to drive more commitments to finance from some of the world's biggest polluting countries. Lastly, it is vital that the discussions on a new climate finance goal for post-2025 include a commitment to a separate goal for adaptation finance – given the failure of the existing goal to mobilise finance for this area.