



# Climate and Environmental Sustainability Policy

## Details

<b>Policy &amp; Procedure Owner</b>	ERF Board	
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## Abbreviations

ACFID	Australian Council for International Development
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
ERF	Edmund Rice Foundation
QP	Quality Principle

## Definitions

ACFID Member	A not-for-profit organisation that has obtained accreditation with ACFID
Board Members	Voluntary directors of ERF's Board
Donor	Members of the public including individuals or organisations who contribute to ERF in cash or in-kind
Partner	Any organisation which has an MOU or contract with ERF
Program	Programs are overarching development approaches and initiatives that set priorities and guide project outcomes, results and activities. Programs can comprise ministries or entities
Project	Projects are the development activities of a Program
Primary Stakeholder (beneficiary)	Children and adults who participate in and are directly impacted by ERF partner projects
Staff	Employees, contractors, subcontractors, outworkers, apprentices and trainees, work experience students, volunteers and any other person who performs work for ERF
Stakeholder	Anyone who interacts with ERF and its Partners including but not limited to suppliers, contractors, volunteers, donors, etc.

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## Contents Page

Section	Page
1 Background	3
2 Purpose	3
3 Definitions	3
4 Policy	4
5 Scope	5
6 Implementation	6
7 Roles and responsibilities	6
8 Related ERF Policies and Documents	7

## **1.0 Introduction**

Climate change represents one of the most urgent and complex challenges facing the global community. Its impacts—rising sea levels, increased frequency of extreme weather events, and shifting ecosystems—disproportionately affect the world’s poorest and most vulnerable populations, who have contributed least to global emissions.

Environmental degradation, such as deforestation, pollution, and biodiversity loss, compounds these challenges by undermining natural resources and ecosystem services critical for livelihoods, health, and food security. Together, these factors threaten to reverse progress on poverty reduction and sustainable development, while exacerbating inequalities and vulnerabilities.

Women, children, and people with disabilities are often disproportionately affected due to social, economic, and physical factors, experiencing increased risks such as malnutrition, displacement, and reduced access to essential services.

Edmund Rice Foundation (ERF) recognises that integrating climate change and environmental considerations into its work is essential to support resilient and equitable development outcomes.

## **2.0 Purpose**

This policy outlines ERF’s commitment to addressing climate change and promoting environmental sustainability and climate justice across its programs and operations. It defines ERF’s approach to minimising environmental harm, managing climate-related risks, and enhancing resilience and sustainability in its development efforts.

The policy ensures ERF aligns with relevant international development standards, environmental and climate frameworks, and good practice principles, including alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and sector-wide expectations for environmental stewardship.

This policy applies to ERF’s Board, staff, implementing partners, and all program activities. As climate and environmental considerations are cross-cutting issues, they must be integrated into all phases of the project cycle—from design and implementation to monitoring, evaluation, and adaptation.

## **3.0 Definitions**

### **3.1 Climate Change**

A global emergency caused by increased greenhouse gas emissions, resulting in rising temperatures, extreme weather events, and long-term environmental disruption. The 2015 Paris Agreement set global targets to limit warming to well below 2°C and achieve net zero emissions.

### **3.2 Climate Justice**

As defined by ACFID, climate justice is a concept that addresses the just division, fair sharing, and equitable distribution of the burdens of climate change and responsibility for its mitigation. A climate justice approach sees climate change as an issue of social and environmental injustice. It recognises that vulnerability to climate change can reflect existing structural injustices in society, and that climate action must explicitly address these structural power imbalances.

### **3.3 Net Zero**

A state where greenhouse gas emissions are balanced by removal efforts, such as emission reductions and carbon capture.

### **3.4 Mitigation**

Actions to reduce or prevent greenhouse gas emissions—for example, transitioning to renewable energy or reforestation.

### **3.5 Adaptation**

Adjustments made to reduce vulnerability to climate impacts, such as using drought-resistant crops or constructing flood defences. Adaptation can also include leveraging new opportunities that arise in a changing climate.

### **3.6 Resilience**

The ability of communities and systems to anticipate, absorb, recover from, and adapt to climate-related shocks without compromising long-term development.

### **3.7 Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)**

Strategies to prevent and reduce the impact of disasters by addressing exposure, vulnerability, environmental management, and preparedness.

### **3.8 Loss and Damage**

The irreversible impacts of climate change that cannot be avoided through mitigation or adaptation—such as land loss from sea level rise or destruction of homes.

### **3.9 Environmental Sustainability**

The responsible management of natural resources to meet present needs without compromising future generations, including practices such as recycling, waste reduction, and ecosystem protection.

### **3.10 Environmental Degradation**

The deterioration of the environment through pollution, resource depletion, biodiversity loss, and ecosystem destruction.

## **4.0 Policy**

### **4.1 Position and Commitment**

ERF recognises its responsibility to contribute meaningfully to climate change action, climate justice and environmental sustainability as integral to its development mission.

ERF's commitments include:

- Have a nominated focal point for environmental sustainability.
- Minimising its environmental footprint across organisational operations.
- Supporting locally led, community-driven solutions that reflect local priorities, knowledge and leadership in responding to climate and environmental challenges.
- Building capacity and resilience within communities, particularly in climate adaptation, disaster risk reduction, and sustainable development.
- Enabling sustainable, resilient communities equipped to withstand environmental and climate-related shocks.
- Promoting the rights and inclusion of women, children, and people living with disability, recognising their disproportionate vulnerability to climate impacts.
- Advocating for sustainable living and the responsible use of natural resources.
- Providing environmental sustainability and impact training to relevant ERF staff and where applicable Board members.

- Where applicable, information on the impacts of climate change and environmental sustainability are promoted in ERF communications.

Through these commitments, ERF seeks to contribute to sustainable, resilient communities and a more equitable future.

## **4.2 Key Principles**

While Edmund Rice Foundation (ERF) does not primarily implement climate-specific programs, it recognises that climate change and environmental degradation are cross-cutting issues that influence its core focus areas: formal education, community-based education, and development education. This policy is guided by the following principles:

### **4.2.1 Do No Harm**

ERF is committed to ensuring that its programs and operations do not inadvertently cause environmental harm or exacerbate climate vulnerabilities. While the majority of ERF-supported projects are in education and empowerment, any activity with potential environmental impact—such as agriculture or small-scale enterprise—will be subject to appropriate environmental risk assessment and mitigation. Safeguarding the natural environment is essential to sustaining livelihoods and wellbeing, especially in communities already facing systemic disadvantage.

### **4.2.2 Climate Justice and Equity**

Climate and environmental issues intersect with gender equality, child safeguarding, disability equity, and social justice. ERF acknowledges that women, children, and people living with disability are often more vulnerable to the effects of climate change, particularly in rural or resource-constrained settings. Integrating climate and environmental considerations into education and community-based programming helps to address these inequities and strengthens broader development outcomes.

### **4.2.3 Participation and Local Relevance**

ERF affirms the importance of locally led, context-specific approaches to development. The voices and knowledge of communities—especially those directly affected by environmental and climate risks—are vital to designing relevant, sustainable interventions. ERF supports community ownership and decision-making, and where appropriate, incorporates traditional and Indigenous environmental knowledge. Even in education-focused projects, contextual understanding of local environmental conditions (e.g. access to water, land use, seasonal climate changes) enhances program effectiveness and resilience.

## **5.0 Scope**

This policy applies to both ERF's organisational operations and its development programming. ERF distinguishes its responsibilities in two key areas:

### **5.1 Organisational Operations**

ERF will work to reduce its environmental footprint by adopting sustainable practices in day-to-day operations. Where emissions cannot be avoided, an annual contribution to climate-related initiatives will be made, as determined by the Board.

### **5.2 Development Programming**

While ERF's core focus is education and empowerment, climate and environmental considerations will be integrated across all programming. ERF will support partners to strengthen resilience and

reduce environmental and disaster-related risks. Where relevant, environmental risk assessments will be undertaken, particularly for projects with potential environmental impacts.

## 6.0 Implementation

This policy will be implemented across ERF's organisational operations and development programming in alignment with its values, focus areas, and partner relationships.

### 6.1 Organisational Operations

ERF is committed to reducing its environmental footprint by embedding sustainable practices into its daily operations. Measures include minimising energy use, reducing waste, limiting unnecessary travel, and prioritising environmentally responsible suppliers and materials. Remote work and virtual meetings will be encouraged to reduce emissions associated with commuting and air travel.

Where emissions cannot be avoided—such as those generated through essential travel—ERF will allocate an annual Board-approved contribution to support climate-related projects. If no such projects are active, the funds will be held and allocated once appropriate opportunities arise.

### 6.2 Development Programming

While ERF's primary focus is education and economic empowerment, climate and environmental considerations will be integrated as cross-cutting issues. To this end, ERF will:

- Require implementing partners to apply a climate and environment lens throughout the project cycle (climate lens section in the project application form).
- Project identification of how its scores (Principal, Significant, Not targeted) on the OECD DAC climate marker. Ensure environmental risks are incorporated into project risk assessments and management plans (environmental risks are incorporated into ERF's Risk Management Framework template).
- Prioritise projects that demonstrate climate sensitivity and environmental stewardship and exclude those posing unacceptable environmental risks.
- Encourage partners to draw on local and Indigenous knowledge to strengthen climate adaptation, resilience, and sustainability.
- Require environmental impact assessments for projects with potential high environmental impact, with external review where needed.
- Ensure compliance with relevant local environmental legislation.
- Support partners through capacity-building, including climate education and guidance on environmental sustainability where relevant.
- Request climate/environment policies or, where unavailable, a clear commitment and approach as part of the project application process.
- Where applicable, include climate/environment indicators in monitoring and evaluation frameworks.
- Partners to report on their climate lens throughout mid- and end-term evaluation acquittals.

ERF will regularly review implementation progress and update the policy as required to reflect emerging best practices and organisational learning.

## 7.0 Roles and responsibilities

- **Chief executive officer (CEO):** Responsible for ensuring this policy is communicated to all ERF personnel and embedded in relevant organisational processes.
- **Program managers:** Responsible for communicating the policy to all in-country implementing partners and supporting its integration into program delivery.

- **ERF board of directors:** Responsible for approving this policy and overseeing its regular review and revision.
- **Human resources and program teams:** Ensure the policy is incorporated into induction materials and onboarding processes for all new ERF staff, both in Australia and overseas.
- **Partner compliance:** This policy will form part of ERF's partner compliance requirements and must be acknowledged and adhered to by all implementing partners.

## **8.0 Related ERF Policies and Documents**

### **Related policies:**

- Development and Non-Development Policy
- Diversity and Inclusiveness Policy
- Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy
- Project Design, Funding & Management Policy