Policy for Climate Change and Environmental Risks

This is a translation from the Norwegian original. In case of discrepancy, the Norwegian version shall prevail

Approved by the board 8.12.22, valid from 2023-2027

1. Intro and background

Climate change, disability and poverty
Persons with disabilities in developing countries are among the most negatively affected by environmental and climate hazards. Climate change affects their livelihoods and health and increase their vulnerability to external shocks. Many people in developing countries rely heavily on the use of natural resources in sectors such as agriculture, fishing and forestry. Natural resources provide food and shelter for the poor. Poor people are therefore severely affected by climate change, affecting livelihoods and access to natural resources. In addition, persons with disabilities suffer disproportionately when water, land, and air is polluted. Environmental conditions account for a significant portion of health problems for persons living in poverty, and persons with disabilities are especially dependent on access to clean water and sanitation in their immediate vicinity, as they often are less mobile than persons without disabilities.

Vulnerability to natural disasters
Persons with disabilities are among those most adversely affected by natural disasters, sustaining disproportionately higher rates of morbidity and mortality, while at the same time being among those with least access to emergency support. Meaningful participation and inclusion of persons with disabilities and Disabled Persons Organizations (DPOs) within disaster risk management is essential to ensure that climate action is respectful of the rights of persons with disabilities. Disability inclusive disaster risk reduction is essential, especially as extreme weather events pose a constant risk around the world.

Climate change adaptation in the Atlas Alliance
Climate change and environmental risks are a cross cutting issue that is highly relevant for our target group. This policy outlines how the Atlas Alliance and our partners will reduce the negative effects on our target group, through two approaches:

1) Ensure all project interventions are adapted to actual or expected climate change and its effects, thereby maximizing resilience through program interventions
2) Minimize potential negative climate impact of our program implementation

Practical implications
The Atlas Alliance Board of Directors, its secretariat, and all Atlas Alliance organizations commit to reduce any negative impact our projects and programs may have, and to strengthen the resilience of our target group, in accordance with the concrete actions described in this policy.

In order to measure the impact of this policy, the secretariat will provide a short narrative analysis of the current status of the Atlas Alliance's work on climate change and environmental risks. This will be part of the implementation plan. At the end of the five-year period (in 2027), a new analysis will be conducted to measure the impact of the policy, and to update the policy for a new five-year period.

2. Terms and definitions

Climate change
This policy document refers to the man-made climate changes caused by emissions of greenhouse gasses. Increased emission of greenhouse gases through human activity has led to an increase in the global temperature and climate change. The effects of climate change are evident in extreme weather patterns observed in different parts of the world. Storms, flooding and droughts are damaging livelihoods, taking lives and threatening millions of people, especially in the Global South.

Climate-change adaptation
Climate-change adaptation refers to the process of adjustment to actual or expected climate change and its effects, in order to moderate harm or exploit beneficial opportunities[1]. The adaptation strategies most relevant to our programs rely on building resilient local communities. This includes agricultural practices adapted to handle droughts and floods caused by climate change, as well as ensuring that early warning systems, evacuation, shelter, transitional housing and other emergency provisions are fully accessible for persons with disabilities.

[1] IPCC, *Managing the Risks of Extreme Events and Disasters to Advance Climate Change Adaptation. A Special Report of Working Groups I and II of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK, and New York, NY, USA, 2012, p. 556.

Climate-change mitigation
Mitigation refers to actions taken to reduce the emissions of greenhouse gasses. Switching from fossil fuels to renewable energy is one example of mitigation. Adaptation strategies often include aspects of mitigation and focus on reducing both the emissions of greenhouse gasses and the risk of loss and damage related to climate change.

3. Implications for programming

Persons with disabilities in developing countries have a very low carbon footprint and should not be burdened with the responsibility of alleviating the dire consequences of the industrialized world's overuse of natural resources and excessive carbon emissions. Despite contributing little to global warming, people living in poverty are adversely affected by climate change. The Atlas Alliance adheres to the principle of Do No Harm when planning and implementing projects. In addition, we will make sure our programs are adapted to climate change, to help reduce the negative impact climate change and its consequences on our target group.

When it comes to programming, mainstreaming environmental issues is most effective when environmental issues are taken into account as early as possible in planning and decision-making processes.

Risks and Do No Harm
There is a two-way relationship between environmental and climate risk and development projects: Climate and environmental risk may negatively affect the implementation and impact; and the program implementation may exacerbate climate and environmental risk. The risks of climate and natural hazards must therefore be considered in all aspects of the projects. For example, natural hazards may hinder school attendance; infrastructure such as eye testing centers may be damaged by flooding or fires, etc.

To ensure that our projects Do No Harm, the Atlas Alliance will:

- Identify links between development and climate change in the Atlas Alliance projects. These links should be analyzed in terms of their contribution to – or detraction from – incomes, livelihoods, health, safety net, growth, etc.
- Consider climate and environmental risks in all risk analyses
- Use the Checklist for Climate Change and Environmental Risks (Annex 1) when designing and evaluating projects.

Climate change adaptation
The Atlas Alliance will increase its focus on climate change adaptation and resilience in cooperation with our local partners. We will support our implementing partners to advocate for stronger disaster risk reduction and climate-change adaptation policy in their local contexts, and to integrate this consideration in all program planning and implementation.

In order to strengthen our target group's resilience to climate change and environmental risks and disasters, the Atlas Alliance will:

- Include outcomes, outputs and/or activities related to climate change adaptation in our results framework
- Focus on disaster risk reduction connected to climate change, and advocate for more funding for inclusive climate adaptation
- Establish partnerships with relevant NGOs and CSOs in Norway and partner countries that specialize in climate change adaptation and food security
- Focus on climate change resilience and food security by
    - Targeted interventions to alleviate environmental risks through projects under the *Disability Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction Programme*
    - Targeted interventions to improve food security through projects under the *Economic Empowerment Programme*

Advocacy
The Atlas Alliance advocates for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in all circumstances, including climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction measures. T We adhere to the principle of do no harm and relate our work in this area to SDG 13 which includes improving education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning (target 13.3).

The Atlas Alliance considers climate and environmental issues an integral part of our advocacy efforts towards national and local authorities

Organizational implications
The Atlas Alliance commits to reducing our footprint in a consistent and appropriate way on an ongoing basis, through minimizing our environmental impact from travel, as well as minimizing our environmental impact in Norway.

Environmental impact from travel
As an international development agency working across the world, international travel is essential to our operations, but we strive to reduce our carbon footprint.

The Atlas Alliance will reduce air travel through:

- Using locally based staff and consultants whenever relevant and possible, such as financial consultants and controllers, workshop facilitators, trainers, etc. (in addition to reducing air travel, this contributes to strengthening the capacity, competence, and project ownership, of local partners)
- Encourage staff to make use of remote meeting and conferencing technology instead of travel whenever possible.
- Investigate the possibility of using trains as the mode of transport when travelling within Scandinavia. The costs and the extra time of the journey will be considered when choosing the mode of transport.
- Consider offsetting the carbon emission from our travels.

Minimizing our environmental impact in Norway

The Atlas Alliance aim to reduce our environmental impact in our communications work by using only recycled paper and economical formats, and by encouraging recipients to recycle all materials. Environmental and ethical requirements and expectations are included in our contracts with partners and in our procurement policy.

In order to minimize the environmental impact in Norway, the Atlas Alliance will:

- Follow the principles of sustainability: Reduce, Reuse, Repair and Recycle, in managing our environmental impact.
- Encourage staff to choose environmentally friendly forms of transport in their commute through providing bike parking, a shower and a changing room in the office
- Encourage staff to use public transport when going to external meetings
- Learn from other civil society organizations with regards to lowering carbon emissions and strengthening climate change adaptation throughout the organizations, and consider the possibility of acquiring relevant certification (for example “Miljøfyrtårn”).

Annex 1: Checklist for Environmental and Climate Risks

The following list is designed to identify possible environmental and climate risks and impacts from development projects. The list should be used when designing projects, and annually throughout the project when updating the risk analysis. Depending on which risks you identify, you should adapt the project to eliminate or reduce these risks.

After identifying how project outcomes, or the project target population, may be affected by environmental and climate risks, and identifying how the project might negatively or positively affect the environment and climate, the next challenge is finding a way to address these concerns and possibilities. Because both the problems and the relevant solutions varies greatly, we do not provide a tool kit for problem solving. The solutions must be identified from case to case, taking local conditions into consideration.

Impact of climate change on our target group

Questions to consider

- What are the climate risks currently being experienced? Increased temperatures, increased flooding? Increased drought periods? Increased/more severe storms and/or wildfires?
- How are interventions in the project affected by climate risks and hazards (flooding of schools, eye testing centers, etc.)?
- How are people affected by these events? Reduced attendance at school/work; death of livestock or crop failure; increases disease prevalence (e.g. by malaria)?
- What are people's responses to these climate events? Do they have safety nets of any sort?
- How will/is this affecting your project goals and strategies?
- How can you change your goals and strategies to take this into account?

An exercise to identify climate risks to your projects
Have your staff write down any changes they have already seen in their work related to climate, e.g. increased temperatures; increased frequency and severity of extreme weather events; changing precipitation patterns; shifting seasons; changes in wind speed and prevalence and intensity of fires.

Identify any impacts on:

- **Geophysical environment:** Possible effects of climate changes on the oceans, ice, freshwater, and soils, air pollution from particulate matter.
- **Natural environment/ecosystems:** Possible effects of climate changes on biodiversity and ecosystem services, e.g. changes in rivers flows; changes in flowering seasons; changes in species migrations; appearance of invasive alien species and/or increases in disease vectors.
- **People's socio-economic situation:** Possible effects of climate changes on human well-being, livelihoods, and the built environment.

Discuss how this can affect your planned projects, the goals and strategies to achieve your goals, and what you need to change to address them.

The potential negative impact of the project

Questions to consider

- Is the project negatively impacting the **water quality** (such as pollution from litter or chemicals (e.g. fertilizers); or soils run-off due to project activities) or quantity (using a lot of water in arid or drought stricken areas)? If so, can alternatives be found?
- Is the project negatively impacting the **geological stability** of the area, e.g. causing soil erosion or landslides?
- Is the project causing the destruction of **biodiversity and wildlife habitat**, whether directly or indirectly? Is it interrupting natural corridors for wildlife movement?
- Is the project **increasing greenhouse gases** through burning of fossil fuels, destruction of forests, or other land-use changes?
- If your project involves **tree planting**, do you use indigenous trees or alien trees? If alien trees, are they invasive? Do they utilize more water than indigenous trees do? Can alternatives be used?
- If your project involves **construction or agriculture**, do you consider how it affects the environment in terms of cutting down trees, destroying habitat, or encroaching on wetland?
- If your project involves **economic activities**, do you consider how it leads to in-migration of people and further impact on the environment/use of resources?
- Does your project require **packaging** that must be thrown away? Can alternatives be found, e.g. biodegradable packaging and/or recycling projects (which could become income-generators)?
- Does your project lead to increased **air, water, soil pollution and/or litter**?

- Does your project involve introduction of **livestock**, or increasing livestock herds, which can result in overgrazing, or conflict/competition with biodiversity?
- If your project generate **biodegradable waste**, can this be used for composting and/or bio-energy? Can solar stoves and/or lighting be introduced?
- Are there ways the environment **can be improved** through the project activities?