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Building a sustainable future: Addressing climate change

Photo: Conor Ashleigh

Photo: Lorrie Graham, AusAID

Many people in developing countries depend on the natural environment for their income, food and water, making them vulnerable to climate change impacts such as increases and severity in droughts, floods and other climate-related natural disasters. This has the potential to undermine, and even reverse, hard-won development progress.

Australia is providing $599 million (2010–11 to 2011–12) to support developing countries adapt to climate change, including the poor in least developed states and small island developing states. We are also assisting developing countries with high carbon emissions to pursue cleaner development.

Community-based adaptation in Papua New Guinea

In Papua New Guinea, Australia is working with local communities and non-government organisations to address the challenges climate change poses to health, water and food security.

Australia is supporting communities in PNG to reduce pressure on natural resources through sustainable coral farming; growing drought resistant crops; more effectively managing fisheries and fish stocks; and preventing coastal erosion by protecting mangroves and building dry stone walls. These programs empower communities by building resilience and local capacity to identify and act on the range of challenges that climate change presents.

Photo: Bruce Bailey

Protecting coastal ecosystems in Vietnam

Vietnam's coastline—home to nearly 40 million people—is under threat from deforestation, erosion, flooding and a fast growing population. Water and soil quality is diminishing and ground level water levels are falling.

In partnership with Germany, Australia is helping Vietnam manage and protect its coastal ecosystems and respond to the impacts of climate change. The five-year Climate Change and Coastal Ecosystems Program is working with local communities in five provinces to develop climate change adaptation plans that include rehabilitating mangroves, improving dyke construction, and supporting communities to adopt alternative farming practices and identify new and sustainable income opportunities. The Program also supports climate change adaptation on a national-level, with lessons learned being used to develop effective policies.

Green building council of South Africa

Australia is working with the Green Building Council of South Africa to provide affordable, energy efficient homes to low-income earners in the Durban city area. Using local labour, the Council is retrofitting homes with solar water heaters, energy efficient lighting, heat-insulation cookers, insulation and ventilation mechanisms, rainwater harvesting systems, and vegetable gardens. Almost three million low-cost, sustainable homes have been built in South Africa over the past 15 years—a number set to double by 2025.

The initiative demonstrates how sustainability interventions—such as retrofitting houses to reduce energy emissions—can save money and lead to improved health and education outcomes for the poor. It is also creating opportunities and building capacity for the local workforce.

Improving water supplies in the Caribbean

Water shortages on Caribbean Islands are becoming increasingly acute. Predicted rises in temperature and sea-levels and decreasing rainfall will put further pressure on limited fresh water stocks. Australia is working with a range of partners to introduce new ways of improving water supply in Bequia, the largest of the Grenadine islands.

Through a pilot project, a solar powered salt-water reverse osmosis system has been installed. The system is delivering water that exceeds previous standards—both in cost and quality—while feeding excess solar energy into the national grid. The initiative demonstrates how renewable technologies can support climate change adaptation by making communities more resilient to water shortages in sustainable ways.

Photo: Rocky Roe