

World Vision Response to Call for Inputs Healthy Ecosystems and Human Rights: Sustaining the Foundations of Life

World Vision is a faith-based relief, development and advocacy organisation dedicated to working with children, families and communities worldwide to help children reach their full potential by tackling the causes of poverty and injustice. World Vision is dedicated to working with the world's most vulnerable people and it serves all people regardless of religion, race, ethnicity or gender.

World Vision, together with other members of Joining Forces, ChildFund, Plan International, Save the Children, SOS Village and Terre des Hommes, developed a **Policy Brief - The Global Climate Crisis: A Child Rights Crisis**. The policy brief describes the impact climate change and environmental degradation has on the fulfilment of child rights. The document is attached to this communication for your consideration.

In response to the call for inputs on the report of the Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment, Dr. David Boyd, a questionnaire was circulated among World Vision in order to collect opinions and evidence from the field. The following is a summary of the inputs provided by the technical experts from WV offices, which we hope will contribute to the Special Rapporteur's report, to the General Assembly in October 2020.

Examples of ways in which declining biodiversity and degraded ecosystems are already having adverse impacts on human rights, in particular children's rights:

Children are the hardest hit by the negative impacts of declining biodiversity and degraded ecosystems. Here are the main areas of concern for World Vision.

Children's right to survival and development

- Children are severely affected by the food insecurity and famine caused by drought and other natural disasters (such as landslides caused by deforestation) triggered by declining biodiversity.
- Children's physical development and health is undermined by a lack of diversity of food and nutrients.
- Pollution of water sources leads to incidents of water borne diseases and poor absorption of nutrition, resulting in children's poor health and malnutrition.

Children's right to play in safe environment

- Children are being denied the right to experience the joy and wonder of nature, playing on land or in water safely, or at all, climbing a tree, seeing wildlife and enjoying the beauty of nature.
- Children are denied safe, clean plentiful water, and land that produces abundantly and consistently, air that does not damage their lungs.

Children's right to adequate standard of living

- In rural areas, communities depend on the forests for food, health and source of income. Depletion of resources affects livelihoods, which in turn affects the capacity of parents and caregivers to provide well for their children's needs (education, transport costs to the nearest clinic)

In Malaysia, **Indigenous community's right** to land is also affected as the tenure insecurity increases the risk of forced displacement. Children of the indigenous community in Malaysia suffer from the consequences, with their right to shelter and adequate living denied.

Examples of good practices in preventing, reducing, or eliminating harm to biodiversity and ecosystems, or restoring and rehabilitating biodiversity and ecosystems:

Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration (<https://fmnrhub.com.au/>)

(FMNR) is an excellent example of good practice with evidence generated in Senegal, Mali, Kenya, Indonesia, among others. It is a multi-stakeholder participatory approach to addressing and reversing degradation. It is a low-cost land restoration technique used amongst poor subsistence farmers by increasing food and timber production and resilience to climate extremes.

FMNR involves the systematic regrowth and management of trees and shrubs from felled tree stumps, sprouting root systems or seeds. The regrown trees and shrubs, integrated into crops and grazing pastures, help restore soil structure and fertility, inhibit erosion and soil moisture evaporation, rehabilitate springs and the water table, and increase biodiversity. Some tree species also impart nutrients such as nitrogen into the soil.

As a result, FMNR can double crop yields, provide building timber and firewood, fodder and shade for livestock, wild foods for nutrition and medication, and increased incomes and living standards for farming families and their communities.

The technique consists of the selection of the stumps that the farmer will utilise and decide how many stems will be allowed to grow on each stump, based on the farmers' needs and ultimate purpose for reforestation. Excess stems are then cut. With the remaining stems, side branches are pruned off up to half way up the trunk. Farmers will return each 2 to 6 months for pruning and thereby stimulate faster growth rates and produce straighter stems.

In Timor Leste, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Ethiopia Ghana, where impact assessment was conducted, there is a strong evidence of improved tree cover and tree density; increased availability of wood and forest products; and improved land and soil quality.

Specific gaps, challenges and barriers that your government, business, or organization has faced in attempting to employ a rights-based approach to preventing, reducing, or eliminating harm to biodiversity and ecosystems:

Very often, the biggest impediment is ideological and policy related. A predominant school of thought adopted by many governments is that responsibility for natural resource management is the sole responsibility of the state. Natural resources must be "protected" from the communities dependent on those natural resources for their very livelihoods. It is difficult for governments to, on the one hand, concede that top down approaches have failed and, on the other, give more ownership, responsibility and benefit sharing to communities along with social accountability. Community members have both rights and responsibilities to protect their own environment. The success of the aforementioned Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration programme is thanks to the fact that the local communities, farmers themselves, understand the importance of biodiversity and gain the ownership of the project management in collaboration with the local authorities, or duty bearers.

In Malaysia, there are following identified challenges:

- Gaps in the land system where lands gazetted as forest areas can still be given or leased by state governments to companies. Deforestation is still ongoing in Sabah.
- Excessive bureaucracy and lack of transparency in the granting of native land titles to indigenous communities. Some of the communities that World Vision Malaysia works with have applied for their native title since 40 years ago and have yet to receive a response from the land office.
- Government and state development plans do not take into account environmental impacts. There are plans in place to clear more forest areas to increase the number of oil palm plantations, provide employment and improve basic infrastructure such as roads. There is also a lack of viable, alternative plans for holistic development which can meet the needs for employment and basic infrastructure.

Ways in which additional protection is provided (or should be provided) for populations who may be particularly vulnerable to declining biodiversity and degraded ecosystems:

- Guarantee shock responsive social protection and safety nets for the vulnerable groups, such as indigenous communities who rely on harvests, in the event crops fail due to drought and forest fires.
- Involving and enabling indigenous communities to take the lead in efforts to protect and restore degraded ecosystems and declining biodiversity.
- Strengthened processes for companies to convert land use for development, adherence to legal requirements such as the preparation of Environmental Impact Assessments before lands are being used for various reasons eg. dams.
- Recognise indigenous land rights. By giving indigenous communities security over the land that they are living in, they have the incentive to manage natural resources in that land in a sustainable way.
- Protect areas gazetted as forest reserves. Tighten loopholes which allow state government to grant land gazetted as forest reserves to companies to convert for other use, such as logging and oil palm plantation.

As to how to empower the vulnerable group, World Vision has strong evidence based tools for empowerment and raising the voice of the marginalised groups, including "Citizen's Voice and Action" and "Empowered World View".

The voices of children and adults in vulnerable situations need to be heard; they need to be included in decision-making bodies and be given a real say in decisions affecting them and their future.

Citizen's Voice and Action programme, conducted in more than 30 countries across Africa, Central and South Americas and Asia educates community members on their rights, and equip them with the skills to negotiate, come alongside and reason with authorities in a non-confrontational manner. The programme helps people know their own value and take responsibility for their own situation. Many people are simply unaware of how land degradation and biodiversity loss impact them negatively, so a big first step is education and awareness raising - and linking the known impacts to everyday reality of the target group.