***Working Alongside Communities to Increase Resilience to Climate Change***

Church World Service (CWS) has spent nearly 75 years helping communities to transform themselves through just and sustainable responses to hunger, poverty, displacement and disaster.

CWS joins like-minded and like-hearted people worldwide, in responding to the accelerating climate crisis, as we believe **creation is sacred** and that we must responsibly steward its gifts.

Multi-faceted action to mitigate climate change is critical to avoid catastrophic impacts around the world. But even in a *best-case scenario* – in which humankind limits global warming from climate change to a 1.5o Celsius increase by 2050 – at-risk communities like the ones with which CWS works around the world face the immediate need to adapt.

One way for communities to become more **climate resilient** is by adapting the ways they use natural resources. This is especially critical for the hundreds of millions of families across the world who put food on their tables and earn a living from smallholder agriculture. While resources and information needed to adapt to climate change may be available at national and global levels, we must do more to reach communities and local governments that already face climate change’s impacts and who urgently seek to increase resilience.

In **Indonesia’s South Sulawesi province**, CWS works with non-governmental partner Pusbinlat Motivator, communities and local governments to make disaster risk management and climate change adaptation a priority. With support from this partnership, five participating communities were recently recognized as Disaster Resilient Villages by the Indonesian government. Each has formed a Disaster Risk Reduction Forum, recognized in an official decree from the village head.

Forum members include a variety of local stakeholders, including government duty bearers. Together with village leaders, they have mapped local hazards and are developing Community Climate Change Adaptation Action Plans. They have agreed on local policies and protocols that support climate change adaptation and will increase community resilience. Now, these are being integrated into local development planning, so that so government systems can support citizens to cope with existing environmental and climate harm, and to mitigate future disaster risks.

In **northern and northeastern Kenya**, climate change is contributing both to longer droughts and more intense rains, as well as less predictable rainfall patterns. It is a cruel irony that communities which suffer the most from droughts are also at the greatest risk from floods, as the earth becomes too hard from extended dry cycles to absorb heavy and sudden rains. During extended droughts, crops have failed, and livestock have died because of lack of water and pasture.

CWS has responded by working alongside local faith-based organizations to provide food in times of emergency, and to restore livelihoods. Following participatory planning with affected communities, modern beekeeping and village savings and loans for resilience (VSLR) were introduced as ways to increase resilience to environmental shocks. Enhanced market linkages have allowed community members to harvest and sell honey to semi-processing centers.

As women have embraced the initiative, their families’ vulnerability to climate-related shocks has decreased, as they now have access to economic resources that can cushion them against disasters. This is also encouraging men to reduce their livestock numbers and shift their energies toward beekeeping, which in turn reduces the potential impact of livestock losses floods and contributes to environmental conservation by minimizing overgrazing and erosion.

The **Gran Chaco** region is a large, semiarid region that covers nearly one million square kilometers across northern Argentina, southwest Paraguay and southeast Bolivia. It is the second-largest forest reserve in South America and a region with great cultural diversity, home to 25 different indigenous groups. While the Gran Chaco is experiencing an increase in average annual temperature because of climate change, this is only one of the human-made pressures facing its inhabitants. Human rights violations, environmental degradation and alarming levels of deforestation (related to expansion of cattle and soy industries) have gone mostly unnoticed and unchecked, disproportionately impacting indigenous communities.

For the last 15 years, CWS and the civil society coalition *Plataforma Semiaridos* (Semi-Arid Platform)have catalyzed local and cross-border partnerships to address socio-economic and cultural inequalities that exist in the Gran Chaco. Participation and leadership of indigenous women and youth has been central to improving land tenure security, access to water and natural resources management. The introduction of new and appropriate technologies – such as Geographic Information Systems (GIS), community-led rooftop rainwater harvesting, and participatory mapping – have been integrated with multi-stakeholder advocacy to improve food security and access to resilient livelihoods.

Our experiences in supporting climate resilience – such as these activities in Indonesia, Kenya and the Gran Chaco – highlights the importance of including **directly-affected families and communities in planning and decision-making**. Responding to the mobility impacts of climate change must similarly prioritize the voices and participation of directly affected people. Already, far too many families in places where CWS works have made the hard decision to move or have become displaced, because of slow-onset climate change’s impacts.

In fact, the ways in which climate-related mobility is managed *could* expand safe, dignified livelihood opportunities for people on the move, and for their families in places of origin. If left unmanaged, though, it could lead to new threats: forced displacement, migration into situations of vulnerability, or being trapped in environmentally fragile and unsustainable hamlets and villages.

People’s decisions to move in response to slow-onset climate change are typically not as urgent as those of asylum seekers fleeing conflict or persecution. Nor are they as dramatic as those of people displaced by sudden-onset weather disasters. Yet, **it is critical to prepare and expand response options now**. Slow-onset changes are well underway, and scientifically proven and humanly experienced climate change will affect – and in some cases devastate – poor and vulnerable communities increasingly into the future.

As people of faith, we are called to serve creation and to seek justice for all people and future generations. Yet, even as we faithfully commit to doing our part, we recognize that these actions alone are not sufficient – this climate crisis requires a global response. All people deserve the opportunity to lead lives of dignity wherever they are. Most certainly, they should not be forced to move because of preventable climate change impacts. National governments and global institutions must act now, as part of an ambitious, just and binding global framework to address climate change and invest in community resilience.