



**LIGHT**  
FOR THE WORLD



**POLICY**  
Environment



## **Global situation**

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Climate change and environmental degradation is one of the most urgent challenges of our time. All member states of the United Nations adopted the Paris Agreement in December 2015 and committed themselves to limiting the global temperature rise to less than 2 degrees Celsius above the level held before the Industrial Revolution. Additionally, in September 2015, the United Nations member states also adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a set of 17 goals to be met by 2030, which aim to tackle pressing global issues such as the climate crisis and poverty.

### **How does this relate to Light for the World?**

Environmental degradation and climate change is occurring all over the world and affects the populations of many countries where Light for the World is currently working. For example, desertification and droughts are evident in the Sahelian zone of Africa and have a downward spiralling effect on local populations. Arable lands become infertile, economic livelihoods cannot be maintained, local food and water resources are depleted, thereby decreasing the living standards, health and well-being of the local population. Those already affected by poor living standards and a lack of publicly available health and livelihood services, including persons with disabilities and the elderly, are especially affected.

In addition to the effects of environmental change on individuals, development work in general contributes to the crisis through its environmental footprint. For example, international and national travel directly contributes to CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, offices require materials and projects may affect the local environment.

Hence while working on inclusion, Light for the World needs to actively pay attention to environmental topics and we are not alone in this. The environment has become an integral focus of responsible organisations, as well as a cornerstone for development work and humanitarian aid. To hold ourselves accountable to our donors and beneficiaries and to ensure that the implementation of our mission and vision does not contribute to environmental degradation or harm, we recognise the need to include more stringent environmental standards into our organisation, policies and programmes.

## Our response

Light for the World proactively developed this Environmental Policy to outline its position and values linked to the organisation's overall environmental performance and direction as expressed by our board of trustees and senior level management.

As an international organisation, we want to contribute to the sustainability of our planet and to contribute to reducing breaking up the interlinkage between environmental degradation, poverty and disability. Actions taken to achieve this should comply with international

and national standards, laws and regulations on the environment and contribute to, amongst others, the climate targets included in the Sustainable Development Goals.

Light for the World has a set of policies and measures in the areas of 'Social & People centred Policies', 'Economic & Governance', and 'Environment & Climate'. Together they form a 'Sustainability Triangle' or approach that underpins our main mandate in the field of disability, development and human rights.



## Key components

Light for the World’s environmental approach encompasses the following **key components**:

- Six **guiding principles** for our engagement;
- The environmental performance of our **offices**;
- Travel and greenhouse gas emissions: reduction and compensation;
- Incorporation of environmental principles into our **programme work**;
- **Investment strategy** to mirror a sustainable approach;
- **Awareness raising** amongst staff, board members, volunteers and partners.

## Six guiding principles for our engagement

This set of guiding principles is designed to reduce our environmental footprint and to help us act in a sustainable way.

**The guiding principles are as follows:**

- We live up to our responsibility towards humankind and the environment;
- We analyse and assess the footprint of Light for the World and will continue to do so;
- We strive to reduce the footprint of our activities to a reasonable minimum and follow the do-no-harm approach;
- We reach out to environmental experts and work hand in hand with experienced partners, to apply an integrated and sustainable approach in our activities;

- We fulfil all international and national environmental standards, laws and regulations, and try to set best practice wherever possible;
- We find holistic solutions that fit jointly at all our engagement levels – international, national and local level.

## Environmental performances in our offices (input & output)

In our offices we will reduce our environmental footprint as much as possible. In the recent years, we have been conscious about the environment and sustainability and we have already put into practice several measures. What has been lacking so far is a comprehensive approach to a detailed assessment of our environmental performance in all locations. Therefore, as of 2019 we will systematically investigate areas of improvement in our offices for the coming years, starting with external environmental assessments in Vienna and Mozambique.

This assessment will also analyse Light for the World’s procurement practices. We will strive to strike the balance of economic efficiency and ethical aspects, such as environmental protection, sustainable use of resources and fair-trade relations when it comes to domestic and international procurement of goods and consumables.

## Travel and greenhouse gas emissions: compensation

The greenhouse effect is the process of the energy of the sun being reflected off the earth’s atmosphere. During this process, some of the energy is reflected whilst the rest remains trapped by the greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. This process makes the Earth habitable, however due to human innovation and industrialisation, the amount of greenhouse gases emitted into the

atmosphere continues to rise which causes high retention of the sun's energy. This contributes annually to global warming and the climate crisis.

At Light for the World, our core business is international programme and advocacy work in our partner countries and at international level. Therefore, travel will remain an integral part of our activities.

Light for the World tries to avoid trips by using modern communication tools for virtual meetings as much as possible. Awareness raising about CO<sup>2</sup> emissions among all our staff will be an important component for future reduction of our travel.

For all necessary travel, Light for the World International will calculate the emissions on an annual basis and will compensate these emissions by giving a financial contribution to climate protection projects or compensation projects. CO<sub>2</sub> compensation projects will be selected by Light for the World based on the following criteria; the project is recognised by international standards (i.e. Gold Standard), the project is implemented in a developing country and has a direct positive impact on the local environment and population, the project is sustainable and the selected projects offer the best cost-to-impact ratio.

## **Our programme work and finances**

### **Our programme work**

Among our mandate areas, eye health has one of the highest impacts on the environment due to medical waste production. Therefore, good waste management is essential. The International Association for Prevention of Blindness has an 'Environment Sustainability Workgroup', which we follow closely. The outcomes or action plans resulting from this working group will be reflected as recommendations in Light for the World eye health programmes.

As for programmes in our other mandate areas (Disability-Inclusive Education, Independent Living,

Disability Rights), we will assess new projects regarding possible environmental impact, and we will monitor how environmental degradation is affecting our target groups. We will evaluate if mitigation measures could be conducted by Light for the World, and/or if Light for the World could support its target groups in advocating for mitigation measures with the responsible political and administrative bodies.

### **Key elements for our environmental engagement in our programme work include:**

- Linking our Country Strategies with national policies following the Paris Climate Agreement (NDC)
- Ensuring that we comply with national laws, rules and regulations, and where possible set up best practice examples and go beyond national legislation
- Avoiding negative environmental impact in our eye health work
- Assessing new projects in other mandate areas from an environmental standpoint. The assessment includes environmental questions and aspects. We will monitor how environmental changes affect our target groups.
- Working with our partners to inform them about environment and climate change.

We will start in Mozambique, as this is the country where the current Austrian Development Cooperation strategic framework is being implemented. We will incorporate the other countries in due course.

### **Finance – our investment strategy**

Environmental criteria are included in our investment strategy. Consequently, external wealth managers interested in collaborating or supporting Light for the World must comply with the environmental policy of Light for the World and/or the external wealth manager must have a sustainability philosophy and a sustainable investment strategy.

## Awareness raising

Part of living a 'greener life' is awareness raising among Light for the World and its partners. Many employees and partners are aware of climate change and environmental degradation. However, the translation into the readiness for concrete actions is not as strong as it could be. We need to ensure that there is a basic understanding of Light for the World's environmental policies, our current

footprint and concrete actions that staff members can take, both individually and collectively, to change our behaviour and positively contribute to a greener and more environmentally-friendly Light for the World. Awareness raising will be rolled out at all levels of the organisation; to the different boards, staff and supporters of Light for the World, to ensure we are all prepared, understand and can implement this policy.

## Environmental management: implementing the policy

This Environmental Policy will be reviewed in five years' time, in 2024.

Every year, Light for the World creates an annual work plan ("Annual Environmental Plan and Evaluation"), which outlines the actions that will be taken each year to implement the key components of the policy. The plan is evaluated before the following annual plan is issued and amendments are made as necessary to reach the annual targets. This evaluation also serves as the basis for reporting to the Board of Light for the World International. Each Associate Member may come up with its own 'Annual Plan', while respecting the lead-country principle.

Focal points, linked to Light for the World International, are to be appointed in each office. Additionally, for each component a responsible staff member is to be appointed to keep an overview, monitor progress and suggest next steps.



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**Light for the World**  
Niederhofstrasse 26  
1120 Vienna, Austria  
Europe

[www.light-for-the-world.org](http://www.light-for-the-world.org)  
[info@light-for-the-world.org](mailto:info@light-for-the-world.org)



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