

# Global Environmental Policy 2021



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# Introduction

At Sightsavers, we work to protect sight and we fight for disability rights globally. Our work aligns closely with the United Nations Sustainability Development Goals, which set out global actions for countries and organisations to follow in alleviating poverty and avoiding catastrophic climate change.

We acknowledge, as an international development organisation, that climate change is affecting the world's most marginalised people the hardest. We work with people who are among the most at risk of experiencing the negative impacts of climate change. Consequently, our work's impact is threatened by the risks of climate change and the loss of biodiversity.

We recognise that, as a global organisation, we have a responsibility to monitor and limit our environmental impact. We are able to do this by calculating our carbon footprint and identifying carbon hotspots.

We also acknowledge that, as a global organisation, we have a large impact due to our need to travel internationally, so we endeavour to take whatever steps we can to limit this impact and to make positive changes to ensure that Sightsavers is a sustainable organisation.

This environmental policy sets standards for change at an organisational level and at a country level, and in the spirit of transparency, we will report on and share the actions we are taking. This policy covers all our operations and programmes, and it will be shared with our partners, who we work closely with, in helping them to reduce their environmental impact.

The objective of this policy is:

- To ensure that Sightsavers complies with relevant legislation and contractual obligations
- To ensure continual improvement and a reduction in our carbon footprint through monitoring the following activities: energy, water, waste, travel, and paper use
- To ensure we achieve our environmental targets, in line with the latest climate science
- To protect the reputation and integrity of Sightsavers and its interests
- To ensure broad public trust and confidence in the activities of Sightsavers
- To assist and guide Sightsavers' trustees and employees on how to deliver the mission of the organisation in ways that are environmentally sound

# Scope

We will assess the range of potential environmental impacts from our operations and set objectives and targets to improve our environmental performance. Part of this will involve identifying and rectifying any wasteful and harmful current practices and, where feasible, seeking to replace these with ones that are more efficient and environmentally beneficial. In addition, we will promote and support environmental best practice via our contracts with our procurement suppliers and programme partners.

The following people are in scope and have a critical role to play in assuring the success of this policy:

- All Sightsavers' employees
- Those working globally on behalf of Sightsavers, including contractors, consultants, temporary staff, and volunteers ("representatives")
- Trustees that serve on Sightsavers' boards

## 1. Mitigation and adaptation

While we endeavour to make changes to our organisation to help limit the effects of climate change, it is nonetheless imperative that we acknowledge and prepare for the reality of changes that are taking place across the world currently.

In addition, it is important for us to mitigate the impacts of climate change, where possible, so that we can ensure a reduced negative impact on our work and communities that we work with.

As much of our work takes place in countries worst affected by climate change, there is a need for country-specific adaptation according to the environment within which we are working. As a part of our strategy, we are looking at enabling our international staff to manage disaster risk and to incorporate it into our project planning.

## 2. Key commitments

### 3.2 What are the key commitments?

Sightsavers commit to continuous improvement to prevent pollution and actively encourage good environmental behaviour at an organisational and individual level by undertaking the following:

- Monitor our consumption of energy, water, and materials, and setting targets for reduction
- Ensure that, where possible, we switch to using products that have a less harmful impact on the environment
- Encourage environmentally responsible business travel, ensuring all employees are aware of our aims and expectations. However, Sightsavers has a responsibility to use

donated funds efficiently, so value for money, alongside the environment, will be prioritised

- Comply with all legal and national policy – we make it our business to know when new legislation comes into force
- Promote responsibility for the environment within the organisation, and communicate and implement this policy across all staff
- Minimise waste by reduction where possible. Where impacts are lower, use reusable or recyclable products, providing quality is not compromised
- Focus on the environmentally responsible disposal of plastics and medical waste
- Work towards integrating this policy into the full range of Sightsavers' policies and services
- Sustainability requirements will be considered within programme design
- Influence suppliers and partners to develop their sustainable development practices
- Identify and provide appropriate training, advice, and information for staff, and encourage them to develop new ideas and initiatives, particularly through the environmental working group
- Provide appropriate resources to implement and operationalise the environmental management system
- Consider linking project development and office environmental management with local environmental initiatives/schemes
- Work in partnership with our logistics suppliers to help minimise greenhouse gas emissions in our supply chain
- Work with landlords to continually improve our environmental performance at our office premises
- Encourage and support staff to take environmentally sustainable decisions and actions in the workplace

## 3.2 Supporting delivery of commitments

In our endeavour to be a transparent organisation, we recognise the importance of reporting on our impacts, particularly in the areas of travel, waste, and energy consumption. We are committed to ensuring the environmental impact of our activities is kept to a minimum through a regular review of performance targets and reporting mechanisms.

To enable the organisation to coordinate the administration and delivery of the environmental commitments, Sightsavers has established an Environmental Management System (EMS). This system will enable us to manage our environmental performance on an on-going basis. It will help us to:

- Continuously monitor, review, and refine our reporting on agreed targets, publishing performance at least annually

- Monitor compliance with environmental legislation and environmental codes of practice and regulation on resource usage, pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, and the disposal of medical waste
- Provide clear guidance, relevant learning opportunities, and appropriate challenge and support to employees, so that they can carry out their work in a way that does not compromise our environmental policy and objectives
- Periodically schedule and carry out environmental management audits and reviews designed to measure our progress in managing risk and remaining compliant

## 3. Procurement and waste

### Our aims are to:

- Reduce our environmental impact through positive management of resources and systems
- Empower and encourage our partners, suppliers, and staff to complement our activity with their own efforts

To help achieve this goal, we have developed an Environmental Management System (EMS), a plan that focuses action on areas of most significant environmental impact. Our EMS has provided a framework for setting and reviewing our environmental objectives.

### We are committed to:

- Procuring from sustainable sources as much as we possibly can
- Ensuring our supply chain is as transparent as possible
- Ensuring we develop trusted relationships with valued suppliers
- Ensuring that our work is conducted honourably and fairly
- Purchasing recycled and other environmentally preferable products where feasible and appropriate
- Asking both contractors and partners to use recycled and other environmentally preferable products whenever practicable or appropriate

As an international development organisation, many of the programmes that we manage rely on international freight. We acknowledge that this can amount to significant greenhouse gas emissions, so we are taking steps to review and consider ways in which we can reduce our impact. Our biggest programme procurement suppliers, such as Imres, Pfizer, Aurolab and Merck, all have codes of conduct or policies regarding environmental standards.

## 4. Travel

In acknowledging that travel is one of the most direct and impactful ways in which we contribute to climate change, we try to minimise travel and always consider alternatives.

While it is often important for staff to be physically present at sites around the world, there are many occasions where video conferencing is used instead. As it is our aim to lessen the amount of travel our staff undertake, electronic methods of communication are always considered first.

International travel is booked internally by our travel department in the head office in the UK, to improve our cost and risk management. We take efforts to report on our travel and to communicate the results with staff.

In addition to our business travel, we have a sizeable greenhouse gas impact from our people commuting to work. Our impact depends, in part, on the nature of our operations. We are taking steps to review our approach to flexible working, realising a reduction in personal domestic travel to reach Sightsavers' offices would lessen our impact on the environment. We will also consider sustainability alongside other organisational needs as part of our real estate strategy and strategic business planning.

Our ability to reduce our environmental impact will also depend on the choices our people make about whether to visit an office and how best to travel. These decisions have implications, not only for our greenhouse gas emissions but also for people's health and wellbeing. For instance, avoiding stressful, unsafe, and tiring journeys, or choosing healthier, active modes of travel such as walking or cycling.

We conduct staff commuting surveys across all our country offices to ascertain modes of transport to the office and highlight any areas of improvement.

## 5. Fundraising and marketing

In line with our commitment to use recyclable and sustainable materials where possible, we use Forest Management Certification (FSC) accredited paper, printed by FSC-approved printers, which use vegetable-based inks for all our paper-based fundraising materials.

We ensure that we use data systems to identify who and where we send our fundraising materials to, which allows us to cut waste and reduce costs.

We carefully consider whether communications such as reports and proposals should be produced and shared electronically or in hard copy. Where hard copies are required, we strive to follow the same commitment to use recyclable and sustainable materials.

## 6. Conclusion

All Sightsavers staff are encouraged to consider their environmental impact through their daily and professional actions. This policy seeks to outline the principles of Sightsavers and is an expression of the seriousness of our commitment to be a more sustainable organisation. Although we have made progress in recent years, we acknowledge that we can always improve. Attached to this policy is an appendix of recommendations for actions to consider moving forward.

# Appendix A: Environmental standards recommendations

Sightsavers is committed to reduce the environmental impact of our operations through a consideration of the following practices:

## Establishing country-specific environmental strategies

Through conversations with country office staff, it has become clear that there cannot be a “one-size-fits-all” approach to environmental recommendations. We acknowledge that each country has context-specific factors regarding mitigation and their own limitations with regards to practice. Therefore, we will work towards country-specific targets in liaison with local staff. Through disseminating good environmental practice with our in-country staff, we also aim to have a positive effect on the behaviour of the partners with whom we work.

## Documentation of legal requirements and INGO reporting

In line with our legal obligations and donor commitments, we will be transparent in our reporting and documentation of our environmental practices.

## Employee and partner engagement

We will communicate this environmental policy and performance with all staff, trustees, and other representatives. We will also take into account staff suggestions for improvement and continue to develop our strategy with the expertise of the different members of our organisation.

It is recommended that we offer opportunities for staff to learn more about environmental issues through our formal employee induction programme as well as through informal learning sessions. The aim is to engage them in individually taking responsibility for their actions.

## Improvement

We will ensure that our environmental policy is periodically reviewed by the controller, Crisis & Risk, so that it maintains its relevance in our work and complies with contemporary requirements. These policies will be disseminated amongst staff and made available to the public.



We work with partners in low-  
and middle-income countries to  
eliminate avoidable blindness  
and promote equal opportunities  
for people with disabilities.

[www.sightsavers.org](http://www.sightsavers.org)