

## 4

# Organisational environmental sustainability

All the work we do as organisations has an environmental footprint, whether that relates to the projects we carry out or to our organisation's internal practices. This section looks at how organisations themselves can measure and reduce their environmental footprint. If our organisation wants to do environmentally sustainable projects, it is important that we make sure our organisation is in order first. The actions of individual staff often have considerable impact, so policies, processes and awareness-raising may therefore need to be put in place to ensure that the organisation as a whole can become environmentally sustainable.

It is increasingly becoming a requirement of donors that we have an environmental policy in place to demonstrate that we are proactively measuring and reducing the impact of our organisation on the environment.

## 4.1 Modelling good stewardship

Christian organisations should seek to ensure that they model good practice in terms of environmental sustainability. Our livelihoods are all based on the natural resources provided by God and we have been given the responsibility of maintaining, preserving and appreciating the world that God has created, not just for our own generation but for generations to come.

Christian organisations should start by reflecting on biblical teaching related to God's creation, stewardship and care for others. This will motivate people to bring change in existing organisational practices. The Bible studies in Section 2 could be used for this purpose.

## 4.2 Issues to consider

Offices would be unable to function efficiently without using natural resources and having some kind of environmental impact:

- Water provision for staff may include flushing toilets, water for washing hands and cooking.
- Computers, printers and lighting all require electricity, whether that comes from a power station, generator, or renewable sources.
- Some waste is inevitable, whether this is waste water, paper, food or food wrappings.
- In order to manage projects effectively, staff need to travel to project sites. Unless it is possible to visit all projects on foot or by bicycle, these visits will result in greenhouse gas emissions, either from the organisation's own vehicle or from public transport.

However, it is important that we understand the impact we are having on the environment and look for ways in which we can reduce it.

There are several issues for all organisations to consider when looking at their environmental footprint:

- the use of **energy** within buildings – such as electricity for lighting, running computers, heating or cooling systems and cooking
- **transport** – both for work purposes and for staff travel to work
- **goods** such as equipment, stationery and food products
- **water** consumption
- production and processing of **waste**
- **building design** including cooling and insulation.

The use of energy and vehicles and the production of goods both have an environmental impact because they use resources, and an impact on climate change because they usually involve the use of fossil fuels. Part of assessing their usage therefore involves looking at their 'carbon footprint' – measuring the amount of carbon released as a result of using energy, fuel for transport and the energy involved in producing and transporting people and goods.

Although the use of some resources and production of waste is unavoidable, organisations can take action to ensure that their environmental and carbon footprints are as small and sustainable as possible. There are often examples of unnecessary use of office resources. There are a number of reasons why this may be the case:

- Staff are not personally responsible for paying for these resources, so there is little incentive for them to reduce waste.
- In larger organisations in particular, it is not always easy to see who is using resources unnecessarily, so it is difficult to keep staff accountable.
- Staff may not be aware of environmental issues and do not practise good stewardship.

Although the actions of a few staff can make a difference, organisations that make big environmental improvements tend to have the commitment of all staff. Staff therefore need to be aware and motivated, and structures need to be in place to support and measure their efforts. It is important that senior management lead by example.

## 4.3 Benefits of good stewardship

Good stewardship of resources by organisations has many benefits:

**CONSERVATION OF RESOURCES** Limiting the use of paper, plastics, metal, and water helps to reduce depletion of natural resources.

**COST SAVINGS** Where resources are used more efficiently and only when necessary (such as turning lights off when there is no one in the room), organisations could save substantial amounts of money that could be spent on projects instead.

**HEALTH IMPROVEMENTS** Buildings that are ventilated or insulated will stay cooler in high temperatures and warmer in colder temperatures, reducing the need for air-conditioning and heating. Staff who work in well ventilated offices are likely to be more productive and stay healthy.

**IMPROVED PROJECTS** Organisations that take account of environmental issues are more likely to plan projects that have minimal impact on the environment and that take account of possible impacts from the environment. The effectiveness and sustainability of projects is therefore improved.

**REDUCTION OF CARBON EMISSIONS** Reducing the use of fossil fuels through conserving energy and using efficient methods of transport, will reduce carbon emissions and therefore greenhouse gases.

**ENHANCED REPUTATION** Better stewardship of resources improves the organisation's reputation among donors, peers and the community who view the organisation as caring and responsible. Organisations may also experience an increase in financial support as a result.

**MEETING NATIONAL GUIDELINES AND TARGETS** National governments are increasingly concerned about environmental issues, and they are now starting to be held accountable for their actions by international agreements, particularly in relation to climate change and carbon emissions. Governments will be putting pressure on industry, the public sector and citizens to contribute to the achievement of national targets. In the long term, the achievement of these targets should be good for everyone, so development organisations should seek to play their part.

## 4.4 Good practice in office-based environmental stewardship

All offices should be working towards:

- **reducing the use of energy and associated greenhouse gas emissions** by:
  - sourcing goods and services locally wherever possible
  - ensuring that all electrical equipment is turned off when not in use (not left on standby, which still uses lots of electricity) and switching off lights, air-conditioning, fans and heating when not needed
  - using energy efficient light bulbs
  - opening windows or having meetings outside rather than using air conditioning, when possible.
- **reducing staff travel** by:
  - co-ordinating visits by different staff members to project sites to reduce the number of trips and distance travelled, and to enable staff to travel together
  - sharing vehicles or combining travel with other NGOs to adjacent sites
  - walking or using public transport as much as possible
  - making more use of low fuel transport when possible – such as motorbikes rather than four-wheel drive (4WD) vehicles

- reducing the number of flights and using phones, internet technology and video conferencing, wherever possible, as alternatives to travelling to meetings.
- **reducing the use of other resources** by:
  - avoiding printing out emails or documents unnecessarily
  - using both sides of paper
  - re-using envelopes and packaging
  - encouraging electronic correspondence and file sharing
  - reducing how often project vehicles are washed.
- **reducing waste and pollution** through:
  - separating rubbish to allow composting and recycling (provide separate bins)
  - banning the use of plastic bags
  - using biodegradable chemicals where possible.

In many situations there may not be the opportunity to recycle materials. However, paper, cardboard and glass may be of value to poor people who make their living from collecting and selling them. Organise regular collection points for them. Kitchen and food waste can usually be collected either for compost or animal feed to avoid waste. Consider establishing a recycling project.

Other ideas, which might require more time and resources to implement, include:

**Energy-saving strategies** including investing in renewable energy supplies (such as micro-hydro, solar panels or wind turbines), installing better building insulation or natural cooling, and fitting mosquito netting over windows so natural ventilation can be used.

**Improved water management** such as installing rainwater harvesting tanks, reducing toilet cistern volumes with water displacement devices (e.g. a brick or a plastic bottle full of water) and fixing any dripping taps.

**Ethical purchasing** such as choosing local products and materials over imported ones, whenever possible, to reduce transport-related emissions, sourcing products only from companies that are seeking to reduce their own environmental footprint, using timber from sustainably managed forests, and encouraging contractors to take account of the organisation's environmental policy when carrying out work.

**Community participation** from an environmental perspective, such as a commitment to take part in and support improvements to the local area (e.g. waste management and tree planting), participation in discussions and the sharing of ideas about environmental issues, and a commitment to advocate for change when the best environmental options are not available or adequate.

These efforts to ensure office-based environmental stewardship should be written down in an environmental policy. (See Section 4.5)

## 4.5 Developing an organisational environmental policy

An environmental policy is a statement of an organisation's commitment to good environmental stewardship and outlines the key activities that the organisation will carry out to make it happen. Such a policy recognises that, however large or small the impact, an organisation's operations do have an impact on the environment.

The policy enables the organisation to communicate its environmental objectives to staff and also to donors, the people it serves, stakeholders and other organisations.

The organisation's leadership must always own an environmental policy. The policy should be developed by members of staff with an understanding of environmental issues and a good understanding of the internal workings of the organisation. All staff will need to take ownership of the policy that is agreed as they will be the people who put it into practice. There may be benefits in using an external consultant to work with staff in developing an environmental policy as they may bring fresh ideas, experience and the ability to identify key areas of concern.

### Practical tips in producing an environmental policy

#### Ensure that the policy is appropriate for the organisation

- The objectives in the policy should relate to the organisation's operations.
- The objectives need to be realistic and achievable.

#### Encourage staff to read and own the policy

- Keep the policy short (e.g. one or two pages).
- Avoid the use of jargon.
- Display the policy where staff can see it.
- Translate it into local languages if some staff do not speak the organisation's main language.

#### Encourage staff to implement the policy

- If the policy is signed and promoted by the leadership, staff are more likely to take it seriously.
- Leaders should set an example to staff by implementing some objectives as soon as possible.
- Help staff to understand the policy by holding awareness-raising events and training.

As a general rule, the policy should contain a commitment to continuous improvement, together with awareness-raising, participation and training for staff in environmental matters. The policy should also include a combination of quick solutions, such as printing double-sided, and longer-term solutions that make the greatest difference, such as reducing the number of flights or planting trees.

## Example of an environmental policy

Here we provide a sample environmental policy for an imaginary development organisation called Help and Hope.

### Help and Hope's environmental policy

**Basis** Help and Hope believes that the whole of creation belongs to God and that all believers should appreciate God's varied and wonderful creation, and care for the environment in order to sustain it for future generations.

**Staff training and education** Help and Hope is committed to encouraging and helping all staff to understand and take action on issues of environmental sustainability.

**Work in the community** Help and Hope will work with those it serves to ensure that all projects are environmentally sustainable. Help and Hope's partner churches will be encouraged to have services that focus on environmental concerns and stewardship on at least two occasions each year.

**Travel** Help and Hope will encourage staff to make use of the least polluting method of travel possible by walking, cycling, using public transport, and minimising the use of cars and air travel.

**Office practice** Help and Hope will conserve energy wherever possible within its buildings with particular emphasis on heating, lighting, ventilation and office equipment. Water will be used efficiently and with care. The use of renewable energy will be encouraged.

**Waste management** Help and Hope is committed to reducing, re-using and recycling waste as much as possible. This will include the recycling of scrap paper, cans, plastic and CDs. The organisation is also committed to reducing the creation of waste. In order to achieve this, the purchase and use of items made from plastic and polystyrene which are not bio-degradable will be discouraged.

**Stationery management** Help and Hope will source recycled office stationery wherever possible and use printers and printing inks which take environmental factors into account. Paper consumption will be monitored and ongoing measures will be taken to minimise the quantity used. Recycling of paper products will be actively encouraged. Electronic communication will be used in preference to paper whenever possible.

**Purchasing and trading** Help and Hope's purchasing activities should always take environmental factors into account. Though cost issues are important, preference should be given to local suppliers who take good environmental practice and sustainability seriously.

**Policy management and monitoring** The organisation will appoint a member of staff as a part time Environmental Officer who will be responsible for developing and reporting on an annual action plan.

**Environmental audit** Help and Hope will carry out a full environmental audit once a year and will make the results openly available for others to see.

## 4.6 Encouraging staff ownership

If the organisation is large, representatives from each department could be brought together to encourage staff to implement the policy. They should meet regularly to discuss progress and new issues to focus on. They could arrange regular events to remind staff of the policy, such as quizzes, competitions, and sharing facts. They could put up signs, posters and cartoons to remind staff about particular actions.

The group could also organise some one-off events, such as spending the afternoon planting fruit trees in the office grounds or local community, or giving a prize to the individual or team that has the best idea for conserving resources.

The implementation of the policy should be carefully monitored and regularly reviewed against targets set by an environmental audit.

## 4.7 An environmental audit

The need for organisations to carry out a regular environmental audit should be included within the environmental policy. An environmental audit measures the organisation's performance in reducing its negative environmental impact and involves collecting accurate, comprehensive and meaningful information. The first environmental audit can be used to establish a baseline against which progress can be measured.

An environmental audit can be carried out by staff or by an independent auditor. Alternatively, two organisations might agree to audit each other and then review the results together, which enhances the learning process. This is known as a 'peer review'.

For many organisations, the end of the financial year is the best time to carry out an environmental audit when other records are updated. Most measurements are best audited on an annual basis so that holiday periods (when offices are closed) and seasonal weather patterns (likely to affect the amount of heating, cooling and other energy used) do not cause widely varying measurements. Many of the measurements should be fairly straightforward to collect, such as noting the electricity reading, logging the number of staff miles travelled and checking the amount of paper and envelopes used. (These should be recorded monthly to make the audit easier.) Sometimes staff surveys will need to be included as part of the audit, such as when finding out how staff travel to work. Where measurements are missing, an estimate can be made based on measurements from similar organisations, if they exist. New record-keeping practices can then be established for the following year. It is important to use consistent methods of measurement between one audit and the next so that progress can be accurately monitored.

At the start of an audit a meeting should be held with all members of staff to explain the audit activities and what is required of them. Emphasise the reasons for carrying out the audit so staff are happy to participate and understand that it is not being carried out to shame or penalise any individual or team.

The table below contains some ideas on what to include in terms of meter readings and measuring waste. (On page 89 there is a blank template to photocopy.) Calculating the totals will involve careful gathering and checking of information, particularly if there are many staff. This will take time during the first audit, but gathering this information for subsequent audits will be quicker, particularly if recording of the data becomes part of routine office practice.

For each measurement, a target should be set for the following year. Once an audit has been completed, compare the measurements with those of last year to see whether improvements have been made and targets met. Efforts will need to be made to address the areas where the targets have not been met.

### Sample environmental audit

**Table 1 Part A**  
Environmental footprint

Resources	Amount used per year	Amount sustainably sourced per year	Target reduction per year
Mains tap water	litres		5%
Bottled drinking water	litres		10%
Paper	reams		10%
Other stationery			10%
Food	tonnes		10%
Other			

Recycling	Amount per year in tonnes	Amount or % recycled	Annual target for recycling
Paper			25% increase
Cardboard			15% increase
Plastic			8% increase
Glass			5% increase
Non-recyclable			5% decrease in non-recyclable rubbish produced



**Table 1 Part B**  
**Carbon footprint**

The second part of an audit looks at the amount of carbon dioxide equivalent produced by the organisation through energy use and travel. (On page 90 there is a blank template to photocopy.)

These figures are correct as of March 2009 and are taken from the 2008 Guidelines to Defra's GHG Conversion Factors.

Please check up-to-date figures for your country each time you complete this table.

FUEL	Amount of fuel used per year	Multiply by this to convert to Kg of carbon dioxide equivalent	Total carbon dioxide equivalent emissions in Kg
Mains electricity supply in kilowatt hours (kWh)	kWh	0.537	
Mains gas (in cubic metres)	Cu M	2.2	
Bottled gas	litres	1.495	
Diesel supply from generator in litres (1 gallon = 4.546 litres)	litres	2.63	
Sourced from renewable energy, such as solar panels, wind or water turbine	Nil		Nil
VEHICLES	Distance travelled	Multiply by this to convert to Kg of carbon dioxide equivalent	Total carbon dioxide equivalent emissions in Kg
Small motorbike (50 to 125cc engine)	Km	0.073	
Small petrol car (up to 1.4 litre engine)	Km	0.1809	
Medium motor bike (125 to 500cc)	Km	0.0939	
Medium petrol car	Km	0.2139	
Large motorbike (500cc engine and above)	Km	0.1286	
Large petrol car or 4WDrive	Km	0.2958	
Small diesel car (up to 2.0 litre engine)	Km	0.1513	
Large diesel car (over 2.0 litre engine)	Km	0.2580	
PUBLIC TRANSPORT	Distance travelled	Multiply by this to convert to Kg of carbon dioxide equivalent	Total carbon dioxide equivalent emissions in Kg
Rail travel	Km	0.06	
Bus travel	Km	0.1073	
Long distance bus or coach	Km	0.029	
PLANE TRAVEL (distances are hard to calculate so instead work out hours of flying time)	Hours flown	Multiply by this	Total carbon dioxide equivalent emissions in Kg
Total of all flights worked out in terms of actual hours flown	hours	250	
<b>ORGANISATIONAL TOTAL FOR CARBON DIOXIDE EQUIVALENT EMISSIONS IN KG</b>			

It is vital that the outcomes of the audit are recorded and that a report is produced. This report could include a description of the office or offices being audited, the type of organisation, details about issues covered, results, and an action plan for the way forward. The results should show any gaps in information or poor environmental practices and can be used to develop targets for reducing impact in the future. The report should be made available to all staff and board members, as well as the community and donors.

When an audit is completed, it is good practice to identify the biggest sources of emissions and put an action plan or policy in place to reduce these, year on year. For example, each team or department could be given a travel or paper budget which they must reduce each year.

It can prove very helpful to share audit information to provide some comparisons with other similar organisations. This enables organisations to review how well they are performing and to share useful ideas.

**REFLECTION**

- Do we ever consider our organisation's environmental footprint?
- Which organisational practices are damaging to the environment and should be changed?
- Should we develop an organisational policy? Who could do this?
- Should we carry out an environmental audit? Who could do this?