

Research report

On the road to building a sustainable future

Five-year review of Tearfund's environmental
and economic sustainability work



tearfund

The findings in this summary are drawn from the following report: Simpson, N.P.; Liu, L.; Hill, R.C.; Kataw, S.; Mwanga, M.; Avelino, C.; Moreno, M.; Frazer, S.; Ling, A.; Ferguson, A. (2023) 'Five-year review of Tearfund's progress towards its corporate priority on Environmental and Economic Sustainability', commissioned by Tearfund UK, Tearfund Netherlands and Tearfund Germany: Teddington, UK.

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📷 Front cover photo: Celeste and her family were badly affected by drought in Paraiba State in Brazil, until Tearfund partner ACEV installed a borehole so they can plant and harvest all year round. Photo: Tom Price – Ecce Opus/Tearfund

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Introduction

Tearfund works with local churches in more than 50 of the world's poorest countries to help people lift themselves out of poverty, live transformed lives and reach their God-given potential. We believe that poverty is not God's plan. It is the result of our broken relationships with God, ourselves, others and the environment. And we believe that we, through the local church, are God's plan for restoring these relationships and ending global poverty.

We have a vision for a sustainable global economy in which extreme poverty is ended, the balance in creation is restored and inequality is reduced. Striving towards this vision, Environmental and Economic Sustainability (EES) has been one of Tearfund's corporate priorities since 2018.

After five years of EES programming, we worked with an independent consultant to take stock of our progress. We examined documentation from **24 EES projects across 19 countries** and visited projects in Brazil, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Malawi, Nepal, Pakistan and Zambia. The review identified strengths and challenges and reflected on areas for revision, improvement and future growth.

The results are encouraging. Our EES projects are having a positive impact on social, environmental and economic conditions, and are contributing towards achieving the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs).

What is environmental and economic sustainability (EES)?

Tearfund recognises that climate change, the environment and people's livelihoods are closely connected. Our response is to promote environmental and economic sustainability (EES). EES is about working towards a world where extreme inequality is reduced and where everyone can meet their basic needs – and flourish – within their environmental limits. We believe that EES work can bring about a deep-seated mindset and behavioural change as churches and communities realise how much God loves his world – and our need to care for it.

EES has a wide range of elements. **All EES projects are making sure they address environmental challenges and economic wellbeing at the same time.** EES activities include: advocacy, influencing and movement building; waste management; self-help groups and savings groups; green livelihoods projects; renewable energy; and climate-smart agriculture.

Top three findings

There are three standout findings from the five-year review of Tearfund's EES work:

1

EES work is having a positive impact on social, environmental and economic conditions for the most vulnerable

The review found **evidence of progress towards our three main EES goals**: providing sustainable green jobs, enhancing the local environment, and reducing inequality.

The review used the EES design principles to score conditions in communities before and after EES projects. Before EES projects started, most communities were rated as 'worsening' or 'fragile'. This reflects the fact that Tearfund works with the most isolated and marginalised communities. After participating in EES projects, the review found **improvement in social, environmental and economic conditions**: communities had a rating of 'stabilised' in all but one of the design principles.

The design principles with the greatest improvement on average were:

- Low-carbon and ecological infrastructure for the betterment of all
- Sustainable resource management informed by the best available science, and local and indigenous knowledge
- Steady improvement in material wellbeing (dwelling, sanitation, safety etc)

These results demonstrate that EES programming has a positive impact on both environmental and economic aspects.

EES design principles

There are ten design principles that guide all EES activities:

1. Equal access to ecosystem goods and services
2. Decision-making processes incorporate long-term and distributional benefits and costs
3. Sustainable resource management informed by the best available science, and local and indigenous knowledge
4. Environmental shocks and stressors understood and prepared for
5. Inclusive upwards mobility for more people
6. Inequalities and inequities declining (access, income, gender, education etc)
7. Market intelligence, good jobs and economic stability
8. Low-carbon and ecological infrastructure for the betterment of all
9. Steady improvement in material wellbeing (dwelling, sanitation, safety etc)
10. Economic resilience and social safety nets built into policies and practices

2

EES work is contributing to achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The review mapped the EES design principles against the SDGs. Together the projects reviewed, and the design principles, contribute towards all 17 SDGs. In particular, Tearfund's EES work is contributing towards SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities) and SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions). This shows Tearfund's EES work aligns with and promotes achievement of the SDGs.



Case study: Informed sustainable resource management in Zambia

A Tearfund-supported agricultural project in Zambia drew upon both science and theology to design its approach to sustainable resource management: the Foundations for Farming resource and the principles of 'care for creation'.

Through this, the project promoted 'ecological intensification' by increasing crop diversity, adding fertility crops and mulching with organic material (like grass or hay) to reduce moisture loss and prompt soil nutrient health.

Churches set up demonstration plots for community members to practise these sustainable farming methods. Seed suppliers used the plots to show the strengths of different crop varieties. The churches hosted school trips to the plots, exposing children to the benefits of agriculture without chemical fertilisers and pesticides.

As they tested the different sustainable agricultural practices in the demonstration pilots, the community was able to identify the best practices for their context. The pilots treat farming as an evolving science, where methods are tested to determine the most successful approaches. Farmers shared this newfound knowledge with each other. As a result, the community has increased the yield of staple crops, improved the soil quality and generated more income at the same time.



📷 Nathan tends to his crops that he planted outside his home in Zambia. He was inspired to adopt sustainable farming practices after attending a training course run by Tearfund's partner, the Jubilee Centre.

Photo: Ruth Towell/Tearfund

3

Tearfund's integrated approaches magnify the impact of EES work

Poverty is complex and multi-dimensional. So Tearfund employs many different approaches to tackle it. Our EES work is often integrated across these approaches and the review found that it complements and magnifies positive impact.

Advocacy is central to embedding and scaling up EES projects. **All of the projects reviewed engaged with government or grassroots groups and over half worked with local municipalities.** In the DRC and Pakistan, urban waste and green livelihood projects were successfully handed over from Tearfund's country offices to local government counterparts.

Tearfund's church and community transformation work creates spaces for church congregations and communities where the environment is thought about, discussed and protected in line with 'care for creation' principles. **Seventy per cent of the EES projects reviewed included activities that encouraged pro-environmental behaviour change.**

EES work also supports Tearfund's commitment to creating reconciled and peace-filled societies by **creating environmentally friendly economic pathways.** Many EES projects include activities that encourage peacebuilding community exchanges. And EES work supports Tearfund's crisis to resilience work by **strengthening coping mechanisms for environmental changes and addressing underlying vulnerabilities.**

Self-help groups (SHGs) play a significant role in bringing together Tearfund's integrated approaches. Not only do they help increase participants' income and entrepreneurship, but they also bring communities together.



📷 More than 40 young people from across Latin America gathered in Colombia to pray, learn about good governance and care for creation, and be equipped to enhance justice in their communities. Photo: Andrés Pacheco/Tearfund




Case study: Improved material wellbeing in Nepal

The installation of metallic-improved cooking stoves in communities throughout the remote region of Bajura in Nepal has significantly improved the health and safety of women and their family members, while being better for the environment.

These mud-built stoves have one or two metallic plates and a metallic chimney. They are more efficient than traditional stoves, using less firewood to burn for longer periods. This promotes forest conservation as less wood is needed for cooking, and women are spending more time tending to their kitchen gardens instead of travelling long distances to collect firewood. Fuel costs are also reduced, freeing up disposable income. The improved stoves are improving health too as there is no more indoor smoke, which is damaging women's eyes and lungs and polluting the home.

Women who participated in this project told us they used to dread cooking because of smoke inhalation. Now, they relish the creativity of cooking and being able to talk to loved ones as they sit together in a smoke-free environment. The local government was so impressed by this project, it offered to pay to install the stoves in more homes. This shows the transferability and scalability of this EES initiative.



 Ambika cooks dinner for her family using a metallic-improved cooking stove. Photo: Tearfund




Case study: Green livelihoods in Brazil

Communities in northeastern Brazil were plagued by water shortages, which made agricultural livelihoods difficult to sustain and encouraged unsustainable farming practices. A Tearfund-supported project helped tackle these issues by installing wells and introducing new, more sustainable opportunities to promote green livelihoods.

To help people start growing their own food, the project set up a seed bank to purchase seeds below market price and provided technical advice about how to grow the seeds. This advice encouraged sustainable farming techniques in place of previously harmful practices like burning straw for planting corn and beans. One of the techniques farmers adopted was utilising waste water for tree planting – and many banana trees flourished from this practice.

Most of the project participants were mothers, aged 20–35, who had limited means to earn money to support their young families. Through this project they were able to sell their produce and generate income. The project helped people to sell their produce through WhatsApp and at markets, sharing the profits across all the farmers. Project participants were encouraged to collect and share income data among themselves, so that they could make decisions about which crops to grow based on what was most profitable. Organic food like beets and aubergines became much more popular across the city, contributing to a more nutritional diet for both the farmers and their neighbours.



 Rita takes advantage of the new well to water her crops in Brazil. She will use these to feed her family and sell in local markets for profit. Photo: Tom Price – Ecce Opus/Tearfund

Conclusion

Tearfund's environmental and economic sustainability approach works. It changes lives. And through it we believe we can end extreme poverty.

This review demonstrates notable progress towards our vision of environmental and economic sustainability: a world where extreme inequality is reduced and where everyone can meet their basic needs – and flourish – within their environmental limits.

We have a vision to scale up our work on EES, and to see hundreds of thousands of churches lead transformation in their communities and bring an end to extreme poverty.

We'd love to tell you more, over the phone, or over a coffee. Please get in touch! You can contact us by phone 020 3906 3500 or email partnerships@tearfund.org



📷 Lucas is a solar entrepreneur in Tanzania who raised capital through his self-help group to open his own shop, which he can now open after dark thanks to a solar-powered light. Photo: Tom Price – Ecce Opus/Tearfund



📷 John (centre) was part of a group from his community in Malawi who learnt forestry skills through EES training. They have planted two hectares of forest and work hard to maintain it. Photo: Marcus Perkins/Tearfund

Poverty is not God's plan. You are.

Thousands of people needlessly suffer and die everyday because of poverty. But that's not God's plan for the world. We believe that we can all play a part in ending extreme poverty and injustice. We invite you to join Tearfund in partnering with local churches and organisations around the world, equipping people to lift themselves out of poverty and fulfil their God-given potential.

This review was commissioned by Tearfund UK, Tearfund Netherlands and Tearfund Germany.

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