

**Submission by the United States of America to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change  
Communication of U.S. Adaptation Priorities  
May 29, 2015**

Adaptation is a challenge for all Parties. In addition to taking action to curb greenhouse gas emissions, all countries also need to prepare themselves for the unavoidable impacts of climate change and to enhance their resilience in the face of future climate uncertainties. That is why the United States is taking action at home, supporting vulnerable countries and communities in their efforts to adapt, and working with Parties to elevate the profile of adaptation through the 2015 agreement.

In Lima, Parties were invited to consider including an adaptation component in their intended nationally determined contributions (INDCs), or to communicate, separate from the INDCs, their undertakings in adaptation planning. The United States has selected the latter option, and is pleased to communicate its forward looking domestic and international adaptation priorities.

### **I. Climate change impacts**

Like many other countries, the United States is vulnerable to current and projected climate changes.

According to the Third U.S. National Climate Assessment (NCA), all U.S. regions and key economic sectors are affected by climate change. For example:

- In the Southwest, drought and increased warming have fueled longer and more intense wildfire seasons, as well as reduced water availability for people and ecosystems.
- In the Northeast, heat waves, coastal flooding due to sea-level rise and storm surges, and riverine flooding due to more extreme precipitation events are increasingly affecting communities.
- In Alaska and the Arctic, summer sea ice is receding rapidly, glaciers are shrinking, and permafrost is thawing, causing damage to infrastructure and major changes in ecosystems.
- Hawaii and U.S.-affiliated Pacific islands are facing increasingly strained freshwater supplies and rising temperatures, posing a threat to food and water security.

### **II. U.S. domestic adaptation priorities**

In 2013, the President put forward his Climate Action Plan, as a blueprint for action to reduce emissions and enhance preparedness for climate change. Through Executive Order 13653 on *Preparing the US for the Impacts of Climate Change*, the President provided direction to Federal agencies and identified **priorities for adaptation planning and action**, with a view to strengthening the climate resilience of vulnerable sectors, ecosystems, and populations. The President also established a **Deputy Secretary-level inter-agency Council on Climate Preparedness and Resilience** in order to promote greater coordination and coherence with respect to adaptation action across Federal agencies and programs.

Going forward, the priorities identified in EO 13653 are intended to guide U.S. Federal adaptation action. Furthermore, the Council will continue to serve as a vehicle for coordinating adaptation activities across Federal agencies.

The priorities include:

1. **Modernizing federal programs to support climate-resilient investments:** Federal agencies are expected to examine their policies and programs to find opportunities to incentivize resilience. Agencies are expected to identify and remove any barriers to resilience-focused actions and investments— for example, policies that encourage communities to rebuild to past standards after disasters instead of to stronger standards. See Table 1 below for examples of such changes.

Table 1: Examples of Federal Agency Action

Agency	Adaptation action
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	The Army Corps launched the Comprehensive Evaluation of Projects with Respect to Sea Level Rise Change to screen and provide an initial assessment of the vulnerability of its coastal projects to sea-level rise in the 50- and 100-year planning horizons.
Department of Transportation	DOT developed tools to help stakeholders in the Gulf Coast region analyze climate data and plan for the impacts of climate change. DOT has supported some 30 pilot projects that will demonstrate risk evaluation practices and resilience planning. DOT’s competitive grant program, Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery, is being used to improve the climate resilience of capital investments in surface transportation infrastructure such as highways, bridges, public transportation, ports and intermodal transportation.
Environmental Protection Agency	EPA is now encouraging consideration of climate change in the management of the Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Loan Funds. The terms and conditions of EPA’s Brownfields cleanup grants now include language that encourage grantees to take potential changing climate conditions into consideration when evaluating cleanup alternatives to ensure they are effective as the climate changes. EPA is also integrating consideration of climate impacts into projects funded under the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, which accelerates efforts to protect and restore the largest system of fresh surface water in the world.
Federal Emergency Management Agency	On January 30, 2015, the President issued <i>Executive Order 13690: Establishing a Federal Flood Risk Management Standard and a Process for Further Soliciting and Considering Stakeholder Input</i> . This new policy requires future federal investments in and affecting floodplains to meet a higher level of resilience. FEMA is leading the effort to consider stakeholder input received on how best to implement this new resilience standard across the wide range of federal programs. The Standard announced gives agencies the flexibility to select one of three approaches for establishing the flood elevation and hazard area they use in siting, design, and construction. The Standard will reduce flood risk and increase resilience.

2. **Supporting communities in their efforts to increase climate preparedness and resilience,** including by working with state, tribal, territorial, and local governments to improve the preparedness and resilience of communities. EO 13653 established a Task Force of State, Local, and Tribal Leaders, comprising 26 elected officials. In November 2014, the Task Force provided a series of [recommendations](#) to the President for how the Federal government can remove barriers to resilient investments, modernize Federal grant and loan programs to better support local efforts, and provide better access to actionable information and tools they need to prepare. Recommendations focused on seven themes, including improving the resilience of the nation’s infrastructure, natural resources, disaster recovery, and human health. The Administration has been actively working to

address the Task Force's recommendations, through the leadership of the interagency Council on Climate Preparedness and Resilience.

3. **Managing lands and waters for climate preparedness and resilience:** Federal agencies are expected to identify changes that must be made to land- and water-related policies, programs, and regulations to strengthen the climate resilience of our watersheds, natural resources, and ecosystems, and the communities and economies that depend on them. In October 2014, the Administration released a Priority Agenda for Enhancing the Climate Resilience of America's Natural Resources.
4. **Providing information, data and tools for climate change preparedness and resilience:** Federal agencies are expected to work together and with information users to develop new climate preparedness tools and information that state, local, and private-sector leaders need to make smart decisions. As part of this effort, the White House launched in 2014 a Climate Data Initiative (CDI) to leverage open data across the Federal government to spur innovation and private sector entrepreneurship as they relate to adaptation. Contributors include Google, Intel, Amazon, HP, Coca Cola, IBM, Walmart, Microsoft, the World Bank, and Rockefeller Foundation, among many others. The CDI is complemented by an online [Climate Resilience Toolkit](#), released in November 2014, which provides scientific tools, information and expertise to help people manage climate-related risks and opportunities and improve their resilience to extreme events.
5. **Planning for climate change-related risk:** Federal agencies continue to build on the first-ever set of Federal agency Climate Change Adaptation Plans, released in 2013 and updated in 2014, developing and implementing strategies to evaluate and address their most significant climate change-related risks. To date, 38 Federal agencies have released adaptation plans detailing how climate change is expected to affect their missions and operations and how they are integrating climate-adaptation considerations into their decision-making.

The **interagency Council on Climate Preparedness and Resilience** is co-chaired by the Chair of the White House Council on Environmental Quality, the Director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, the Director of the White House Office of Management and Budget, and the Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism. Comprising approximately 30 agencies, the Council seeks to promote more effective coordination across agencies. Its objectives are to:

1. **Develop, recommend, coordinate interagency efforts on,** and track implementation of priority Federal Government actions related to, climate preparedness and resilience;
2. **Support regional, State, local, and tribal action** to assess climate change-related vulnerabilities and cost-effectively increase climate preparedness and resilience of communities, critical economic sectors, natural and built infrastructure, and natural resources; and
3. **Facilitate the integration of climate science in policies and planning of government agencies and the private sector**, including by promoting the development of innovative, actionable, and accessible Federal climate change-related information, data, and tools at scales relevant for decision-makers.

### III. U.S. international adaptation priorities

In addition to helping communities at home prepare for climate change, the United States is committed to enhancing international cooperation and helping vulnerable developing countries adapt to a changing

climate. It recognizes the importance of the National Adaptation Plan (NAP) process for developing countries in adapting to climate change. By developing and implementing a strategic, prioritized, actionable and participatory NAP process, vulnerable countries can reduce vulnerability and integrate climate change adaptation into their national and development planning.

Climate change adaptation is a core element of the United States' development strategy, which places a premium on broad-based economic growth, democratic governance, game-changing innovations, and sustainable systems for meeting basic human needs. Going forward:

**1. The United States intends to provide dedicated resources to support the capacity of partner countries and communities as they seek to build resilience to extreme weather and climate events into their development strategies.**

The United States intends to continue to provide support – through both bilateral and multilateral channels – to vulnerable countries to reduce climate risks in key areas, including infrastructure, agriculture, and health and water services. This support helps the most vulnerable develop the capacity to use the best science and analysis for decision making, and promote the sound governance and national adaptation planning necessary to carry out these decisions.

As part of this effort, for example, the United States intends to provide climate information to vulnerable countries for the purposes of making decisions about investments and strategies to build resilience and adapt to climate change. In September 2014, President Obama announced a new public-private partnership that provides climate science, data, tools, and training to developing countries to help them prepare for the impacts of climate change. The President also announced the release of high-resolution, free, online topographical data for the entire world, starting with Africa, providing a data point every 30 meters for the Earth's surface by the end of 2015. These data will provide countries around the world a key information for making decisions about infrastructure, the impacts of sea level rise, fresh water supply, and other climate impacts.

Finally, the United States helped spearhead last year the creation of the new National Adaptation Planning (NAP) Global Network to galvanize bilateral agency support for the NAP process. More and more developing countries are undertaking national adaptation planning processes to reduce their vulnerability and increase resilience to climate change. For bilateral donors providing support to the NAP processes, opportunities to better coordinate, leverage and learn from each other's programs – both globally and within countries – must be harnessed.

**2. The United States intends to mainstream adaptation into all U.S. international development efforts.**

Over recent years, U.S. federal agencies have been taking important and cutting-edge steps toward ensuring our broader international investments and programs are climate-resilient. USAID, for example, has sought to integrate climate considerations into its development work since 2012. As part of this effort, it launched in 2013 its Climate-Resilient Development Framework, which helps decision makers and practitioners integrate climate considerations directly into development activities across multiple sectors, to ensure that the United States can achieve international development goals despite a changing climate.

To build on this important work, and to make more systematic our assessment and response to climate risk throughout the U.S. government's international development portfolio, in September 2014, the President issued Executive Order 13677 on Climate-Resilient International Development, requiring Federal agencies to factor climate-resilience considerations into all of the U.S. government's international development work and to promote a similar approach with multilateral entities.

While dedicated funding for adaptation is critical, the magnitude of the challenge requires not just dedicated adaptation finance flows but also a broader, integrated approach. Development investments in areas as diverse as eradicating malaria, improving agricultural yields, and developing transportation systems will not be effective in the long term if they do not account for impacts such as shifting ranges of disease-carrying mosquitoes, changing water availability, or rising sea levels.

This new Executive Order is expected to improve the resilience of the Federal Government's international development programs, projects, investments, overseas facilities, and other funding decisions through consideration of current and future climate-change impacts. All agencies will be expected to meet the EO requirement of "estimating the proportion of each agency's direct international development programs and investments for which climate risk assessments have been conducted as well as an estimation of the proportion of the programs and investments for which climate risk was identified and acted upon."

To help facilitate the implementation of this Executive Order, the President established a Working Group on Climate Resilient International Development, under the Council on Climate Preparedness and Resilience. Co-chaired by the Department of Treasury and USAID, the working group is tasked with several duties, including facilitating the exchange of knowledge, lessons, and good practices, as well as promoting interagency collaboration.

For more information about the impacts of climate change in the United States, and U.S. experiences and lessons learned as they relate to adaptation, both domestic and international, please refer to:

1. Third U.S. National Climate Assessment: <http://nca2014.globalchange.gov/>;
2. Sixth National Communication of the United States of America, Chapter 6: <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/219044.pdf>;
3. Report of the State, Local and Tribal Taskforce on Climate Resilience and Preparedness to the President: [https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/task\\_force\\_report\\_0.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/task_force_report_0.pdf);
4. U.S. Climate Resilience Toolkit: <http://toolkit.climate.gov/>;
5. Recent U.S. case studies on good practices and lessons learned for adaptation planning processes to the Nairobi Work Program (all case studies, as contributed by Parties and Nairobi partner organizations, will be made available online on the NWP web page of the UNFCCC website this summer); and
6. USAID website, which includes description of its work in support of adaptation in developing countries: <http://www.usaid.gov/climate/adaptation>.