

PAN AMERICAN DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION

Reducing the carbon footprint of decentralised operations

- **Region:** United States - Latin America and the Caribbean
- **Number of staff:** Approximately 900
- **Year of incorporation:** 1962
- **Type:** Operating foundation
- **Endowment:** No
- **More information:** [padf.org](https://www.padf.org)

The Pan American Development Foundation (PADF) was established by the Organization of American States (OAS) in the 1960s, to complement the United States Agency for International Development programmes in Latin America and the Caribbean. PADF is part of the Inter-American Human Rights System, but maintains an independent status, focusing on addressing the needs of vulnerable populations, promoting sustainable livelihoods and advancing rights and justice. While climate considerations are spread across all of these focus areas, it is under ‘promoting sustainable livelihoods’ that the most progress can be seen, from grants that promote workforce skills development, renewable energy deployment and nature-based solutions initiatives. In 2021, 63% of PADF’s resources came from the United States government, 27% from OAS members, and 10% from a few private partners. The Organisation reported reaching over 3.1 million people, partnering with civil society, governments and the private sector to build local capabilities for achieving sustainable development.

Although PADF does not have a specific climate programme, its approach to climate concerns is present in several elements of its 2022-2024 Strategic Plan¹, ranging from climate integration in its projects, to measuring the carbon footprint of its daily practices to help make operations more efficient. For decades, PADF has been

¹ “2022-2024 Strategic Plan”, PADF, <https://www.padf.org/2022-2024-strategic-plan/>

financing nature-based solutions² projects and supporting efforts to strengthen government skills to leverage data about climate vulnerabilities. However, the Organisation became more vocal and explicit about its climate work in 2017, when Katie Taylor joined as executive director.

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“We will never be a purely environmental organisation. We are at the intersection of people and the planet and productivity. What we are good at is working with people, particularly at the community level – even though we work at every level.”

– KATIE TAYLOR, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF PADF

Building the PADF’s Climate Action Plan

PADF opted to be transparent by publicly announcing its commitment to embrace climate in its operations. The process of deciding to publicly embark on this journey started with the Organisation signing the NGO Climate Compact³, led by InterAction – the largest alliance of international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the United States. The Compact commits signatories to assessing “the major categories and sources of greenhouse gas emissions, water usage, and waste at our organisation’s headquarters, country offices, and field offices; consider conducting a baseline study of those aspects using the Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Protocol or other widely recognized industry standards”. In 2021, PADF also joined Climate Accountability in Development (CAD) – a membership-based collective of NGOs and funders working on development issues that commit to taking meaningful action to address their carbon footprints.

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“My advice to organisations that want to start this journey is to join a community [of practice] like the Sustainability Managers Roundtable. This is the best space to just talk through all the challenges and hear from so many perspectives, and then pick the commitment that is right for you.”

– MAYA STERLING, PROGRAM COORDINATOR AT PADF

²“Finance nature-based solutions in Latin America and the Caribbean”, PADF, 2022

<https://www.padf.org/disaster-resilience/financing-nature-based-solutions-in-latin-america-and-the-caribbean/>

³“The NGO Climate Compact: Commitments toward Environmental Action and Sustainability 2020-2022”, InterAction, 2022,

<https://www.interaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Climate-Compact.pdf>

The next step was for the Organisation to calculate its GHG emissions for 2019, 2020 and 2021. The detailed measurement⁴ is published on PADF's website. Establishing an accurate measurement of carbon emissions has been challenging due to a lack of data. PADF's operations are heavily dependent on its partners' and grantees' actions, and many partners do not yet understand the data requirements for measuring carbon. The fact that PADF is a decentralised organisation with offices in different countries added another layer to the data collection challenge since each unit operates with a high degree of autonomy. As a result, the main challenge at the moment is to find ways to incentivise partner organisations and local offices to generate and share data so that PADF can more effectively and systematically measure its carbon footprint. The team knows and is honest about its baseline data not capturing all operational emissions.

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“This too is a work in progress. In year one of measuring our carbon footprint, we realised that there is a ton of stuff that we don't measure. We didn't even think about measuring it. We might not have all the answers, but we are doing it anyway, and we will learn as we go, and add a little, and so on. And hopefully, this becomes a virtuous cycle of green and blue energy.”

– KATIE TAYLOR, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF PADF

One of the key learnings of this process was to recognise the importance of identifying win-win strategies and understanding the organisations' different motivations for staff to embark on this effort. PADF selected some easily implementable actions so that people would start seeing the results and feel more motivated to continue their efforts. For example, identifying actions that would reduce operational emissions and expenses, such as reducing flights between different offices. While the financial benefit was not the primary objective, it added another incentive to reduce carbon emissions.

The transition of PADF's office in Haiti⁵ to solar panels is another example of a win-win strategy. It shifted to solar panels due to fuel shortages and high energy costs, resulting in savings and increased resilience. The move replaced diesel generators and demonstrated an effective business strategy.

PADF plans to be carbon-neutral by 2025 and the carbon emissions from critical activities, such as shipping humanitarian goods and field travel to check project compliance will be compensated with carbon offsets. CAD has already adopted an internal carbon price for its members and is discussing with them ways to evaluate

⁴“PADF's Emissions”, PADF, 2022, <https://www.padf.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/PADFs-Emissions.pdf>

⁵“Q&A: PADF Haiti Office Transitions to Solar Panels”, PADF, 2022, <https://www.padf.org/qa-padf-haiti-office-transitions-to-solar-panels/>

emissions avoided through basic actions. For example, if a meeting takes place virtually, rather than in-person, a process can be followed to automatically calculate avoided emissions. These efforts must include reliable and transparent offsets that have a positive impact on territories and try to provide opportunities for the reforestation projects that PADF already support to be certified and become more financially sustainable.

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“We want to avoid that race to the bottom that sometimes happens when purchasing emissions. Because that means that a lot of the most valuable ones are undervalued just because they are cheap to implement, like conserving a forest. I saw something on LinkedIn the other day: if we allocate the same amount of resources that countries are trying to allocate to extract carbon from the atmosphere through new technologies, into actually mitigating those emissions through nature, we wouldn't be in this crisis altogether. So it is crazy how that plays out. And for us it is very important to recognise the value of mitigation coming from sources that are not valued appropriately now.”

– JOAQUÍN VALLEJO, DEMOCRACY, GOVERNANCE, AND HUMAN RIGHTS DEPUTY DIRECTOR AT PADF

PADF's team is trying to find offset options that align with its priorities. The criteria are detailed in the Organisation's draft Climate Action Plan which will be published on PADF's website once approved.

Capacity building of staff and partners as preconditions for climate action

Work done up until drafting the Climate Action Plan would not have been possible without dedicated human resources. PADF invited staff members to create a working group to champion this effort. A voluntary Green Team was formed and met monthly to educate themselves about climate science. To increase buy-in, the Green Team presented the draft Climate Action Plan to all staff, collected feedback and addressed questions and concerns. The Green Team hopes to have the plan approved in the first quarter of 2023 and is eager to start mentoring colleagues and partners on climate issues.

Implementation partners have shared climate concerns and eagerness to 'walk the talk'. They know that climate impact reporting is likely to become a requirement for project funding in the near future. Currently, PADF is

adjusting its project assessment methodologies to become climate sensitive. The Organisation is setting up a climate mainstreaming guide for all projects to consider climate change and risks and intends to conduct project analysis around two questions: *How does the project impact climate change?* and *How does climate change impact the project?* It is envisioned that the guidelines become a requirement for the new business phase of every PADF project. With full support from the Foundation's executive office, PADF has been piloting the guidelines with a few project co-implementers, collecting feedback and making improvements while building grantees' capacities.

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“We are trying to respond to trends we see worldwide, in addition to our personal beliefs and commitments to act on climate.”

– JOAQUÍN VALLEJO, DEMOCRACY, GOVERNANCE, AND HUMAN RIGHTS DEPUTY DIRECTOR AT PADF

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