

Climate Finance for WASH: Pacific Region



Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) is integral to supporting community climate resilience that ensures no one is left behind. Inclusive, climate-resilient WASH goes beyond infrastructure to ensure that solutions meet the needs of the most marginalised and can continue functioning in the face of climate hazards.

Accessing climate adaptation financing for WASH projects has been a challenge for civil society organisations (CSOs) due to a number of procedural, design and systemic barriers. This brief provides a short overview of the climate finance available for the WASH sector in the Pacific region. It identifies the main barriers to climate finance access and highlights proven pathways to funding. It also recommends ways for CSOs and funders (primarily donor governments and multilateral development banks (MDBs)) to improve access to funds for climate-resilient WASH. It is based on analysis of secondary data from a desk review and interviews with key climate finance stakeholders¹ in late 2022.

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Introduction

The Pacific is home to thousands of islands, many of which are extremely susceptible to the effects of climate change, notably sea level rise. The [World Risk Report](#) listed Vanuatu, Tonga, Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, Fiji and Kiribati within the top 20 countries most at risk of disasters due to climate change² Water resources are particularly vulnerable on island states, where there is often a high reliance on rainwater for domestic use. Many surface and groundwater sources located in low areas and near the coast are brackish, and rising sea levels will reduce their potability even further³ WASH initiatives are therefore fundamental as part of the climate response within the Pacific Islands context.

[The Pacific Islands Forum](#) is the major political body representing those who live in the region. It has been a powerful voice in the fight against climate change, advocating for reducing the amount of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions produced globally. The Blue Pacific continent has only contributed 1% of total GHG emissions⁴ but is on the frontline in experiencing damaging impacts⁵ Climate finance requirements are estimated to be in the USD100 millions,⁶ and adaptation requirements 6.5–9% of GDP annually for many islands.⁷ The [Regional Pacific Nationally Determined Contribution \(NDC\) Hub](#) brings together the NDCs of 15 ocean states in the Pacific, another example of collective action on climate change. Water security is a key adaptation component of most islands' plans.⁸



The Pacific region is home to thousands of islands, many of which are extremely susceptible to climate change impacts

The International Monetary Fund’s (IMF) 2021 paper, [Unlocking Access to Climate Finance for Pacific Island Countries](#)⁹ explores access to climate donor funders and lists some of the challenges of the finance landscape and potential changes needed. Between 2014 and 2019, Pacific islands states were given USD3.3 billion, with 44% of the funds allocated solely to adaptation and 28% focused on adaptation and mitigation jointly ([Figure 1](#)). However, disbursement of funds remains slow, often taking years.¹⁰

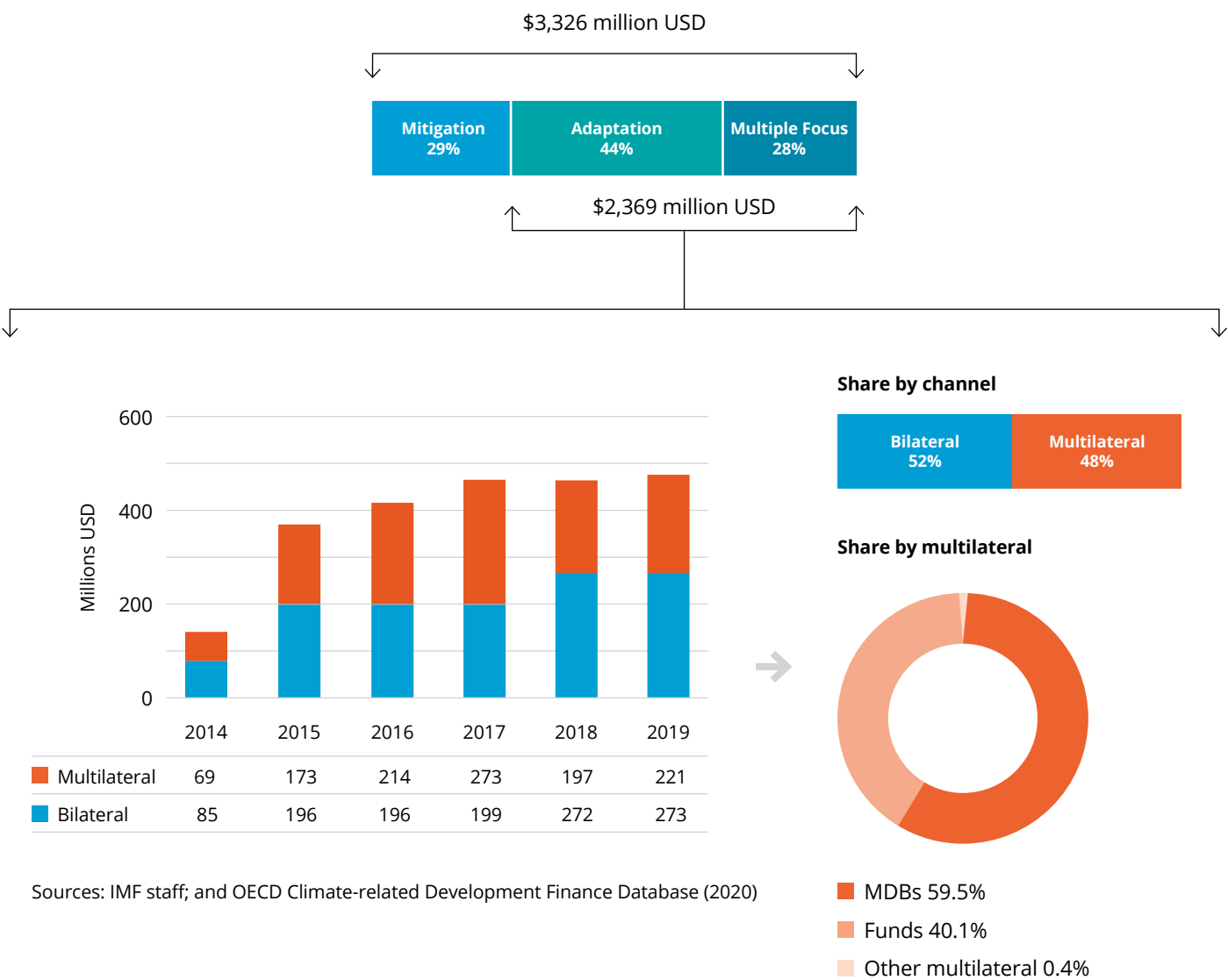


Figure 1. Climate finance commitments for Pacific Islands, 2014 to 2019 Source: Adapted from International Monetary Fund (2021)¹¹

The main funders of climate programming for the Pacific region are shown in [Table 1](#), and include bilateral, multilateral and other funds. This brief seeks to identify specific funding and projects related to WASH within the broader climate finance context in the Pacific.

Table 1. Climate finance for adaptation and multiple focus projects in the Pacific Islands, 2014 to 2019¹²

BILATERAL	Papua New Guinea	Vanuatu	Solomon Islands	Fiji	Samoa	Kiribati	Tuvalu	Marshall Islands	Tonga	Nauru	Micronesia	Palau	TOTAL
Australia	\$317.6	\$119.5	\$46.3	\$49.1	\$27.3	\$18.1	\$9.2	\$3.8	\$12.4	\$2.1	\$3.6	\$1.5	\$610.7
EU Institutions (excl. EIB)	\$125.9	29.5	11.1	22.4	22.4	25.8	7.7	11.8	1.3		2.0	3.1	262.9
New Zealand	23.4	40.8	18.8	10.0	9.4	6.8	18.6	2.0	10.1	0.3	1.2	1.0	142.4
Japan	4.9	38.8	2.4	5.4	11.9	35.0	4.2	0.4	0.2	0.0	0.1	17.9	121.2
Korea	0.4	1.5	38.8	7.7	0.6	2.4	1.6	1.6	0.1	0.1		1.0	55.8
Germany	3.8	0.0		3.8				0.1	0.5				8.2
Canada		1.8	1.6	4.0				0.3					7.8
Italy			0.2	1.1		1.2	0.1		0.3			0.2	3.1
United States	2.0										0.4		2.4
United Kingdom	0.3			1.8									2.1
Sweden		0.1	0.4	1.5									2.1
Switzerland		0.5		0.7									1.2
France	0.1	0.7		0.1									0.9
Austria				0.3									0.3
Finland	0.1												0.1
TOTAL BILATERAL	478.4	233.3	119.6	108.0	71.6	89.2	41.4	20.0	24.9	2.6	7.4	24.8	1,221.3
MULTILATERAL													
MDBs													
AsDB	88.0	1.8	18.3	10.0	31.6	9.1	2.7	3.7	12.8	15.1	3.2	1.5	197.8
EIB	11.8			8.0									19.8
WB	7.7	80.5	37.9	63.5	64.5	14.2	26.5	32.3	59.6		24.9		411.6
FAO	0.1				0.1								0.2
UNDP	0.6		0.7	1.1	0.4								2.9
Subtotal	108.3	82.3	57.0	82.6	96.6	23.3	29.2	36	72.4	15.1	28.1	1.5	632.3
FUNDS													
Adaptation Fund			4.4	4.2							10.0		18.6
CIF	29.8												29.8
GCF		18.1	86.0	31.0	57.7	28.6	36.0	43.6		26.9			328.0
LDCF		20.9	19.7			9.2	8.4						58.3
GEF	2.5	8.9	0.3	2.4	0.9	4.2	0.7	6.2	4.5	4.0	0.9	4.6	40.1
IFAD	10.2		4.5		2.3	3.0			1.2				21.3
Abu Dhabi Fund for Development			15.0										15.0
Subtotal	42.5	47.9	130	37.7	61.0	45.0	45.1	49.8	5.7	30.9	10.8	4.6	511.1
OTHER													
GGGI		0.7		2.8		0.6							4.1
Subtotal		0.7		2.8		0.6							4.1
TOTAL MULTILATERAL	150.8	130.9	186.9	123.1	157.6	68.9	74.3	85.8	78.1	46.0	38.9	6.1	1,147.5
TOTAL	629.2	364.2	306.6	231.1	229.1	158.2	115.7	105.8	103.0	48.7	46.3	30.9	2,368.8

Note: Figures are in millions of US dollars

Overview of Pacific Region climate finance for WASH

Civil society organisations can access financing opportunities in the Pacific through various manners from multilateral donors, and bilateral partnerships, to large foundations. Some examples of the major funds are described below.

Large global funds

The Green Climate Fund

- Small island developing states (SIDS) are a priority group for Green Climate Fund (GCF) funding. The GCF is the primary climate fund in the Pacific region, with 14 Pacific island countries already receiving funds.¹³ In total the GCF has provided USD3.7 billion to the Asia-Pacific region, with approximately USD435 million approved for Pacific island countries.¹⁴
- Most GCF funding has been provided to international accredited entities, but the region now has several regional and national entities that have received funding.
- Four GCF projects have a WASH focus, as detailed below. The Pacific region has several of the best examples of GCF-funded WASH projects.
 - In Fiji, the GCF has provided USD31 million as part of a USD405 million project on improving water and wastewater treatment in Suva.
 - In Marshall Islands, the GCF has allocated USD18.6 million towards improving the resilience of water resources.
 - In Kiribati, the GCF disbursed USD28 million for the construction of a desalination plant that will provide a reliable and climate-resilient water supply.
 - In the Federated States of Micronesia, a climate change adaptation solutions project includes activities on improving water security in the country.
- The GCF is preparing to release guidance that will detail how investment can be made in climate-resilient WASH. The GCF board has approved project-specific accreditation, allowing organisations that aren't already accredited entities to submit projects. The GCF will work through the approval process for the organisation and the project simultaneously. This project-specific one-time accreditation will facilitate access to a much larger group of entities.

The Global Environment Facility

- The Global Environment Facility (GEF) has made large investments through various mechanisms in the Pacific region, but only three approved projects appear to have a WASH component.
 - The GEF provided USD6.9 million for the Solomon Islands Water Sector Adaptation Project, completed in 2018.
 - The GEF will provide USD4.6 million towards a large infrastructure project called Strengthening Resilience of Water Supply, in Honiara, Solomon Islands.
 - In Kiribati, the GEF will provide USD4.6 million to the South Tarawa Water Supply Project.

The Adaptation Fund

- The Adaptation Fund (AF) supports 33 adaptation projects in the Pacific region that are water security and water resource management-related. However, the AF has funded no adaptation projects for sanitation and hygiene.
- To date no Pacific country has received AF funding for WASH, but one project in the Cook Islands – *Pa Enua Action for Resilient Livelihoods* – has a water security component.
- The AF is likely to fund implementation of a regional water resource management project in Fiji, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu after the board reviews the proposal (submitted in October 2022).

Regional funds

The Asian Development Bank

- The Asian Development Bank's Pacific WASH Technical Assistance for Strengthening Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene Practices and Hygiene Behavioural Change in the Pacific is spending USD5 million on planning, improving and extending sustainable WASH sector services. Priority areas include behaviour change communication, WASH policy reform, WASH standards, regulation and compliance, installing handwashing stations, and water quality, sanitation and wastewater management in its Pacific Developing Member Countries.¹⁵ Service delivery projects and behaviour change campaigns include a focus on women, girls and community elders.

The World Bank

- The World Bank is working in the Pacific region to strengthen water supply and provide access to WASH facilities to the community.
- In Kiribati, it approved funding 15 million USD to expand and upgrade Tarawa's water supply network to deliver piped water to homes and set up a desalination plant to increase drought resilience.¹⁶

Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

- The Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) is supporting multiple initiatives in the Pacific region that focus on strengthening WASH service and delivery.
- Water for Women supports improved health, gender equality and wellbeing in Asian and Pacific communities through socially inclusive and climate-resilient WASH projects and research. It is the Australian Government's flagship WASH program, investing AUD154.9 million over seven years. Water for Women is partnering with civil society organisations, research organisations and local partners to deliver 40 projects in 16 countries from 2018 to 2024.
- DFAT also supports the Pacific region through the development of the Pacific Telewater network in partnership with the Pacific Water and Wastewater Association through the Australian Water Partnership program. This program, managed over four years (2019 to 2023), aims to provide virtual technical assistance to 31 water utilities in the Pacific.¹⁷



Children use a new tap installed in their village on Kairiru Island, East Sepik Province, PNG as part of WaterAid's [Water for Women project](#)
Credit: WaterAid / Dion Kombeng

Bilateral funds

United States Agency for International Development

- The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) works to expand the delivery of WASH services by helping implementing agencies to build capacity to develop, operate, and sustain climate-resilient water supply and sanitation systems, promote proper hygiene and handwashing habits, and improve management of water resources. USAID focuses on enabling vulnerable and underserved communities' access to WASH services.
- USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance provided USD1.7 million in 2020 and 2021 for food, shelter and WASH assistance to the people of Fiji, Palau, Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Vanuatu who were affected by Tropical Cyclones Harold and Yasa and Typhoon Surigae.¹⁸
- In Kiribati, in partnership with UNICEF, USAID distributed WASH hygiene kits to drought-affected communities.
- USAID has funded infrastructure in the region to increase water storage capacity, including rainwater tanks in Samoa, PNG, Tonga, Kiribati, Tuvalu, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.¹⁹

New Zealand's Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Trade

- New Zealand's Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) has committed NZD1.3 billion in grants for climate finance between 2022 and 2025, with at least half of this supporting adaptation in the Pacific.²⁰ WASH should be part of these commitments.
- Projects so far include NZD6 million in funding to the Tonga Climate Fund for the Building Resilient Water Management System. This project aims to improve water and sanitation services in Tonga by constructing and installing water tanks and latrines.²¹ The installation of the infrastructure focuses on the most vulnerable in the community, including the elderly, people with disabilities, women and children.

The Government of Japan

- The Japanese Government, through its Pacific Environment Community Fund and in collaboration with national governments, has funded desalination plants (costing USD1.7 million to USD4 million each²²) in Fiji, Nauru, Palau, PNG, Tuvalu and Vanuatu, and potable water solutions in the Republic of Marshall Islands.

Other funding opportunities

United Nations (UN) agencies such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) implement and fund climate-related WASH projects.

UNICEF

- UNICEF helps to strengthen national systems and WASH capacity through construction of WASH infrastructure in communities, schools and health centres, strengthening national legal systems and policies for WASH, and partners with government and CSOs to improve WASH behaviour.
- In Solomon Islands, UNICEF, UNDP, the European Union and the Solomon Islands Government launched a EUR8 million project to support decentralisation and service delivery of water and sanitation services, along with strengthening the governments' capacity to support this delivery.²³ All activities consider the most vulnerable and marginalised communities.
- UNICEF has a central unit based in Fiji, and interviewees mentioned this unit has delivered strong programming, especially in Vanuatu.

UNDP

- UNDP works towards providing access to clean and safe public water supply in various Pacific Island nations. All UNDP projects focus on providing access to WASH services to women, girls and vulnerable groups.

- In the Federated States of Micronesia, UNDP has worked towards improved water resource management to increase access to clean and safe water through the Japan-funded Enhancing Disaster and Climate Resilience project.²⁴
- In Solomon Islands, the organisation works in collaboration with the government to improve the resilience of water resources and health to the impacts of climate change. The work is part of the Solomon Islands Water Sector Adaptation Project funded by the GEF-managed Least Developed Countries Fund.²⁵
- UNDP is also an accredited entity for the global funds listed. This means CSOs can seek to engage or learn from their experience of working with large climate funds.

The Bezos Earth Fund

- The Bezos Earth Fund has significant potential to support non-governmental organisations in the fight against climate change. So far, its projects have not focused on the Pacific and water is not currently high on the agenda, but this should change as further funding is announced.

Barriers to CSOs accessing finance

Top three barriers to CSOs

1. **Technical rigour.** Many climate projects require considerable scientific data detailing the variations due to climate change that have been observed and are anticipated. This is a major challenge for most countries. SIDS in the Pacific face an upward battle to demonstrate the climate need for investment, particularly when some activities can appear to be similar to development projects. Limitations on WASH technology choices due to low availability of ground and surface waters results can require expensive solutions, particularly when considered on the basis of cost per beneficiary. Local solutions are not always valued highly, because technical evidence is generally inadequate and indigenous Pacific knowledge and experience are given less weight.
2. **Rigid designs.** Many projects must be substantially designed at the proposal stage, leaving little opportunity for adaptation across diverse contexts and for highly under-served and marginalised communities. One interviewee described the process as over-engineered because everything needs to be presented upfront. Many CSOs and communities need to have flexibility in their adaptation projects, and Pacific islands and their populations can vary significantly, so bespoke solutions are often required.
3. **Scale.** The Pacific contains thousands of mostly small islands, yet the solutions offered are often large infrastructure such as desalination plants, which are more useful for large populations. Small communities may not have the technical capacity or desire to host and operate large infrastructure, instead requiring contextually appropriate solutions to sustainable WASH services.

Other barriers to CSOs

The International Monetary Fund lists four major challenges to access to climate finance: accreditation, project design, capacity and macroeconomic challenges. These broad categories cover most of the barriers that CSOs face in trying to access climate finance. Seeking funding specifically for WASH adds further difficulty.

Recommendations and opportunities

For civil society

- Although climate-related risks to SIDS are well known, CSOs must ensure they can present a clear climate rationale for WASH projects. CSOs should engage and work with governments and donors on ways WASH can support SIDS' adaptation to climate change.
- CSOs should learn lessons from other organisations with funded climate projects and familiarise themselves with the pipeline or design phases of climate funders such as the GCF and AF. CSOs should be open to sharing and discussing each other's projects and be willing to critically assess them. Engagement across sectors is needed to ensure WASH is an integral part of major climate projects.

For more information, see Water for Women's finance brief for civil society organisations: [Improving opportunities for civil society to access climate adaptation funding for WASH](#)

Pathways to access funding

-  Provide clear evidence of climate-related need for proposed project interventions
-  Support sector-wide efforts to build evidence about WASH's contribution to resilience and mitigation and the impacts of climate hazards on WASH
-  Link proposed activities directly to climate mitigation or adaptation outcomes
-  Check what else is being done and reference and build on existing climate programs
-  Directly align proposals with national targets and plans
-  Seek to collaborate with other sectors so that WASH is included as part of larger programmes
-  Build and maintain relationships with donors and advocate for inclusion of WASH in future programs

For funders

- Funders should appreciate that SIDS typically have minimal data and make allowances for this, and ensure that indigenous experiences and ideas are valued and considered in project design.
- Funders must recognise that the cost of access to WASH per beneficiary is high in SIDS. As such, donors should be willing to try novel solutions to overcome the complex problems Pacific countries face, while supporting sustainable climate-resilient WASH services for all community members.

For more information, see Water for Women's finance brief for funders: [Accelerating adaptation finance for climate-resilient WASH in Asia and the Pacific](#)

Conclusion

The Pacific is one of the world's most climate-affected regions, comprising many and diverse SIDS for which climate change is already a significant threat. Finance for climate adaptation and mitigation is critical to support Pacific communities to continue to thrive. WASH has already been part of several global climate funders' projects in the Pacific, providing good examples of the importance of water and sanitation services to the resilience of communities.

WASH projects in the Pacific are often prohibitively expensive, especially because island populations are usually small. It is essential, therefore, to develop innovative solutions and call upon local and indigenous knowledge to create sustainable and cost-effective options for communities. The GCF has indicated that it will provide guidance on investment for climate-resilient WASH; it is hoped this will encourage all donors to include WASH activities in climate programs. The Pacific region offers the perfect setting to enter a new era of climate-resilient WASH projects, which will benefit communities living on Pacific Islands as well as the rest of the world.



Water for Women is partnering with Plan International Australia, Plan International Solomon Islands, Live and Learn Environmental Education, the International WaterCentre at Griffith University, Solomon Islands National University, and Earth, Water People to support [community-to-catchment planning for inclusive, climate-resilient WASH systems](#) in rural communities in Guadalcanal Province, Solomon Islands

Credit: Alec Hughes

Endnotes

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Header image: An aerial view of the community of Ngariawang in Leron Wantoat, PNG. Credit: World Vision.

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Limitations: The finance information in this brief was collected from online sources and interviews and was correct when compiled. Unfortunately, reporting of WASH and climate finance in the Pacific Region is not comprehensive; most figures provided represent total funds invested or available.



Learn more
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About Water for Women

Water for Women supports improved health, gender equality and wellbeing in Asian and Pacific communities through socially inclusive and climate-resilient water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) projects and research. It is the Australian Government's flagship WASH program, investing AUD154.9 million over seven years. Water for Women is partnering with civil society organisations, research organisations and local partners to deliver 40 projects in 16 countries from 2018 to 2024. Knowledge and learning are central to Water for Women, positioning the Fund as an important contributor to global knowledge development and sharing in inclusive and climate-resilient WASH. Water for Women's Learning Agenda promotes collaborative learning, knowledge development and sharing to support long-term transformative change to WASH policy and practice globally.

Find out more at
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Building Climate Change
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