

International Civil Society Call to Address Inequalities and Social Justice in Climate Policy

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Summary

Socioeconomic inequality is an integral part of the climate crisis, and must be addressed.

Climate change disproportionately impacts poor and marginalized people and communities, who suffer climate impacts more severely, do not have the resources to respond or adapt, and lack the resources and influence to demand necessary changes. Climate change particularly impacts women and girls. Climate change is also a factor in the migration crisis. Climate change hurts the poor or marginalized more than the rich, compounding existing inequalities.

Inequality is a key driver of the climate crisis. Inequality lies at the root of unsustainable behaviors. Inequality makes it socially acceptable for some people to have far more than others, and ties consumption to social status, promoting overconsumption. Our economic system also drives the climate crisis, as growth, short-term incentives and profit motives systematically contradict sustainability.

Inequalities, both within and among nations, block agreements and pathways that could lead to sustainability. Within nations, socioeconomic inequalities reduce cultural diversity, depriving societies of potential models for more sustainable ways of life. Overwhelmed with problems caused by inequalities, societies cannot turn their energy towards the transition to sustainability. Between communities and nations who do not share common interests and responsibilities, agreement to address climate change is unlikely to be found. Socioeconomic inequality, by eroding trust and creating social fragmentation, blocks cooperation and joint problem-solving.

We call on the world's governments, nations and communities to recognize that inequality is an integral part of the climate crisis; that those who did the least to precipitate the crisis are likely to be harmed the most; that developed countries have a moral and legal obligation to support developing countries in adapting to climate change; and that all countries should support their most vulnerable communities.

We further call on the world's governments, nations and communities to commit to –

- making the inequality and injustice dimensions of the climate crisis a central element of the COP 21 climate accords and subsequent policies;
- ensuring that the full benefits of climate protection, technology transfer and CDM programs are channeled to the appropriate people, particularly to poor communities;
- a more equitable global distribution of wealth and resources, including the GHG emissions budget;
- providing the economic resources, technologies, and expertise to empower developing countries and less privileged communities to protect themselves from climate impacts, and to move successfully along an innovative, efficient and sustainable development pathway;
- climate finance mechanisms that bridge the gaps in capacity between nations, and that empower marginalized communities to implement their own priorities;

- developing and implementing a global resettlement plan to take in all refugees of conflict and economic collapse – often related to a worsening climate;
- fully respecting human rights throughout the process of responding to climate change;
- systemic social, economic and political changes towards more equal and participatory societies;
- ensuring workers’ rights to a secure livelihood during the transition to non-fossil fuel-based energies;
- divesting from fossil fuel-based economic activity and redirecting such investment towards sustainable energy technologies; and
- greater democratization of decision-making, in which vulnerable communities play a leading role in determining how best to achieve social resilience, mitigation and adaptation.

FULL STATEMENT

Preamble

Socioeconomic inequality is now understood to be integrally linked to the climate crisis. Inequalities drive climate change, and inequalities result from climate change. Climate change is an injustice to the underprivileged and aggravates inequality. Inequalities, both within and among nations, block agreements and pathways that could lead to sustainability. This vicious cycle of climate change and socioeconomic inequalities must be broken. As we engage in mitigation, adaptation, and the transition to a low-carbon economy, we must ensure that inequalities are substantially reduced.

I. Climate change affects people in very unequal ways, thus compounding inequalities.

Poor and marginalized people suffer the consequences of environmental degradation more directly and severely. Those most likely to bear the brunt of climate change are those who suffer from disadvantage or discrimination, whether on the basis of income, wealth, gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, health, ability, legal or migration status, or other characteristics or identities. Inequalities are compounded when poor and marginalized people are forced to live in locations more severely impacted by climate change, and vulnerable to storms, flooding, drought, landslides, or other environmental impacts. Inequalities are compounded when poor communities do not have the resources to respond to disasters or adapt readily to climate change.

Women and girls are particularly impacted. Women and girls are more likely to care for children, the sick and the elderly, to prepare food, to fetch water, to work the soil. All of these activities become more difficult as the climate degenerates. Furthermore, when climate impacts destroy economic opportunities at home, women and girls are less able to travel safely to seek new opportunities.

Despite suffering more severe impacts from climate change, poor and marginalized people generate significantly less impact on the environment as measured by standardized metrics such as consumption or carbon output. This is true for both poorer nations and for poorer socioeconomic classes within countries. It is unethical that those who do less harm should suffer more.

People who lack the necessary economic resources, knowledge, and political clout are disempowered and unable to demand necessary changes. Often, despite enormous and sophisticated grassroots or civil society efforts, the power differentials between those who stand to benefit from

environmentally damaging economic activity, and those who are affected by it, are simply too great to overcome.

A vicious cycle exists. People on the lower rungs of the socioeconomic ladder experience environmental disparities which perpetuate and compound economic difficulties. Environmental disparities may produce debilitating health impacts; economic and human losses associated with weather disasters; loss of agricultural capacity; the need to travel long distances to obtain suitable water resources; and the erosion of critical ecosystem services for resource-dependent and rural agrarian communities. People who have lost access to environmental resources have fragile livelihoods, and are less able to respond to shocks and environmental stresses.

The ongoing immigration crisis is also linked to climate change. The poor are more vulnerable to climate impacts, such as loss of water and land resources or soil productivity, and especially vulnerable to resulting conflict. It is the poor who are forced to migrate in search of survival. At the same time, the poor are least able to undertake the risky journeys required, and least able to navigate complex systems of migration law which permit them access to a new place to live.

II. Inequality is a key driver of the climate crisis.

Inequality lies at the root of unsustainable behaviors. Inequality promotes overconsumption by making it socially acceptable for some people to have far more than others. Inequality provides incentives for overconsumption by tying consumption to social status. The greater the level of inequality, the greater the incentive to elevate one's status through consumption. Current consumption patterns put excessive pressure on the planet's dwindling resource base, as an elite minority unjustly appropriates ecological space. This excessive consumption usurps natural and economic resources, driving up prices for basic goods such as food, housing, healthcare and education, thus directly impacting those who do not have enough.

Our economic system drives the climate crisis, while locking in and aggravating inequalities. Its growth paradigm promotes ever-greater impacts on the environment; its short-term incentives and profit motives systematically contradict the sustainable satisfaction of human needs. Elites make decisions on behalf of their own interests rather than the public interest, while the benefits of development and climate adaptation aid and investment are often channeled to narrowly-held business interests. Financialization of the economy provides additional perverse incentives that run counter to sustainability. Commodification, both of nature and of people as labor, destroys emotional and social incentives that would otherwise serve to protect communities and their environments. Moreover, current economic pricing mechanisms fail to include "externalized" costs of social and environmental impacts. These distorted prices in turn distort consumption patterns, aggravating resource depletion and pollution. Meanwhile, the economic analysis of climate change focuses on aggregate costs and benefits, largely ignoring distributional implications.

III. Inequality blocks needed solutions to the climate crisis.

Finally, inequalities block progress toward solutions and agreements to address climate change. Overwhelmed with social crisis, breakdown and conflict caused by inequalities, communities and societies cannot turn their energy and resources towards climate-friendly technologies and the transition to environmental sustainability.

Socioeconomic inequalities allow aid, resources, and other benefits to be diverted to elite families and business concerns, often fossil-fuel based. Meanwhile, the general public, including especially the poor, are often left suffering the social, economic and environmental consequences of profitable but unsustainable development. Adding insult to injury, the public is often left holding huge sovereign debts, resulting in the reduction of urgently needed social benefits. As inequality grows, there are many more people who do not have the resources to implement the needed conversion to sustainable economic activities.

Socioeconomic inequalities often complicate the implementation of local sustainability mechanisms, such as Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES), Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD), and similar schemes. When inequalities are ignored in assessing the effectiveness and desirability of specific policy tools, unintended consequences may result. Rich and poor are affected differently, leading to altered community relationships and patterns of wealth. It is then much harder to find equitable and effective incentives for reducing carbon impacts.

Socioeconomic inequalities reduce cultural diversity by disempowering, displacing, or destroying the culture of various local groups. Embedded cultural knowledge, including indigenous knowledge, of local and traditional environmental practices is then diminished, thus depriving communities of potential models for more sustainable ways of life. Migration also leads to a loss of local environmental knowledge; moreover, migrants living in unfamiliar environments often lack the status and influence to push for needed environmental protections.

By creating lack of trust and social fragmentation, socioeconomic inequality blocks cooperation and collaborative problem-solving. Communities and nations are far less likely to make the necessary agreements to address climate change when they are aware that they do not share common interests, benefits, and responsibilities. Even if they were to make an agreement, the parties would not feel that the allocation of benefits and responsibilities was fair, thereby undermining cooperation.

Any initiative to address climate change and climate justice must place inequality at the center of the discussion. Current approaches to climate change have been largely technocratic in nature, and proposed “green economy” solutions which retain the same set of incentives and structures seem likely to worsen the existing scenario. Climate justice begins at the point where we recognize that current economic models, which generate ever-growing inequalities and look to more economic growth as a solution, will not provide transformative change. We cannot solve the climate crisis utilizing the same structures that created the crisis in the first place. Around the world, citizens sense the futility of “more of the same,” and governments are aware that they will face more protests and civil disobedience if they do not demonstrate their political will for meaningful transition.

We call on the world’s governments, nations and communities to –

* Recognize the inequality dimensions of the climate crisis, including how inequalities contribute to climate change, as well as the injustice aspects of the climate crisis, particularly the fact that those

who had the least role in precipitating the crisis are likely to be harmed the most;

* Recognize that even with the most enlightened environmental policies in place, without social sustainability and social resilience, the societal foundations of sustainability will eventually erode away through instability, conflict and social breakdown;

* Recognize that there will need to be new, more innovative, efficient and sustainable pathways to development, as the traditional fossil fuel-based route has failed humanity both socially and environmentally;

* Recognize that, considering the tipping points ahead as well as the major destruction and misery caused among the poor everywhere, and particularly in the Global South, “business as usual” is no longer an option;

* Recognize the importance of common but differentiated responsibilities, whereby developed countries (synonymous with high emission countries) should have a moral and legal obligation to support developing countries in adapting to climate change, and all countries should support their own most vulnerable communities in adapting to climate change;

* Recognize that any budget of allowed greenhouse gas emissions must take into account the following four points: historical responsibility, equitable ecological footprint, capabilities (technological and financial), and state of development (purchasing power parity);

* Recognize the need for altered patterns of consumption, whereby those consuming in excess of what they need will reduce their consumption, while those without enough to meet their needs will consume more, achieving a net reduction;

* Recognize within-country differences in greenhouse gas emissions, as measured by the carbon inequality index, as well as within-country differences in the extent to which people’s needs are met;

* Commit to making the inequality and injustice dimensions of the climate crisis a central element of the COP 21 climate accords and subsequent policies;

* Commit to ensuring that the full benefits of climate protection, technology transfer and CDM programs are being channeled to the appropriate people and communities – not to enrich particular business interests and contractors;

* Commit to ensuring a more equitable global distribution of wealth and resources, including the CO2 emissions budget, as well as the more equitable distribution of capacity to respond to risks;

* Commit to providing the economic resources, technologies, and expertise that will empower developing countries, and less privileged communities within countries, to protect themselves from climate impacts, to adapt to a changing climate as necessary, and to move successfully along a new, more innovative, efficient and sustainable development pathway;

- * Commit to climate finance mechanisms that bridge the gaps in capacity between nations, and that empower marginalized communities to implement their own priorities in responding to climate change;
 - * Commit to developing and implementing an urgently-needed global resettlement plan to take in all refugees of conflict and economic collapse – which are due, in part, to the impacts of a worsening climate;
 - * Commit to fully respecting human rights throughout the process of responding to climate change, including but not limited to the fulfillment of various international conventions and declarations on human rights;
 - * Commit to systemic social, economic and political changes towards more participatory societies in which incentives and decision-making processes allow citizens and communities to protect their own (and the world’s) long-term social and environmental interests rather than being at the mercy of short-term profit incentives and decision-making processes;
 - * Commit to ensuring workers’ rights to a secure livelihood during the transition to non-fossil fuel based energies;
 - * Commit to divesting from fossil fuel-based economic activity and redirecting such investment towards sustainable energy technologies;
 - * Commit to greater transparency and democratization of decision-making processes, in which vulnerable communities most impacted by climate change are empowered to play a leading role in determining how best to achieve social resilience, mitigation and adaptation.
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Organizational Signatories, By Region

INTERNATIONAL

Initiative for Equality (IfE)* - International
 Academics Stand Against Poverty (ASAP) - International
 Augustinians International (Curia Generalizia Agostiniana) - International
 Climate Emergency Institute - International
 Climate Healers - International
 Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd - International
 Congregations of St. Joseph - International
 Development Alternatives India - International
 Dominican Leadership Conference / Dominican Sisters International – International

* Convening Organization

EKOenergy - International
Equity for Children - International
Fundación Internacional Baltasar Garzón - International
Global Call to Action Against Poverty (GCAP) - International
Global Network of Civil Society Organisations for Disaster Reduction (GNDR) - International
Institute for Science and Human Values, Inc. - International
International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (INPEA) - International
International Presentation Association - International
International Social Science Council - International
Loretto Community - International
MADRE - International
Make Mothers Matter - International
Marianists - International
Maryknoll Sisters - International
Mercy International Association - International
New Future Foundation (NFF) - International
OceansWatch - International
Okogun Odigie Safewomb International Foundation (OOSAlF) - International
Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary - International
Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur - International
Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues - International
Society of Catholic Medical Missionaries - International
Sustainable Innovation Initiatives - International
The Global Women's Project - International
UNANIMA - International
VIVAT International - International
WaterAid - International
Women's UN Report Network (WUNRN) - International
World Futures Studies Federation - International

AFRICA

Abibiman Foundation - Ghana
Anjong Young Farmers' Group - Cameroon
ASEDI - Togo
Association Nigérienne des Scouts de l'Environnement - Niger
Aube Nouvelle pour la Femme et le Développement (ANFD) - Democratic Republic of Congo
Better World Cameroon - Cameroon
Bum Association of Health Personnel (BAHEP) - Cameroon
Catholic Women Organization (CWO) - Nigeria
Centre for Grassroots and Environmental Concerns - Nigeria
Centre for Human Rights and Climate Change Research - Nigeria
Charles and Doosurgh Abaagu Foundation - Nigeria
Child Health Organization (CHO) - Nigeria
Collectif Sénégalais des Africaines pour la Promotion de l'Education Relative à l'Environnement (COSAPERÉ) - Senegal

Community and Family Aid Foundation - Ghana
Community Center For Development - Nigeria
Community Emergency Response Initiative (CERI) - Nigeria
Community Emergency Response Initiative (CERI) - Nigeria
Council for NGOs in Malawi (CONGOMA) - Malawi
Echoes of Women in Africa Initiative - Nigeria
Fantsuam Foundation - Nigeria
Gender Empowerment and Development (GeED) - Cameroon
Green WaterHut - Ghana
Greenspring Development Initiative - Nigeria
Human Health Aid - Burundi
Innovative Strategy For Human Development (ISHD) - Nigeria
Labour, Health and Human Rights Development Centre (LHAHRDEV) - Nigeria
Namalere Forest Conservation Organization - Kenya
Natural Resources Alliance of Kenya (KeNRA) - Kenya
Neighbourhood Environment Watch Foundation - Nigeria
Organisation de la Société Civile pour l'Environnement Mandresy DIANA (OSCE Mandresy DIANA) -
Madagascar
OSIENALA (Friends of Lake Victoria) - Kenya
Owerri Daughters League (ODL) - Nigeria
Pan African Vision for the Environment (PAVE) - Nigeria
Paradigm Youth Network - Zambia
PHM Benin - Benin
Stephanie Peacebuilding and Development Foundation - Nigeria
Support for Women in Agriculture and Environment (SWAGEN) - Uganda
Sustainable Rural Community Development Organisation - Malawi
The Lwazi Programme - Zimbabwe and United Kingdom
Women Entrepreneurs Association of Nigeria (WEAN) - Nigeria
Women Environmental Programme (WEP) - Nigeria

ASIA

Agricultural Support Foundation - Pakistan
Association for Promotion Sustainable Development (APSD) - India
Association of Collaborative Forest Users Nepal (ACOFUN) - Nepal
Aurat Foundation - Pakistan
Buddhism for Development (BFD) - Cambodia
Center for Bangladesh Studies (CBS) - Bangladesh
Center for Integrated Development Studies - Nepal
Center for Sustainable Rural Development (SRD) - Vietnam
Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh - Bangladesh
Coastal Area Intervention Network (CAIN) - Bangladesh
Community Environmental Resource Center (CERC) - India
Conservation of Flora and Fauna (COFF) - Pakistan
COPPADES - Nepal
Dallit Alliance for Natural Resources (DANAR) - Nepal

Department of Rural Sociology, Bangladesh Agricultural University - Bangladesh
Development Initiative for South Asians (DISA) - South Asia
Ecumenical Commission for Human Development - Pakistan
Federation of Vembanad Lake Protection Forums - India
Forest Environment Workers Union (FEWUN) - Nepal
Gcom Bangladesh - Bangladesh
Gram Bharati Samiti (GBS) - India
Indian Youth Climate Network - India
International Movement For Advancement of Education Culture Social and Economic Development (IMAECSED) - India
Jaago Sustainable Development - Pakistan
Kawish Resource Center - Pakistan
National Confederation of Dalit Adivasi Organisations (NACDAOR) - India
National Educational & Social Development Organization (NESDO) - Nepal
National Fisheries Solidarity Movement (NAFSO) - Sri Lanka
National Forum for Advocacy, Nepal (NAFAN) - Nepal
Nepal Climate Change Federation (NECCAF) - Nepal
Neudom - Pakistan
Noakhali Rural Development Society (NRDS) - Bangladesh
Orissa State Volunteers and Social Workers Association (OSVSWA) - India
Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum (PFF) - Pakistan
Pangoea International - Bangladesh
Participatory Research Action Network (PRAN) - Bangladesh
PATHIKRIT - Bangladesh
Peace Foundation - Pakistan
Sanayee Development Organization (SDO) - Afghanistan
Savisthri National Women's Movement - Sri Lanka
SETU - Bangladesh
Sindhica Reforms Society - Pakistan
Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres (SPARC) - India
South Asian Youth Climate Coalition (SAYCC) - India
Sri Lanka Nature Group - Sri Lanka
UDYAMA - India
Union Women Center - Georgia
Vinoba Bhave University, Hazaribag - India
Voice of Women (VoW) - Maldives
WAVE Foundation - Bangladesh
YWCA of Simla - India

EUROPE

Active Remedy Ltd. - United Kingdom
Black Activists Rising Against Cuts - United Kingdom
Campaign against Climate Change - United Kingdom
Climate Action Network Europe (CAN) - Europe
Eco Dobrogea - Romania

European Environmental Bureau (EEB) - Europe
Forum for Women and Development (FOKUS) - Norway
Global Partnership for Local Action - Austria
International Council on Social Welfare Europe (ICSW) - Europe
Italy Equality Group - Italy
Ius Primi Viri - Italy
Journalists from Human Rights - Macedonia
Jedan stepen Srbija (One Degree Serbia) - Serbia
KULU: Women and Development - Denmark
Medsin-UK - United Kingdom
NGO BIOS - Moldova
Presentation Justice Network - Ireland
Rogers Foundation for Person-Centred Education - Hungary
SocialCoop, CRL - Portugal
Terra-1530 - Moldova
The Equality Trust - United Kingdom
The National Alliance of Women's Organisations - United Kingdom
The Schumacher Institute - United Kingdom
Women In Development Europe (WIDE) - Europe
Women's Federation for World Peace International - Europe

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

América Latina y el Caribe del Llamado Mundial a la Acción Contra la Pobreza (GCAP LAC) - Latin America and the Caribbean
Centro Nordestino de Medicina Popular - Brazil
El Centro Para El Desarrollo Comunal (CEDECO) – Honduras
Fondo ACI-ERP - Honduras
Fundación Natura - Colombia
Fundacion para Estudio e Investigación de la Mujer (FEIM) - Argentina
Grenada Community Development Agency (GRENCODA) - Grenada.
Grupo Tacuba - Mexico
La Asociación De Micro, Pequeños y Medianos Empresarios Afro Hondureños – Honduras
La Red Hondureña Contra La Iniquidad – Honduras
Latin American and Caribbean Committee for the Defense of Women's Rights (CLADEM) - Brazil
Red de Educacion Popular entre Mujeres (REPEM) - Latin America
The Hunger Project Mexico - Mexico
TRANSPROJETACAO (Uma metodologia para prosperar a sustentabilidade no mundo) - Brazil
Tribes Alive/Indigenous People's Cultural Support Trust - United Kingdom and Brazil

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

AEEFG - Tunisia
Association pour la Protection de l'Environnement et le Développement durable de Bizerte (APEDDUB) - Tunisia
Association pour le développement et de la promotion des droits humains (ADPDH) - Mauritania
The Association of Environmental Justice in Israel (AEJI) - Israel

Union de L'Action féministe (UAF) - Morocco
Zenab for Women Development - Sudan

NORTH AMERICA

Alchemus Prime - United States
American Anthropological Association - United States
American Psychological Association (APA) – United States
Center for Political Ecology - United States
Center for Sustainability, Ramapo College of New Jersey - United States
Centers of Investigation for Poverty and Inequality and for Sustainability, Moravian College - United States
Chiapas Support Committee of Oakland – United States
Donkeysaddle Projects - United States
EcoEquity - United States
Esperanza Peace and Justice Center - United States
Ethical Markets Media - United States and Brazil
Gullah/Geechee Fishing Association - Gullah/Geechee Nation
Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition - Gullah/Geechee Nation
Gullah/Geechee Sustainability Think Tank - Gullah/Geechee Nation
Incite Options - Canada
Jeannette Rankin Peace Center (JRPC) - United States
La Peña Cultural Center - United States
National Council of Women - United States
National Economic & Social Rights Initiative - United States
Other Worlds - United States
San Jose Peace and Justice Center - United States
Sisters of Charity Federation - United States
The Dellums Institute for Social Justice - United States
Women Graduates - United States
Women's Studies Advisory Council, Moravian College - United States

OCEANIA

Presentation Sisters Queensland - Australia
Institute for Human Security and Social Change, La Trobe University - Australia
Women in Adult & Vocational Education Inc (WAVE) - Australia
