

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

October - November 2015

## 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

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