

TOWARDS CLIMATE ACTION THAT LEAVES NO ONE BEHIND

CLIMATE CHANGE, POVERTY ERADICATION
AND HUMAN RIGHTS

POLICY BRIEF FROM THE INTERNATIONAL
MOVEMENT ATD FOURTH WORLD FOR
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- People living in extreme poverty and their communities across the world are the first, most and hardest hit by the effects of climate change while they are the least responsible for its causes and have the least means to protect themselves from it. Climate change exacerbates the vulnerability people living in poverty already face.
 - UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, Philip Alston, warned that “climate change risks undoing the last 50 years of progress in development, global health and poverty reduction”.
 - Fully implementing the Paris Agreement and all the states obligations including proper loss and damage compensation, supporting the poorest in their daily resistance and own actions against climate change, promoting local knowledge gathered by these communities, creating spaces for participation and empowerment, strengthening social protection systems that secure economic and social rights of all, are crucial solutions towards a sustainable future, respectful of the planet and leaving no one behind.
 - Policies and mechanisms put in place should therefore follow a human rights based approach. Human rights should be explicitly mentioned in the text of the Rulebook of Guidelines. This would allow adaptation and mitigation strategies and grievances and remedy mechanisms for loss and damages to be based on the UN Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights.
 - The International Movement ATD Fourth World fully supports the Climate Vulnerable Forum's call to create a new mandate of UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Climate Change.
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The poorest, least responsible for climate change environmental degradation and yet, most affected by its violence

By increasing the occurrence of natural disasters, the destruction of crops and cultures due to extreme weather changes, droughts or floods, **climate change affects millions of poor families and communities who mostly rely on local ecosystems for their subsistence livelihoods.** According to the World Bank, **climate change could push more than 120 million people into poverty by 2030** if effective actions are not implemented immediately.

Climate change constitutes a new violence against the poorest. Their situation, wherever they are in the globe, is the result of the same process of economic and political domination by an oligarchic elite, social exclusion and violence of ill-designed policies that have intentionally put aside and violated the political, economic, social and cultural rights of people living in poverty, whose lack of political power and agency add into the cycle of disempowerment.

The poorest also bear the heaviest brunt of global warming. At the time of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 in the United States, those with resources left in advance of approaching hurricane; those without resources (largely the poor, African-American, elderly or residents without private cars) remained, trapped as the floodwaters rose. The victims of the hurricane were disproportionately black - the mortality rate for black adults was 1.7 to 4 times higher than the mortality rate for white adults in certain areas of New Orleans.

The poorest were also left out in post-disaster reconstruction and recovery. Years after Hurricane Katrina, thousands of low-income families in New Orleans still cannot find adequate housing. Houses refurbished by investors and apartments and public housing rebuilt into units for rent or sale are unaffordable to them. While the affluent and tourist areas of the city have been rebuilt, the traditionally under-resourced neighborhoods were not. Shops and public services have virtually disappeared, making life in these areas even more challenging.

Clean energy programmes that are ill-designed have adverse consequences on people and communities living in poverty. In many countries, the construction of large-scale hydroelectric dams has entailed forced eviction and relocation, unfair and insufficient compensation, sometimes marred by corruption and discrimination to the detriment of the poorest. This raises serious human rights concerns with respect to the loss of land and means of livelihood by local people, and the severance of the cultural connection and history that are particularly important to indigenous communities.

Climate actions pursuing the promising prospect of a Green Economy sometimes fail to take account of their social impacts on vulnerable populations. For example, a 70-family-strong community in the Mekong Delta used to earn their living as waste-pickers and by recycling materials. A new waste processing plant has eliminated their livelihood while only hiring 15 of the 150 adults for odd jobs, for lack of plans to provide skills training or retraining for the others.

Supporting people living in poverty as actors of change in the preservation of their ecosystems and communities

States have multiple human rights obligations towards their citizens, notably the obligation to ensure adequate responses to the climate crisis. Such responses, through policies and actions, must **recognize and prioritize the poorest people as drivers of change**. One of the key approaches is to seek with the poorest people how to learn from their local, ancestral and indigenous knowledge to better build their agency and resilience in today's world.

For instance, inhabitants in the Cusco region of Peru, both in the Andean and Amazon areas, have used their ancestral **knowledge to adapt** to the rugged geography and climate variability by developing a wide range of knowledge that has allowed them to grow crops successfully, in spite of the changing environment. Among these knowledge, there is the selection of crops and varieties resistant to extreme climatic events; the diversification of production; planting in different altitudinal floors; tillage systems consistent with soil quality and land geography; fertilization with natural products; product transformation, among many other practices. The transformation of products ensures food for times of shortage.

In Madagascar, for 12,000 people living in informal settlements in a flood-prone neighbourhood the ecological disaster is happening on a daily basis. In extreme conditions of survival, they seek to **take care of each other, and manage to make life possible**. This also implicates taking care of their environment with often derisory means, like recycling plastic bottles and other few recoverable materials in a nearby landfill. *“Every year, we dig channels, we put boards to pass, so that at least children can go to school without risking their lives. But the water comes back constantly and our houses built of dry earth bricks melt in the water. It never ends. We live in the water, we sleep in the water.”* The neighborhood youth raised the passages so people can circulate even when there is water. Conscious that the same efforts should be repeated every year, they looked for more durable solutions. Young engineers from the country showed them how to turn the collected plastic waste into breeze blocks. They now have paved the first 150 meters of a passage that runs through the area.

It is essential not to leave them alone and learn from their fights and know-how.

Creating spaces for participation and empowerment of the most vulnerable communities

At its core, the International Movement ATD Fourth encourages the direct participation of people living in poverty through the creation of safe spaces where communities with the experience of poverty, discrimination and violence can form and express their knowledge without fear or stigma.

One such transformative action led by ATD Fourth World worldwide is *People's University*. In 2019, one of the themes discussed in People's Universities in France was climate change as the awareness around this phenomenon is growing. While the climate is temperate and the standard of living is high in France, the poorest people are already suffering from poor living conditions, lack of access to affordable and clean energy, aggravated by climate change, including heat waves that have recently hit Europe.

"I live in a rented house. It is very badly isolated. Moisture comes in, it takes off the paintings, if we do not get covered we get sick (asthma, osteoarthritis). But at the same time, the first environmentalists, I think it's the poor. Because it is they who collect everything that can be recycled including copper, aluminum, scrap metal. And so, we are the first recyclers, it goes back far."

A strong political conscience was expressed by ATD Fourth World activists with a direct experience of poverty: *"Ecology is also to take care of people, not to put them on the side. How many times have we been made guilty while those who live in the superfluity deprive the poor of the necessary. We must involve the poorest in all human projects, as it is being done in the **Zero long-term unemployment zones**. Protecting the environment must also be a fight for people, against violence, stigmatization, the obligation to live in rotten housing where it is cold. We must get out of these contradictions."* (Account of the Fourth World's People's University, Brittany 2019).

Hearing these voices in the global discussion is crucial to tackling climate change in an effort to eradicate poverty. It is a way to allow that the **local communities participate in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of adaptation and mitigation strategies that affect their lives.**

Recommendations for inclusive climate actions

- Even though this has been clearly stated in the Paris Agreement, the intrinsic relationship between **climate changes actions, responses and impacts** and equitable access to **sustainable development and eradication of poverty** should be reinforced.
- Countries should devote more efforts to gather support from citizens in favor of climate action. To that end, they should strive to design **policies and programs that are socially acceptable**. It is also imperative that the NDCs and National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPAs) developed by Parties to the Paris Agreement include measures and budgets targeting the most vulnerable communities, particularly those living in poverty, ensuring that they benefit from **training and job creation programmes** in the context of transitioning to a 'Green Economy'.
- Governments should reach out to people and communities who are most and first affected by climate change phenomena and by inadequate response measures and **involve them as 'stakeholders' and 'partners'**, to ensure that actions to address climate change are inclusive.

- In the area of climate financing, an **accountability mechanism** is needed that allows affected people to obtain remedy for the damage caused by programs supported by the Green Climate Fund. It is equally crucial to consider **non-economic impact** of climate change and adaptation strategies such as disruption of support networks, loss of livelihood or culturally important sites.
- **Stronger social protection**, designed with the contribution of those most affected by climate change, should be implemented in all countries, as encouraged by the ILO Recommendation n°202.
- The **holistic knowledge** gained through participatory actions and research should feed into the design of social protection systems that protect both the economic and social rights of the poorest, so their capacity to face climate disruption is strengthened.

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The International Movement ATD (All Together in Dignity) Fourth World is a movement of solidarity among and in collaboration with the most excluded families around the world. Founded in 1957 by Joseph Wresinski in France, ATD Fourth World, active in 34 countries, brings together people from different cultures and social classes. With the goal of leaving no one behind, all our projects are designed and planned with people living in persistent poverty and aim to bring their voices to all decision-making spheres, including at the global level.

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ATD Fourth World has had general consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council since 1991 and associate status with UNESCO since 1970. It has permanent delegations at the European Union and the Council of Europe.

It is also recognized by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Organization of the Francophonie (IOF).

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