

NYC-Geneva Global Community Virtual Dialogue
on SDG implementation and climate action
in times of COVID-19 Recovery

**Theme: Climate action and SDG implementation:
Effectively reaching those living in extreme poverty**

A diverse group of stakeholders* mainly based in New York and Geneva attended a virtual meeting to discuss concrete ways in which the global policy community can build forward better by placing people and the planet at the center of multilateral efforts to achieve the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. After opening remarks by four keynote speakers, the discussion was articulated around three questions and included the following points:

Opening remarks:

- Vulnerable communities, who primarily depend on fishing, subsistence farming, forest products utilization and paid labor, are being threatened by development activities resulting in overexploitation and abuse. Climate change exacerbates their vulnerabilities.
- For communities already living in poverty, the accumulation of social and environmental crises, such as insect invasions, floodings, drought, and the covid 19 pandemic is pushing people further into extreme poverty and deprivation.
- It is crucial to think more holistically about the climate crisis: those living in extreme poverty are also some of the most impacted by climate change and the pandemic.
- Climate change should be addressed as a cross cutting development issue, not merely an environmental one.
- Even before the pandemic, not a single country was on track to achieve the Agenda 2030.
- There is a need for international cooperation and multilateralism. In particular, countries responsible for large amounts of global greenhouse gas emissions should be financing climate adaptation in low-income countries, who bear the brunt of climate change.

Question 1: How do the contributions shared today by our keynote speakers resonate with your personal or work experience? For example, what would be the priorities for you to address in policy or in advocacy work?

- Discussions about the Paris agreement sometimes remain theoretical, but sharing concrete experiences can ground our conversations in the present rather than in future or long-term perspectives.

- Treating climate change and poverty eradication in silos will not help to achieve the expected results. It is essential to adopt a whole-of-society approach.
- The Covid-19 crisis was a wakeup call. Countries that took action rapidly to tackle Covid were affected the least; the same approach must be followed for addressing the climate crisis.
- It is crucial to invest in capacities and knowledge so that communities themselves are empowered to make necessary changes at the local level.
- The Escazu Agreement is an important tool for regional environmental human rights defenders and those living with the impacts of the climate crisis.
- Women bear much of the responsibility for their families but have less secure jobs. It is crucial to stress the importance of women at the center of poverty eradication and leading in communities, along with the importance of partnership, transparency, good governance.
- Countries have to rely on their resources. We need to get out of the debt trap and the poverty trap. People living in extreme poverty are not benefiting from globalisation.
- Regarding policies on sustainability and climate change, the UNDP HDRO Report 2020 mentions the following priorities: changing social norms and values, changing incentives, and raising solutions to work with nature rather than against it.
- Reinforcing the dignity of human beings is essential. We need policies empowering indigenous peoples and educating local communities about their rights.

Question 2: What difference can human rights-based approaches to climate action and sustainable development make for people living in extreme poverty? Do you have any success stories in your work where you were able to ensure that human rights were at the center of climate or development projects or policy?

- Human rights promotes human dignity at the core, which is key in empowering people. Human rights defenders should be protected.
- Human rights-based approaches are key to addressing climate change and SDG implementation. They help develop a better understanding of why certain groups are more vulnerable. When people's rights are protected, including the right to information, they feel more valued and included in the process. People are not poor because they don't have the materials, it is because they don't have the right systems in place.
- These approaches can address structural violence against people living in poverty, deeply entrenched inequalities, etc. - they permit a shift from a charity/humanitarian model towards empowerment for affected communities. .
- It is crucial to build resilience within communities to cope and adapt with climate change but also trust their traditional knowledge and let them lead the conversation.
- Treaty bodies give a basis for tackling some of the issues happening today. Too often, their work is left there: we need to think how to use their decisions and recommendations for social and economic justice on the ground.
- One of the biggest issues in climate and development policy is participation: people want to say something, but who is listening? The establishment of a new UN Special Rapporteur on Climate Change and Human Rights could be a solution.
- In addition to human rights-based approaches, we need to promote nature-based solutions, to consider not only human beings at the center of change, but all of the environment.

Question 3: How can we ensure better policy coherence between Geneva and New York on issues related to climate action, SDG implementation and human rights in times of Covid-19 recovery?

- Human rights language can sometimes be sensitive in New York: how do we address that issue? Should we push for a human right language or speak of human dignity instead?
 - We need to focus on the objectives we want to achieve, which is changing the lives of local communities, and align our strategy with the needs of local communities.
 - It is imperative to talk about human rights, the difficulty is in tackling it linked with environmental issues. That is why we need the support of NGOs to bring these issues and awareness and relevant language in the resolutions.
 - Human rights advocates should articulate what it means to integrate human rights into fiscal policy, mitigation and adaptation (see the Rights-Based Economy policy brief by the Center for Economic and Social Rights)
 - The global community needs to connect the different struggles and come up with a common agenda to speak with a common voice. This idea of partnerships is already enshrined in the 2030 Agenda but should continue to be pushed forth.
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*Representatives in attendance:

From Permanent Missions and Governments: Costa Rica, Ecuador, France, Haiti, Madagascar, Philippines, Portugal.

From United Nations agencies: Food and Agriculture Organization, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations Environment Program, United Nations Development Program, UNDP Human Development Report Office, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development.

From Non-Governmental Organizations: Franciscans International, International Movement ATD Fourth World, Bahà'í International Community, Brahma Kumaris, Calamianes Resilience Network, Center for Economic and Social Rights, Center for International Environmental Law, Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, CORDAID, Earthjustice, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Global Network of Civil Society Organisations for Disaster Reduction, UN NGO Committee on Migration, Quaker United Nations Office, Social Watch, Soka Gakkai International, Soroptimist International.