

SUMMARY REPORT OF HLPF 2021 WEBINAR

Addressing the tensions between extreme poverty and environmental conservation: grassroots voices and solutions

- Side-Event to the United Nations High Level Political Forum 2021 -

Thursday 8 July 2021, 1PM-2:15PM (EST), on Zoom



Seela John Sainyeye
Coordinator of Women
Empowerment and Gender
Equality at the Pilot Light
Development Organization in
Arusha, Tanzania



Leidiane Quilombola
Educator, leader of the Quilombola
Movement of Maranhão MOQUIBOM
and of the collective of Warrior
Women in Resistance, Nazaré, Brazil



David Smith
Chief Economist and Regional
Co-ordinator - Africa. UNDP-
UNEP Poverty-Environment
Action for the SDGs (PEA),
UNEP Africa Office



Yves Lador
representative of Earthjustice
to the United Nations
in Geneva.



Moderator:
Donald Lee
President of the International
Movement ATD Fourth World

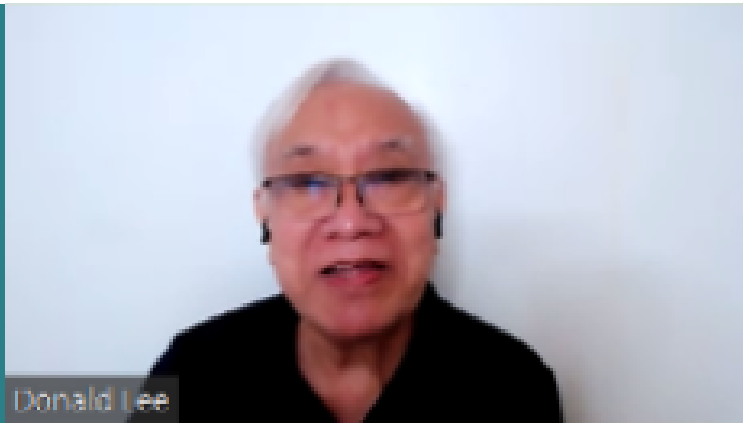


ATD
FOURTH WORLD

OPENING REMARKS

Moderator, Donald Lee

President of the
International Movement
ATD Fourth World



President of the International Movement ATD Fourth World Donald Lee opened the webinar sharing some background information about ATD Fourth World, a movement of solidarity with and between families and communities living in persistent poverty around the world. The core mission of ATD Fourth World is to make sure that no one is left behind by reaching out to those whose voices are still marginalized, and including them in dialogue. Aligned with one of ATD Fourth World's global priorities entitled 'Promoting a society respectful of all people and of the earth as a pre-condition for peace', this webinar highlighted the intersections of environmental and social justice.

Through ATD Fourth World's involvement at the United Nations, this webinar on the margins of the High Level Political Forum 2021 was a space for powerful Indigenous and local activists to share some of the struggles their communities face regarding their land, resources, freedom, and identity. Fellow panelists were two professionals, one in the field of human rights and environmental justice, and the other on environmental management and sustainable development.

Together, they led a rich and complex conversation connecting the local to the global, and asking the audience thought-provoking questions, about whose lands are "protected" and the reasons behind it, how this can negatively impact local communities and right holders, and what can be done differently in the future.

"When not designed with the participation of local communities, conservation efforts can harm and displace local communities, pushing them further into poverty and may even criminalise them for encroaching into conservation areas."

Leidiane Quilombola

Educator, leader of the Quilombola Movement of Maranhão MOQUIBOM and of the collective of Warrior Women in Resistance, Nazaré, Brazil



Leidiane Quilombola opened the conversation with an acknowledgement of her origins within her Quilombola community, as a descendant of slaves from Africa and Indigenous ancestors from the country now known as Brazil. As a leader of the Quilombola Movement of Maranhão, Leidiane knows from experience of the various challenges that her community is fighting against. Leidiane explained that illegal extractive activities and deforestation on the Quilombola territory affect the spiritual connection of her community with their territory. Since the community relies on the land for self-sustenance and identity expression, this connection to the territory is vital. Further, Leidiane highlighted that, through deception and lack of consultation, the government encroaches on their territory to implement agro-forestry and other development projects.

Leidiane is also part of MOQUIBOM, the Collective of Women Warriors in Resistance, and in her intervention she consistently connected her community's struggle with women's empowerment. She also emphasized that taking back education (Retomada, meaning Retaking) is a major part of resisting oppression and conserving the identity of the Quilombola communities.

Leidiane finished with a song dedicated to the freedom of the territory and a message of togetherness across borders.

"If we take
away the
territory,
we cannot
survive."

Seela John Sainyeye

**Coordinator of Women
Empowerment and Gender
Equality at the Pilot Light
Development Organization
(PILIDO) in Arusha, Tanzania**



Through a video intervention, Seela presented the life and challenges faced by the Maasai communities in Tanzania. As pastoralists, Maasai are highly dependent on open land for cattle grazing. The peace shared with wildlife and nature has now been disrupted by external pressures and interests - such as national conservation areas, tourism, small and large scale farming, land grabbing, mining areas - pushing many pastoralists away from their lands who gradually lose their traditions and cultural practices. As natural conservationists, Maasai used to know how to survive a drought. Today, the combination of climate change, loss of open spaces of land, forests and natural water sources, traditional knowledge is not enough to survive.

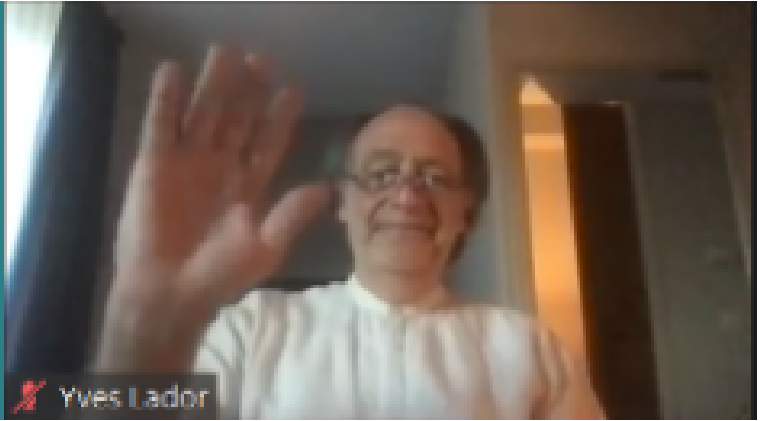
As some men look for work in the city, more burden and responsibilities are added on Maasai women, who, without herds nor lands, have to resort to cutting down trees to make charcoal and sell it for survival. Seela insisted that this harmful practice was not a natural part of Maasai women's lives, and led to overwork, poor health and harassment by forest preserve officers.

Against this backdrop, Seela emphasized the efforts of her organization focusing on small-scale entrepreneurship projects for women, microfinance loans, Share a Goat project, securing title deeds to women's plots. Awareness is raised on land tenure rights, gender rights, child rights and environmental rights. For Seela, the only solution in the long term is to invest in projects allowing for sustainable development.

"Presently in the Maasai districts, more than 80 percent of the population lives below the poverty line, where traditionally Maasai pastoralists were prosperous and self-reliant."

Yves Lador

**Representative of Earthjustice
to the United Nations in Geneva**



Yves Lador's contribution helped to connect Leidyane and Seela's experiences with the conservation processes being undertaken by UN bodies. In particular, he delved into the UN's 30x30 plan, which aims to protect 30% of land and water on Earth by 2030. Yves explained that ecosystems need space and time in order to be self-sustained, which is what the 30x30 plan aims to provide in order to counter human activity that causes ecosystems to collapse. However, such a plan must carefully consider where and why an area is being protected, and how it would affect local right-holders. Land conservation practices should take into account the right to self-determination of communities whose livelihoods are tied to those areas. Yves made a strong case for respecting the human rights of Indigenous communities, not for their role as custodians of the land, but as equal right-holders.

Yves hopes that the Convention on Biodiversity, which was set to take place in 2020 but has been delayed due to the pandemic, will decide on a new agenda that can tackle the relevant questions posed by the 30x30 plan, while highlighting the issues of the human rights and livelihoods of communities living off of the land.

Yves finished with an example of land protection that is based on meaningful dialogue between scientific and traditional knowledge. In New Zealand, the Whanganui river has been granted rights, and is now being managed by both representatives of the state and of the Mauri.

"These
[custodians of the
land] have rights,
and they don't
only have rights
because they
manage their
ecosystems well,
they have rights
because they are
our equals"

David Smith

Chief Economist and Regional Coordinator - Africa. UNDP-UNEP Poverty-Environment Action for the SDGs (PEA), UNEP Africa Office



David Smith started with highlighting a necessary shift in language, explaining his preference for ‘sustainable management’ over concepts such as ‘preservation’ or ‘conservation’, the latter words suggesting that local communities are ‘locked out’ of these natural areas. To reduce the potential for conflict between land preservation and livelihoods and to reconcile it with the overarching objective of the Agenda 2030 to eradicate poverty, UNEP uses a tool of comprehensive economic analysis that demonstrates how dependent people living in poverty are on the environment and natural resources. For example, in Malawi, 18% of household income comes from the forest. If a government restricts access to the forest, this would immediately deprive local communities from 18% of their income, which would be devastating for people who are already poor.

Further, David pointed to the need for both quantitative and qualitative disaggregated data between men and women to understand who has the control over how natural resources are used.

David closed by explaining that the UN cannot impose but only convince decision makers in key ministries such as ministries of planning, finance or agriculture to adopt this equitable benefit sharing model, as the decisions they make have the most impact on the environment and communities.

"If people are treated with respect and their needs are met, they are far more likely to succeed and be sustainable in managing forests and lands"



HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE DISCUSSION BETWEEN PANELISTS AND WITH THE AUDIENCE

- Women are the guardians of the territory because women produce life. Women don't see territory just as a product. We interact with the territory without violence because we are engaged in sustaining life.
- When there is deforestation, we are not talking about poverty in terms of money, as when you cut down a fruit tree, you are taking away the sustainability of the Quilombo.
- Systems of oppression force traditional communities to forgo their ancestral roots. In the Quilombos, the Warrior Women in Resistance movement meets with women, organizes dialogues, meetings and fairs to recover the knowledge of our ancestors, so that we can defend our territory.
- We can merge ancestral knowledge and scientific knowledge. We, as women, see the future in ancestrality, in order to free our territory from any kind of oppression.
- In order to expand the role of women in land protection, we can teach them their rights, ensure that children can go to school, and provide training and education on climate change to reduce harmful environmental practices.
- In order to support local groups of women engaged in nature preservation, international organizations can work on ensuring their safety. There has been a big increase in violence against people who are confronting development projects. This must be denounced and stopped, because if people cannot act for the environment freely, then we are not headed in the right direction.
- International organizations can also lobby governments to make sure that the communities who are concerned have a voice. Once the government agrees, UN organizations can step in to help provide capacity building and finances so that people can participate in a meaningful way.
- If you look at the struggle Indigenous peoples have gone through in the past decades, they have managed remarkable achievements within the international systems and institutions, and that gives them a stronger voice and more legitimacy. The problem is the power imbalance. Even with these successes, Indigenous communities are far from having the same power as major corporations. This power imbalance has not been changed, we are still living in the matrix of colonization. It's an uphill battle.