



"Wherever human beings are condemned to live in extreme poverty, human rights are violated. To come together to ensure that these rights be respected is our solemn duty."

Joseph Wresinski (1917-1988)
Founder of ATD Fourth World

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Inputs for the report by the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights on The "just transition": people in poverty and sustainable development

ATD Fourth World welcomes the opportunity to provide input for the report of the Special Rapporteur on the "just transition": people in poverty and sustainable development.

People living in extreme poverty face multiple social, economic, cultural and institutional obstacles that prevent them from enjoying their fundamental rights. The 2030 Agenda encompassing 17 Sustainable Development Goals has raised the high hope of fulfilling the ambition of 'Leaving No One Behind' in ending poverty in all its forms everywhere (SDG1) and reducing inequalities (SDG10). To this end, it is important to acknowledge and address the multiple and overlapping insecurities that confront people living in extreme poverty at the same time.

1. The burden of environmental degradation on people living in extreme poverty.

A vast majority of people living in extreme poverty over the world inhabit areas prone to floods and drought, with limited access to clean water and sanitation owing to cost, lack of infrastructure or denial of services to persons without secure tenure. Sea level rise is a harsh reality they experience, and landslides destroy their homes owing to decades long deforestation that cause extensive soil erosion. To earn their living, they accept dangerous working conditions, are exposed to health damaging pollutants and accidents. They have to settle for cheap, innutritious food full of chemical ingredients.

In industrialised countries, too, people in extreme poverty bear the heaviest brunt of global warming. For example, they represented a high percentage of the heat-related deaths among the elderly population in metropolitan Paris during the heat wave that scorched Europe in 2003.¹ In New Orleans, at the time of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, people with resources left in advance of the approaching hurricane; those without resources like private cars (largely people in poverty, many of whom were also elderly) remained trapped as the floodwaters rose.²

The following experience from Bangui, Central Africa Republic shines a light on a host of issues.

Barclay, his wife Cyndie and their two children settled on the banks of Oubangui river, after leaving the unsafe area they lived before, where shooting between rebel and 'self-defence groups' occurred regularly and communities of different faiths have been turned against each other. The respite was short-lived though – the river submerged their new neighbourhood in the rainy season. The scale of the disaster was an evidence of climate change, on top of many long-standing environmental abuses.

Along with other residents, Barclay tried to resist the rising river, protecting his family from getting malaria or typhoid from the water polluted by overflowing latrines and septic tanks. Their home was finally swamped along with the small kiosk where Cyndie used to sell soap and groceries when what Barclay earned was not enough to live on. Having little money left and knowing no other places, they resolved to go back to where they had left because of violence – temporarily, they thought. But they couldn't get their kids back in school or save enough money to start a small business again. Their life is even harder than before; Cyndie suffers because she cannot contribute to the family's income. Barclay is back where he started.

The story unfolds against a background of many development challenges in the country: Unrestrained logging for the benefit of other nations' economies, tree species are felled for charcoal production and

firewood supply, the forest is gradually disappearing, animals' habitat is endangered. Rivers diverted from their natural beds to irrigate gold and diamond mines are polluted by the chemicals. People become impoverished in spite of their hard work, leading to migration to towns and cities for survival.³

The experience shows how environmental justice and social justice are closely interlinked. The fulfillment of SDG12, 13 and 15, which are more directly related to environment and climate action, actually requires policies and measures addressing many challenges pertaining to other SDGs: affordable and clean energy (SDG7), decent work (related to SDG 8), housing and safe human settlements (related to SDG11), among others.

2. Ensuring that policies and measures in the ecological transition do not adversely impact on people living in poverty

Not only are they excluded from the promised benefits of the current production and consumption model – which actually exhausts natural resources – people living in poverty also bear the negative impacts of 'clean energy' projects which do not involve them in their design. The resulting loss of land and livelihood by local people, and severance of the cultural connection and history particularly important to indigenous communities have raised serious concerns regarding violations of human rights.⁴

In Manila, settlements along the creeks and under the bridges were demolished in 2014 to clean up the waterways - thousands families were displaced far away from the city, cut off from their means of livelihood, the schooling of the children was in jeopardy, and the adults struggled to find work in the new settings. In New Orleans, thousands of low-income families still could not find adequate housing years after Hurricane Katrina. Public housing apartments made into units for rent or sale are unaffordable for them. The long under-resourced neighbourhoods have not been rebuilt, unlike the affluent and touristic areas of the city. Unemployment is high, shops and public services have virtually disappeared.⁵

In the pathway to a zero-carbon economy, will countries only invest billions in cutting-edge technologies that essentially generate jobs for engineers, digital specialists and highly qualified workers? Or will they also invest in 'low-tech' activities – thermal insulation of buildings, tree planting, restoration of natural areas, local resource-sharing systems? Jobs created in these areas will be more easily accessible to people in situation of poverty.

3. Just transition through the lens of work and employment

SDG Target 1.B calls for "creating sound policy frameworks (...) to support accelerated investment in poverty eradication actions," and SDG Target 8.3 relates to "promoting policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, creativity and innovation." Globally, actions intended to shape a Green Economy do not necessarily benefit the most vulnerable populations.⁶ For example, a community of 70 families in the Mekong Delta used to earn their living as waste-pickers and by recycling materials. A waste processing plant was set up, eliminating their livelihood while hiring only 15 among the 150 adults as security guards or for other odd jobs. No plans were proposed for skills training or retraining for employment in other sectors.

If the "just transition" is limited to addressing collective agreements and bargaining powers between employers and employees, it runs a high risk of leaving behind a large proportion of workers in the world, who have no labour advocacy groups to represent them.

In Guatemala and Madagascar, ATD Fourth World reaches out to people who work in the informal sector, in precarious and badly paid jobs. The "Working and Learning Together" programme helps identify areas where they can be organized and accompanies them in activities that generate income in an environment of solidarity. The programme also provides them with skills training that allows them to find work in the formal sector. Besides governments, worker representatives and employers, it is important to work with associations in direct contact with vulnerable populations in order to ensure that they are also included in projects for a just transition.

Another example of a good practice in this area is the “Zero Long-Term Unemployment Zones” Experiment. Three principles preside over the initiative, started in 2017 by ATD Fourth World and partner non-profits in France: No one is unemployable; people who have been out of work for a long time still have skills; jobs exist because there are many unmet needs. The innovative approach engages long-term unemployed persons in the territories concerned and authorities at various levels in a novel form of cooperation aimed at creating dignified, ecological and sustainable jobs. The skills of the persons seeking jobs are matched with the needs identified in the area. Attention is paid to supporting emerging public policies that foster social bonds and ecological transition.

The range of jobs comprises waste management, recycling, respite care, personal services to isolated people, short supply chain (farm-to-fork systems), employment in neighborhood shops, etc. The government has reallocated the funds earmarked for unemployment benefits to fund three-quarters of the salary of every job created, and the rest comes from the income generated by the jobs. As of mid-2019, the experiment has created 800 jobs and helped 11 businesses recruit new employees. Conducted currently in 10 localities, the initiative will be extended to a few dozen more in 2020-2021. At a time when the "commons" are coming back in the political discourse, the “Zero Long-Term Unemployment Zones” project aims at establishing a new kind of "common good" by and for the inhabitant community: employment. (More details in <https://frama.link/eJN0S1tV> and <https://www.tzclld.fr/>)

4. Housing and energy performance of buildings

Various countries in Europe have passed legislation regarding energy-efficient housing. However, the solutions – insulation, energy-saving appliances, photovoltaic panels, heat pumps, etc. – are not affordable for people living in poverty, who often live in buildings of low quality and deplorable energy performances. Actions to support energy savings are often difficult to access. Grants require refinancing the investments, whereas tax deductions are not applicable to low income population groups. In Belgium, for example, various organizations have developed systems that provide third-party financing for energy efficiency improvements of low-income households.

An example of a good practice is the ASSIST2GETHER project developed by EAPN. Among its activities, 'Home Energy Advisors' trained in social, communication and technical aspects provide vulnerable consumers with advice on energy efficiency and facilitate their access to support measures. The project also gathers and generates knowledge on the issues of consumer vulnerability and energy poverty throughout the countries in Europe. (<https://www.eapn.eu/assist2gether-energy-poverty-project/>)

5. Planned obsolescence and life cycle of products

An example of a good practice is ECCOFOR located in Dole, France. It is firstly a production school where students can acquire the skills of tire vulcanization/ repair and welding/metalwork. It has also the status of a business, one that considers recycling and reusing materials, preventing waste and saving resources – thus contributing to reduction of greenhouse emission (SDG13) – are a tool for sustainable economic and social development.

A specific feature of ECCOFOR is to welcome young school drop-outs and unaccompanied minor refugees. The certified vocational qualification it delivers is also a step stone for the inclusion of the youth who were out of school and have fewer assets to find jobs on the labour market. For ECCOFOR, the ambition that a Just Transition for All, leaving no one behind is possible. (See <http://www.eccofor.fr/fr/association-eccofor-dole.php>)

6. Engaging with people living in poverty to build a just transition and fulfill the SDGs

"You often hear it said that people living in poverty are not interested in sustainability, that they are each just trying to survive and that is all. Totally untrue! We must demand our place in this debate and make our own contribution to it. Because we know where the present growth model leads as we are experiencing the

consequences and suffering as a result. We must make this clearly understood because we are regarded simply as people who contribute nothing and who cost a lot to society." (Excerpt from Conclusion in the 2018-2019 Report of the Combat poverty, insecurity and social exclusion service, Belgium).⁷

People living in extreme poverty are the first to take action within their communities in response to climate change and environmental challenges. Their efforts and their experience go unnoticed; their ability to contribute positively to solutions have been overlooked; they are not recognized as drivers of change. For lack of representation such as a Major Group or a Constituency, it is difficult for their voice to be heard in the international bodies.

Recommendations at the policy level:

- Ensure that the terms "actors" and "stakeholders" are understood as comprising people living in poverty, among the populations vulnerable to climate change and environmental challenges and at risk of sinking further into poverty as a result of the response measures.
- Consequently, ensure that measures for climate change education, training, public awareness, public participation and public access to information, as spelled out in Article 6 of the UNFCCC and restated in Article 12 of the Paris Agreement, reach out to people in poverty and involve them as stakeholders and partners in their own rights.

Recommendations for action implementation:

- Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) should include provisions 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
- Ensure that people living in poverty have access to technology and scientific developments and products that can improve the quality of their housing, including its energy efficiency.⁸
- States should put into place social protection floors, as recommended under Goal 10.4 of Agenda 2030, to cushion the consequences of changes related to jobs and employment
- In working towards a green restructuring, governments, worker representatives and employers should engage with civil society organizations to ensure that the policies and programmes developed during the transition period work towards greater social justice and poverty eradication.

ATD Fourth World (All Together in Dignity) 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 nationalities and social backgrounds. 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.

¹ Cadot E., Spira A., (2006). *Canicule et surmortalité à Paris en août 2003 : Le poids des facteurs socio-économiques*. English summary available [online](#)

² Black, R., and Collyer M. (2014). Populations 'trapped' at times of crisis. FMR 45 Forced Migration Review. Available [online](#).

³ <https://www.atd-fourthworld.org/barclay-and-cyndie/>

⁴ UN-HABITAT, OHCHR, UNPFII, ECLAC and IOM, 2007. *Report of the International Expert Group Meeting on Urban Indigenous Peoples and Migration Santiago de Chil*

⁵ Olson M.G., Stornelli K., Victoire Marie., (2012). Not Meant to Live Like This – Weathering the Storm of Our Lives in New Orleans. ATD Fourth World Publications. Available [online](#)

⁶ Raworth, K., Wykes, S, and Bass, S. (2014). *Securing social justice in green economies: a review and ten considerations for policymakers*. IIED Issue Paper p4. Available [online](#)

⁷ Service de lutte contre la pauvreté, la précarité et l'exclusion sociale (2019). *Durabilité et pauvreté - Contribution au débat et à l'action politiques*. Rapport bisannuel 2018-2019. Bruxelles. English summary [online](#)

⁸ International Movement ATD Fourth World and Franciscans International (2015). *Making Human Rights Work for People Living in Extreme Poverty*, p.25, 41. Available [online](#)