

Civil Society Groups Call on Nations to Address Inequalities in Climate Policy

Civil society organizations around the globe are calling for nations to address inequalities and social justice in the accord to be adopted at the upcoming COP21 climate policy meetings in Paris late November and early December. According to the “International Call to Address Inequalities and Social Justice in Climate Policy,” drafted by global network *Initiative for Equality* and co-signed by over 200 civil society organizations, inequality is a “key driver of the climate crisis,” and “blocks agreements and pathways that could lead to sustainability.”

Most of the organizations endorsing the Statement represent poor or marginalized populations in the developing world, although several prominent organizations have endorsed, including the American Psychological Association and the International Social Science Council. *Initiative for Equality*, or IfE, is a global network itself, including nearly 300 civil society groups advocating in 90 countries for greater social, economic and political equality. IfE’s Field Hearings project has collected input from thousands of poor or socially excluded people in marginalized communities around the world, many of whom cited the harmful impacts of changing weather on their livelihoods and well-being.

“Climate change disproportionately impacts poor and marginalized people and communities,” according to Richard Osaliya, Field Hearings Regional Coordinator and member of the Statement’s drafting committee from Uganda. “These communities do not have the resources to respond or adapt, and lack the influence to demand necessary changes,” he said.

According to IfE President and Stanford University researcher Deborah Rogers, “inequality lies at the root of unsustainable behaviors. By making it socially acceptable for some people to have far more than others, and tying consumption to social status, inequality promotes overconsumption.” She also noted that the globalized economic system helps drive the climate crisis because its “emphasis on growth, short-term incentives, and profit motives contradicts sustainability.”

“Climate change puts women and girls at risk,” according to German advocate for women and member of the Statement’s drafting committee, Daniela Antons. She noted that women and girls in many parts of the world are more likely to care for children, the sick and the elderly, and to prepare food, fetch water, and work the soil – all of which become more difficult as the climate degenerates.

“Any initiative to address climate change and climate justice must place inequality at the center of the discussion,” said Bhola Bhattarai, director of National Forum for Advocacy in Nepal and member of the drafting committee. By disempowering or destroying the culture of indigenous groups, inequalities cause the loss of environmental knowledge and deprive communities of potential models for more sustainable ways of life, Bhattarai said.

Carmit Lubanov, member of the drafting committee and director of The Association of Environmental Justice in Israel, stated that inequalities block cooperation and collaborative problem-solving by creating lack of trust and social fragmentation. “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 the same interests, benefits, and responsibilities,” she said. Her group works with disadvantaged communities, including Arab Israelis, for environmental empowerment, and develops policy indicators to incorporate justice and equity into environmental and climate policy

“There is a serious ethical problem when those who suffer the most from climate change are those who generate the least emissions,” according to Kavya Michael, researcher on relative carbon emissions by activities of the poor and by elites in India, and member of the drafting committee. Michael said that her research shows that the well-to-do class generates approximately ten times as much carbon emissions as the poorest peasants in India.

Roberto Guimaraes, Brazilian member of the drafting committee and author of the UN’s groundbreaking 2005 report, *The Inequality Predicament*, said that current consumption patterns put excessive pressure on the planet’s dwindling resource base, as a wealthy minority “appropriates more than their share of resources.” “Because rich and poor are affected

differently, it's much harder to find equitable and effective incentives for reducing carbon emissions," he said.

The signatory groups plan to use their network members to put the "*International Call to Address Inequalities and Social Justice in Climate Policy*" into the hands of national climate negotiators before they arrive in Paris for the COP21 Climate Summit at the end of November. "If we don't address inequalities in climate change, the game is over," said Rogers. "This isn't just a nice idea – this is essential to achieving global agreements and workable solutions," she said.

For further information, see:

Summary Statement and List of Signatories:

<https://www.initiativeforequality.org/index.php/equity-treaty-action-collaborative/call-for-climate-justice>

Full Statement:

<https://www.initiativeforequality.org/images/IfEClimateJusticeFullStatementFINAL.pdf>

Website for *Initiative for Equality*: <https://www.initiativeforequality.org/>

Report by Dr. Kavya Micheal on carbon emissions by different socioeconomic classes in India:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17565529.2015.1034235>

Report by Dr. Roberto Guimaraes on "The Inequality Predicament" (2005):

<http://hdrnet.org/61/1/The%20Inequality%20Predicament.pdf>

Field Hearings report citing local communities on impacts of changing weather:

https://www.initiativeforequality.org/images/wtbh_link_page.pdf

Working paper by Dr. Deborah Rogers on relationship between inequalities and environment:

https://www.initiativeforequality.org/images/rogers_working_paper_Equity_Sustainability2012.pdf