

Trade Unions & Climate Change

The trade union perspective on Climate Change



The context for trade union action in the negotiations

- Trade unions have a double role: to position themselves on the debates from a global workers' perspective and to promote the integration of the labour agenda in these debates.
- At the international debate, trade unions are still explaining to other actors the linkages between climate change and union responsibilities & work.
- In these negotiations, we are very few to put forward solidarity & social justice as essential principles to solve in a sustainable manner the causes of climate change.



A union agenda on climate change

Union's priorities in the climate change agenda are organized around the following issues:

- A vision on the global debates regarding the response to the climate change challenge (temperature raise control, emission reductions, common but differentiated responsibilities, finance)
- Impacts & transformations on employment and the world of work
- The need for accompanying measures, regrouped under the concept of 'Just Transition'
- The need for governments to reinforce & formalize dialogue with civil society, in particular with workers & their unions.
- Enhance the potential of workplace action in reducing emissions.



Employment and Climate Change

- Effects on employment from climate-induced disruptions;
- Effects on employment from the implementation of adaptation measures;
- Effects on employment from the impacts due to emissions' reduction (so-called mitigation) efforts.

Effects of climate change on employment

First and hardly hit: developing countries, but current events show global effects.

- ❖ Damage to crops → adverse effects on agricultural workers, in particular seasonal workers (harvesting, crop processing). Cyclone Bangladesh SIDR (500,000 job loss)
- ❖ Damage to infrastructure → adverse effects on urban employment (lack of transportation to reach workplaces, workplaces destroyed). Hurricane Katrina
- ❖ Health damages → adverse effects on workers' productivity & income
- ❖ Other sectors: tourism, fisheries.



Employment and adaptation to climate change

- Research on adaptation and employment is still rare.
- However, we expect adaptation, if properly planned, to avoid job losses and create jobs (only possible with LIMITED climate change, < 2 degrees raise)
 - Positive impacts of investment on health services
 - Jobs from public works
 - New skills

Employment and emission reductions (mitigation)

- Different impacts:
 - On energy intensive sectors: challenges related to profound changes needed in production.
 - Accompanying the sectors in transition. Important to better understand the impact of climate change measures on sectors (currently, less serious than rise in oil prices, trends towards globalized production) but not to be underestimated.
 - The low carbon economy opens the way for better and also new jobs



Green jobs: “one day, all workers will be green”

Green jobs are decent jobs which reduce their environmental impact, leading to environmentally, economically and socially sustainable enterprises and economies

Examples of green jobs:

- Renewable energy: 2.3 million jobs
- Environmental industries: 5.3 million in the US
- Solar thermal: 1.000 manufacturers; 60.000 jobs in China
- Ethanol: 500,000 jobs in Brazil.
- ‘greening the work’

Unions must ensure that green jobs are decent jobs AND that these are available for those who need the most: youth/women/SMEs/ ‘the most vulnerable’



Forests & the next agreement

- Deforestation & changes in the use of land are the main cause of GHG emissions in developing countries. Forests as carbon sinks will be rediscussed.
- Deforestation: Unions raise the need to address the social root causes. Neither the forest police, nor illegal harvesting prescriptions, will alter the current situation as long as workers and the forest poor have to choose between illegal activities and failure to survive.
- Afforestation, reforestation: We call for a participatory and well-financed transition scheme for forest workers' and communities, as well as an equitable benefit distribution of incentives for emissions reduced. Sound democratic decision making is also essential for a fair forest transition.
- Main policy proposals:
 - promoting forest commodity pricing structures that recognize and reward those who engage in SFM
 - investing in data and research to better understand the benefits and potential adverse effects of avoided deforestation, afforestation and reforestation initiatives
 - extending ILO core labour standards to all workers in the forest products' value chain through certification schemes and global framework agreements,
 - promoting social dialogue activities among forest direct stakeholders.

Union proposals for Kyoto II

- Objective of the agreement: no more than 2° C; Emission reductions: 85% global reduction for 2050.
- Criteria for the burden share of emissions (common but differentiated responsibilities)
- Employment and just transition