

Why Do We Need a Global Climate Justice Movement?

By Nicola Bullard with Gopal Dayaneni
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Because we need just, equitable and not simply effective action on climate change – it's not just about numbers but about just numbers. Because the rich countries are shifting the burden to the South – on the developing and least developed countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America that have contributed the least to global warming. Because short-term economic interests are driving the negotiations – the considerable lobbying power of big oil, big coal, big agriculture, and other big corporations is out in full force ahead of the upcoming Copenhagen negotiations in December 2009. And because the people are not being heard – especially those who will be adversely affected first, and the most, by climate change in the developing world and here at home.

Grassroots International is a member of the [Funders Network on Trade & Globalization](#), which commissioned Nicola Bullard and Gopal Dayaneni to prepare this brief on the need for a global climate justice movement. Many of Grassroots' partners and allies, like the [Via Campesina](#), [Focus on the Global South](#) and the [Indigenous Environmental Network](#) are leaders in the emerging climate justice movement.

WHY DO WE NEED A GLOBAL CLIMATE JUSTICE MOVEMENT?

- prepared by Nicola Bullard with support from FNTG

Because we need just, equitable and effective action on climate change

A wealthy minority of the world's countries and corporations are the principal cause of climate change, yet its adverse effects fall first and foremost on the impoverished and marginalized majority of people. This simple truth is the foundation of climate justice.

Actions to combat climate change and address the consequences must be effective and equitable. But above all they must be just. The "success" of the emerging climate regime should not be measured by any apparent political "break through" between the major economies, but by its ability to drive significant emissions reductions and to facilitate *just transitions* to low-carbon societies within a framework that guarantee rights and is based on the fundamental principles of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, as stated in Article 3, and in particular Paragraph 1:

The Parties should protect the climate system for the benefit of present and future generations of humankind, on the basis of equity and in accordance with their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities. Accordingly, the developed country Parties should take the lead in combating climate change and the adverse effects thereof.

Considering the present state of negotiations, the UNFCCC will not deliver this result in Copenhagen.

Because the rich countries are shifting the burden to the South

At stake in the negotiations is the division among rich and poor of the Earth's limited remaining atmospheric space as well as the technology and finance required to live well within it and adapt to the rising effects of climate change. The reduction targets tabled by the [Annex 1 countries](#) [rich countries] are far too low. The US is talking about only a four percent reduction compared to 1990 levels, and Japan just eight percent below 1990 levels. Even the European Union, which regards itself as the vanguard of climate policy, is offering just 20 percent below 1990 levels (and 30 percent if other developed *and* developing countries come on board) yet almost half of that through offsets. These rich countries are effectively transferring a huge burden of emissions reductions to [non-Annex 1 countries](#) [poor countries] and to future generations, while continuing to consume far more than their fair share of fossil fuels and atmospheric space.

The mitigation gap – between what is proposed and what needs to be done both according to the science and to meet the development needs of the South – is far too wide, and it is the responsibility of the Annex 1 countries to bridge that gap, both through emission reductions and by providing technology and finance. All of this is mandated by the Convention, yet none of it is forthcoming. At the same time, there is tremendous pressure from the Annex 1 countries on several developing countries with large total but still small *per capita* emissions to take on mandatory reduction targets. This is a blatant ploy to shift the

blame and the burden to the South, and is seen by some in the South as an attempt by the North to grab what is left of the remaining atmospheric commons for their own development.

Because short-term economic interests are driving the negotiations

The unwillingness of the Annex 1 countries to make deep domestic cuts and their reliance on offsets (which lets polluters “buy” carbon credits in another country to reach their targets rather than reducing their own emissions domestically), shows that economic and short-term political interests, rather than ecological and social concerns, are driving the negotiating agenda. Industrialized countries are more interested in protecting their trade “competitiveness” and current standards of consumption than working for a global solution.

The best possible outcome in Copenhagen would be one that does not lock in an unfair deal, but puts in place a principled framework that recognizes the climate debt owed to the peoples of the South. In practice, this would mean that Annex 1 countries would assume their responsibilities to fairly share the Earth’s atmospheric space, to drastically reduce emissions and to provide finance and technology to help countries of the South transition to low carbon societies while achieving sustainable and equitable development.

And because the people are not being heard

Inside the negotiations, very few civil society voices calling for climate justice yet an ever-growing number of climate activists, social movements, affected communities, environmental and social justice organizations, and trade unions are more and more concerned at the lack of action at the international level and the marginalization or total absence of human rights, justice and equity in the negotiations. The unwillingness of several major economies in the course of the negotiations to recognize the rights of indigenous peoples, or even the basic right to development, is on the record.

If we are to achieve long-term effective and equitable solutions to the climate crisis, those calling for genuine climate justice must be brought into the debate: this includes communities affected by climate change in the South and the North; workers who will be doubly-impacted by climate change and the inevitable transition to low- or no-carbon economies but whose skills and knowledge can help find solutions; farmers, fishers, pastoralists and forest communities whose livelihoods are threatened but who have the know-how to manage productive resources sustainably; and indigenous peoples whose cultures and territories are on the frontline of resource extraction and industrialization yet who still have traditions, practices and deep knowledge about protecting the land, forests and biodiversity. Feminist and women’s organisations must also be part of the debate, as well as youth. Social and environmental justice activists, working at every level from local to international, on issues such development, energy, trade, agriculture, debt, finance, governance and alternatives, also have much to contribute by mobilizing public opinion and providing analysis and policy alternatives.

These social forces – in both the South and the North – have a direct interest in the climate talks yet most of these groups have been excluded as the negotiations become more technocratic, complex and opaque, and less concerned with practical action, social realities, equity and justice. Given the urgency of the problem and the dismal prospects for a good result in the short term, we need these social forces to join the debates on climate change and help shape the solutions nationally and internationally.

It’s not too late, so where do we begin?

This is a critical moment: we know that Copenhagen will not deliver enough. We know that vested interests will try to obstruct progress, and we know that shortsighted governments need massive pressure from outside and from below before they will do what needs to be done.

Right now, we must make it known that the climate talks are not merely about emissions: they are about who gets access to the global atmospheric commons. The rich or the poor? The polluters or the people? Climate change must be reframed as a question of justice.

Looking beyond Copenhagen, and even beyond the UNFCCC, we need a broad and diverse climate justice movement to shape and drive the debate, push for policy change, construct alternatives, rebuild damaged ecosystems and communities, challenge the orthodoxies and powers that obstruct the transition to low- and no- carbon societies, and defend the rights of those who are impacted.

The Earth's atmosphere is a global commons and we need a global movement to defend and manage the commons, now and for the future. We can do this but we need to start, here and now.

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