

# CLIMATE JUSTICE & HUMAN RIGHTS

Focus on food security, nutrition, health and gender

“Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family, including food.”

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)  
(U.N. 1948)

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## CLIMATE CHANGE THREATENS THE RIGHT TO HEALTH AND TO ADEQUATE FOOD OF MILLIONS OF PEOPLE

Climate and environmental changes undermine the full enjoyment of human rights and especially the right to adequate food and health. The IPCC 5AR concluded with high confidence that climate change will have a substantial negative impact on food production and food nutritional quality and on per capita calorie availability. It will increase childhood undernutrition, particularly stunting, and undernutrition-related child deaths in developing countries. Calorie availability in 2050 is likely to decline throughout the developing world, resulting in an additional 24 million undernourished children<sup>1</sup>.

Climate change will exacerbate the enormous existing burden of undernutrition through its impact on the three main 'underlying causes' of undernutrition: 1) food security and household food access, 2) maternal and child care, and 3) environmental health and health access<sup>2</sup>.

Climate change is projected to cause substantial increases in population movement and forced migration in the coming decades, affecting the right to health and adequate food among the most vulnerable. Indeed, the health risks associated with forced displacement include: undernutrition, food and water-borne illnesses, diseases related to overcrowding, sexually-transmitted diseases, increased maternal mortality, gender based violence and mental health disorders, among others<sup>3</sup>. Rural to urban migration may also put additional pressure on public health systems in cities, making access to health services more difficult, and increasing the vulnerability of individuals<sup>4</sup>. Yet, migration is an important strategy for

adaptation to climate change, and may also help individuals and communities become more resilient by diversifying livelihoods, ensuring access to key health and sanitation services and infrastructures.

*This is a matter of justice because vulnerable people who have contributed the least to climate change are the most affected.*

The Human Rights Council has regularly called attention to the negative implications of climate change for human rights, noting that the effects "will be felt most acutely by those segments of the population that are already in vulnerable situations owing to factors such as geography, poverty, gender, age, indigenous or minority status and disability"<sup>5</sup>. For example, it is expected that health losses due to climate change-induced undernutrition will occur mainly in areas that are already food insecure. Relative increase in child severe stunting is estimated to increase by 23% in central sub-Saharan Africa to 62% in South Asia by 2050 compared to a future without climate change<sup>6</sup>. Children from developing countries are and will suffer most of the health-related consequences of climate change. It is estimated that 99% of deaths related to climate change occur in low- and middle-income countries and of these deaths, 80% occur among children<sup>7</sup>. Poor health and undernutrition in turn, undermine people's resilience to climatic shocks and their ability to adapt<sup>2</sup>.

## WOMEN ARE AGENTS OF CHANGE TOWARDS FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY AND HEALTH

Gender equality and equity are fundamental to achieving climate-resilient sustainable development and the right to health and to adequate food. Overall, social norms and expectations around the roles and behaviors of women, girls, men and boys place limitations on everyone's ability to act in the face of change and adversity, including the challenge of responding to climate change<sup>8</sup>. Women and girls worldwide are still facing deeply entrenched disadvantages particularly when it comes to resource ownership and control<sup>8</sup>. To ensure gender equity, it is crucial to improve women's access to education, information, land, technologies, credit, social protection, and resilient health systems. The need to engage men and women equally is crucial to guarantee a transformative process.



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## ANY MEANINGFUL CLIMATE AGREEMENT MUST ADHERE TO HUMAN RIGHTS

The State Parties to the UNFCCC have already agreed, in the 2010 outcome document adopted by COP16 in Cancun, Mexico, "that Parties should, in all climate change-related actions, fully respect human rights." This needs to be reaffirmed and strengthened. However, despite such promises, and given the impact of climate change on health, food and nutrition, gender,

water, inequity and migration, these rights need to be reasserted and foregrounded in the negotiations. Additionally, to avoid the worst impact of climate change, climate negotiators, governments and donors should urgently cut drastically their emissions to limit warning below 1.5°C and commit to help the most vulnerable to adapt to an increasingly unpredictable world.

### THE 2015 CLIMATE AGREEMENT SHOULD:

- Recognize key strategies which can contribute to realizing human rights and empowering the most vulnerable communities. We are calling for “*language in the 2015 climate agreement that provides that Parties shall, in all climate change related actions, respect, protect, promote and fulfill human rights for all*”<sup>9</sup>.
- Integrate the right to health and to adequate food as core issues in the adaptation debate. Addressing agriculture and food security is critical but not sufficient to tackle the impact of climate change on the expected rise of undernutrition.
- Integrate gender equality and equity as guiding principles for all climate action.
- Recognize loss and damage as a human rights and climate justice issue. Parties should acknowledge that the most vulnerable people and countries are likely to suffer most from climate change losses and damage, while contributing least to global greenhouse gas emissions.

### CLIMATE FINANCE SHOULD:

- Address food and nutrition security, and support mitigation and adaptation measures that bring nutrition and health co-benefits.
- Be innovative, flexible, long term and additional, without diverting funds from budgets designated for poverty reduction and sustainable development. This includes mobilization of sufficient investments for national adaptation plans and international cooperation, including from climate funds.
- Respect gender equality and equity principles at all levels. Gender equity and equality should be integrated in: decision-making; project development, identification and implementation; financial allocation; and monitoring and evaluation. Socially disaggregated data should be collected throughout the project cycle. Activities with co-benefits should be promoted to ensure sustainability of the outcomes and ensure that public finance meets the needs of the most vulnerable communities.
- Include key social and environmental safeguard policies. To guarantee the application of such safeguards, effective grievance mechanisms must be implemented to ensure that affected peoples and communities can raise their concerns and have them addressed in a timely manner. Moreover, opportunities must be available to achieve meaningful and effective participation in all stages of relevant decision-making processes.



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“The right to adequate food is realized when every man, woman and child, alone or in community with others, has physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement.”

(Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights Fact Sheet No. 16 (Rev.1):  
The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights).

“Adequacy means that the food must satisfy dietary needs, taking into account the individual’s age, living conditions, health, occupation, sex, etc.”

(Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights FAO Fact Sheet No. 34:  
the right to adequate food)

## NATIONAL ADAPTATION PLANS AND CO-BENEFITS OF MITIGATION

- **Nutrition-sensitive adaptation and mitigation, nutrition-smart investments, increased policy coherence, and institutional and cross-sectoral collaboration can contribute to addressing the impacts of climate change to food security and nutrition.** This requires mainstreaming issues of food and nutrition security in low and middle-income countries into national adaptation plans and international cooperation, including through priority support to women and children in communities most at risk for undernutrition. Mitigation is urgent but should be nutrition sensitive and avoid increasing food and nutrition insecurity with measures such as the production of certain biofuels<sup>10</sup>. Mitigation strategies that aim to reduce the carbon footprint of the food sector through sustainable food production, sustainable food consumption (sustainable diets), and food waste reduction should be encouraged<sup>10</sup>.
- **Promoting health co-benefits of greenhouse gas mitigation policies and universal access to healthcare and healthy environments can help to minimize the impacts of climate change to health and nutrition.** The promotion of health co-benefits of greenhouse gas mitigation policies in sectors such as energy, transport, food and agriculture, water and housing will reduce the adverse health effects of climate change through actions which promote the linkages among the main environmental determinants of health. The use of health indicators can strengthen accountability for the social impacts of development policies, contributing to governance for sustainable development.
- **Migration needs to be recognized as an important strategy for adaptation to climate change,** which can help individuals and communities access improved livelihoods, key health, food, sanitation services, and infrastructures thus reducing their overall vulnerability. Two main areas of work remain: avoiding forced human mobility induced by climate change by supporting other adaptation strategies and ensuring support to displaced people. As such, human mobility needs to be integrated into national adaptation planning, to address, on the one hand, key mobility challenges, and on the other hand to harness the potential of migration as an adaptation strategy.
- **Gender equality and equity must be a priority in relevant guidelines for national planning, such as the guidelines for national adaptation plans.** Women's participation and leadership in climate change decision making at local, national and international level can contribute to the appropriateness and effectiveness of policies by ensuring that women's needs are addressed in the policies and also that their knowledge is utilized in addressing the challenge of a changing climate.
- **Smallholder farmers need to be recognized as critical players in the development of adaptation strategies.** Given the scale and speed of the impacts of climate change and variability, smallholder farmers need urgent support from the international community and governments which should do its utmost to provide opportunities for innovation and investments in resilient agricultural models. The Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) work program should ensure participation of smallholder farmers' organizations and specifically support family farming and agro-ecology practices as part of adaptation.



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