

ZERO CARBON ZERO POVERTY THE CLIMATE JUSTICE WAY

Achieving an equitable phase-out of carbon emissions
by 2050 while protecting human rights – Short Paper



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**Mary Robinson
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■ Climate Justice

INTRODUCTION

Actions by all countries are needed to save the planet for humanity. In designing the global response to climate change we have an opportunity to eradicate extreme poverty, ensure access to clean energy for all and achieve equitable access to sustainable development. To deliver this action on the scale and in the timeframe required to avoid dangerous climate change, the global community must act in solidarity and invest in the transition to Zero carbon and Zero poverty in all countries.

A low carbon, climate resilient pathway to prosperity for developing countries is more likely to support the right to development than business as usual. Carbon will ultimately constrain development in the least developed and most vulnerable nations of the world as climate impacts lead to more poverty and greater inequality. In a transition to Zero carbon and Zero poverty on the other hand the benefits outweigh the risks, with opportunities for developed and developing countries in terms of energy security, greater competitiveness, decreased mortality, job creation and greater resilience.

EQUITABLE ACCESS TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND ZERO POVERTY

It is possible to achieve Zero poverty while phasing out carbon emissions. Zero poverty articulated as the eradication of extreme poverty, universal access to clean energy and equitable access to sustainable development can be achieved through low carbon alternatives to fossil fuels. Experience has shown that business as usual fossil fuel based growth has not yielded an equitable and prosperous world for all. There is now increasing evidence that development is not, as many would have us believe, contingent upon fossil fuels and carbon emissions. However, development does require access to energy.

The overriding priority for developing countries is development and with support and access to low carbon energy, people in all countries can realise their right to development. With a focus on human rights the conditions to achieve equitable access to sustainable development can be raised for all, including the 3 billion people living without access to electricity and or clean cooking.





The risks posed to human rights by climate change are significant and would undermine progress on poverty reduction to date. This is an injustice we cannot allow to happen. Acting now to phase out carbon emissions to zero is fully compatible with eradicating extreme poverty and achieving sustainable development. A commitment to integrate human rights and equity into all climate policies and to design policies to maximise the potential for positive co-benefits including improved health, decent work, sustainable food production and access to renewable energy, can ensure that Zero poverty and Zero emissions are win-win goals for the global majority.



TRANSITION TO ZERO

By agreeing to keep warming as far below 2°C as possible, the international community implicitly agreed to set a limit on global cumulative carbon-dioxide emissions. Reaching Zero carbon is what is required to stay within this “carbon budget” – this can be achieved through a rapid peaking of the world’s carbon emissions, by 2020, and a complete phase out of carbon emissions by 2050.



Research commissioned by the Mary Robinson Foundation – Climate Justice clearly indicates that while this goal is challenging, it is achievable and affordable if approached in the context of human solidarity, with global cooperation delivering investment in green infrastructure in developing countries. Reaching Zero carbon and Zero poverty the climate justice way offers our global society a unique opportunity to combat climate change and promote equity while developing a social and international order, in which the rights and freedoms set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are realised; a world everyone is entitled to.



The climate justice way demands greater ambition from countries in phasing out carbon emissions in order to increase the likelihood that human induced warming of the climate system will plateau as far below 2°C as possible and protect global citizens from the worst human rights impacts of climate change. The IPCC Fifth Assessment Report (AR5) indicates that achieving net Zero carbon emissions by 2050 will greatly increase the likelihood of staying below 2°C and keeps 1.5°C in reach.

The longer carbon emissions continue, the greater the risk of severe, pervasive and irreversible impacts for people and ecosystems. It is clear that continued growth in carbon emissions and poverty reduction are incompatible. It is in the interests of all people and nations to phase out emissions as rapidly as possible.

AFFORDABILITY

As stated above, for a transition to Zero carbon to be successful all countries must undertake it together. Developing countries are home to the majority of the extremely poor people in the world and have less fossil fuel based infrastructure to diversify from than developed countries, largely due to this development deficit. Developing countries also face the significant climate risks and adaptation costs, even in a 2°C world. As a result the majority of climate action will need to take place in developing countries and must be supported by the international community. If not the global transition required to avoid dangerous climate change cannot be achieved.

Development requires energy but not carbon emissions. The right to development of people in developing countries requires that they have access to alternative sources of energy to develop and lift themselves out of poverty. It is unreasonable to expect developing countries to reduce emissions on their own at an equivalent stage of development to when rich countries were drastically increasing theirs. The only feasible way to achieve this is through the provision of support, both financial and technological, from those countries with greatest capacity. ***Only with this support will the phase out be achieved on a timescale which avoids dangerous climate change.***

Without this approach, where all countries pursue a Zero Zero pathway together, we risk creating a two tier world characterised by affordable, sustainable and clean energy on one side and expensive, carbon-based and dirty energy on the other. This would inevitably lead to greater inequality, deplete the global carbon budget and render the transition ineffective.

OPPORTUNITIES

A Zero carbon emissions pathway will reduce climate risk by keeping warming as far below 2°C as possible and it increases the feasibility of effective adaptation to the changes already locked into the climate system. A Zero emissions pathway is critical for poverty reduction as a failure to control climate change will undermine development and exacerbate poverty. Zero poverty will increase resilience to climate impacts build adaptive capacity and enhance equality.

Above all a Zero Zero path reduces climate risks and exposure to volatile energy markets and increases energy security, improves well-being, reduces air pollution, improves health, reduces traffic congestion, improves quality of life and sustainability of food supply and supports a more equitable global society. The opportunities of a Zero Zero pathway are there to be seized. The 2015 climate agreement and the post-2015 development agenda can pave the way for the transition by enshrining these goals in international policy.





What can be done in the near-term to achieve Zero carbon, Zero poverty the climate justice way?



1) We must act now – a carbon phase out must begin quickly and extend globally in order to be effective.

This ambitious global transition to Zero carbon requires that:

- All Parties to the UNFCCC adopt the goal of an equitable carbon phase-out by 2050 in the 2015 Paris Agreement and undertake to, in all climate actions respect human rights for all.
- All countries engage in pro-poor low carbon development, with a focus on pre-2020 climate action to ensure that the peak in global emissions is as soon as possible [and no later than 2020].
- Countries with the capacity to do so accelerate the provision of climate finance whilst protecting and increasing their aid budgets to enable pro-poor, low carbon and climate resilient development in all countries.
- Private sector investment is redirected away from fossil fuel intensive industries and towards sustainable alternatives. Investment in clean, renewable technologies can close the global infrastructure gap in agriculture, transport, energy and water sectors.

2) All countries must be enabled to take part in the transition to Zero carbon, Zero poverty on the same timescale.

As the majority of climate action must occur in developing countries, and all countries must be part of the transition, a fair phase out goal requires:

- The international community to provide financial support for climate action and a wide range of “just transition” activities in developing countries. Support for mitigation must not come at the expense of support for poverty reduction, adaptation, or compensation for loss and damage; even the most rapid possible phase-out will not eliminate climate impacts and the most vulnerable need to be protected.
- Fair contributions to climate action by all countries – all countries must do their fair share. Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (iNDCs) must contain sufficient detail and justification to allow a comparison effort in terms of equity and adequacy.
- Universal access to the necessary low-carbon technologies be made available through appropriate rules and mechanisms relating to innovation and intellectual property.

3) Democratic processes at all levels will be necessary to enable an equitable and inclusive carbon phase-out that protects human rights.

Access to information and participation in decision making are fundamental human rights, essential for the protection of other rights. Governments should:

- Dramatically increase investment in education, participation, access to information and capacity building, as mandated in Article 6 of the UNFCCC, and Principle 10 of the Rio Convention, to engage people around the world in climate action and sustainable development.
- Strengthen the participation of a broad range of stakeholders in climate and sustainable development policy at all levels, including subnational and local government, business and civil society, including youth, persons with disability, women and indigenous peoples.
- Ensure that policies to achieve a carbon phase-out are gender-sensitive and empower women as actors in climate action, poverty eradication and sustainable development.
- Implement participatory rights and dispute resolution mechanisms, at international and national level, to limit the influence of vested interests in climate policy and address any human rights violations arising from climate actions.



Acting Together for Zero Zero the Climate Justice Way

Perhaps more than any other problem humanity has faced, climate change confronts us with the reality of our interdependence. It is as morally unacceptable to allow uncontrolled climate change to happen as it is to tolerate the existence of extreme poverty in the 21st century. No country alone can protect their citizens from the impacts of dangerous climate change. All countries and citizens must act together motivated by enlightened self-interest and human solidarity for a better future.

A global phase-out of carbon emissions can only work when it is done fairly and as part of sustainable development. A human rights approach provides the framework necessary for success. Zero carbon, Zero poverty the climate justice way would not only avert a catastrophic future but would precipitate a transition to a more equitable future defined by a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, including freedom from poverty, are realised. That is, after all, a world everyone is entitled to.



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