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Let's rethink the world

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE **(MISSING)** HUMAN RIGHTS COMPONENT OF A JUST CLIMATE TRANSITION

Proposals to enhance T20 Brasil Task Force 2
recommendations from a human rights-based approach

Collective insights from +20 organizations across regions

Introduction

The world faces unprecedented climate and environmental challenges, making the conversation about a just climate transition more necessary than ever. However, one critical element is often overlooked: the human rights component. Environmental and land defenders, who play a key role in these agendas, are under constant threat in many countries of the Global South, making it essential to advance strategies to *defend the defenders*. How can we ensure that climate policies address not only technical or regulatory issues, but also the rights of those most affected? How can we build an inclusive approach to climate and energy transitions without losing sight of the dignity and rights of all for all? How can we promote an agenda that creates equitable opportunities, especially in the Global South?

These were some of the questions that guided the T20 Brazil side event titled "*Global perspectives on the (missing) human rights component of a just climate transition*"¹, a truly global debate organized by Asuntos del Sur (Argentina)², the International Development Research Centre (IDRC, Canada) and the E+ Energy Transition Institute (Brazil) on October 2, 2024 in Rio de Janeiro. The event aimed to promote a comprehensive discussion of the role of human rights in climate justice, and to advance proposals for action, together with world leaders, policymakers, experts, and organizations from different parts of the Global South. Through interactive panels, thematic group dialogues, and expert testimonies, participants

¹ The session is available for viewing here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H8FtuXIOPaE&t=79s>

² Asuntos del Sur, with support from IDRC, is facilitating the Knowledge Alliance for Environmental Defenders (KALLIED), a global community of practice that brings together a cohort of nine action research projects and partner organizations centered around the experiences of climate and environmental defenders, activists, and affected communities. By fostering collaborative learning and impact, KALLIED seeks to bring their voices and expertise to the heart of climate discussions. To learn more, visit www.kallied.org.

could: interact with opinion leaders, share their experiences, and contribute to enriching the recommendations of the T20 Working Group 2 (TF2) on sustainable climate action and just energy transition from a rights-based perspective.

The event brought together more than twenty organizations from Latin America, Middle East, Southeast Asia and Africa, offering global perspectives and suggestions for action on the missing human rights component of a just climate transition. The following is a summary of the exchanges that took place.

This document aims to contribute to a longer-term process of evidence-gathering, debate, and advocacy, so that the voices of activists, organizations, and think tanks working together in research and outreach can successfully merge the human rights agenda with that of energy and the climate transition.

Recommendation 1: *Fostering the just dimension of transition plans through institutional capacity building, technology transfer and adequate funding.*

As set out in the statement of the Task Force 2, this recommendation calls on the G20 to take the following actions:

/... [to] exercise leadership in developing holistic transition plans that promote economic decarbonization, climate adaptation, biodiversity preservation, universal access to clean, affordable energy, whilst mitigating the social impacts of energy projects and reskilling labor forces. To ensure a fair global economic transformation, the G20 should support the development of countries' capacities to design and implement long-term systemic plans by committing, through appropriate finance and coordination mechanisms such as country platforms, to i) build institutional capacity for the design and implementation of nationally-led transition plans in developing countries; ii) increase South-South and North-South cooperation to facilitate the transfer of existing technologies and the development of new (and low-cost) technologies to promote a green industrialization pathway, focusing on low-income and commodities-dependent developing countries; and iii) develop grants-based and highly concessional finance mechanisms to fund such plans

The organizations identified at least three dimensions where this recommendation could be strengthened. Each of these dimensions has been discussed and examined to propose actions that facilitate and provide important steps toward its realization.

- Inclusion of a **people-centered approach**.
 - A consensus emerged that **local communities needed to be involved** in all phases of the policy-making process -from its design and consultation to decision-making-, especially those communities that are most affected by and vulnerable to the climate crisis. However, local community involvement must be geared towards ensuring and guaranteeing the widest possible diversity and inclusion in terms of identity, including but not limited to: race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, or geographical origin. Given that the definition of Indigenous communities -in the context of policy- is as important as their consideration for participation in decision-making, G20 countries need to consider a just and equitable approach to the participation of Indigenous communities in a manner that respects their **self-identification**.
 - Measures aimed at broadening participation and promoting a people-centered approach must be based on instruments such as **free, prior, and informed consent** (FPIC). This ensures that all stakeholders are involved, and that decisions are made, on a more equal basis. This also highlights the issue of accessibility to information and the processes through which local communities consent to issues that affect them. To this end, aspects such as transparency, as well as a proactive attitude toward providing (understandable) information to these communities, need to be ensured.

- There is a need **to reform and decentralize** the -national and multilateral- mechanisms and institutions where key aspects of the transition are debated, influenced, and decided. Current structures are increasingly showing signs of exhaustion. Innovative approaches and methodologies are needed to renew these agendas. In turn, the implementation of the proposed transition plans should take a more comprehensive approach, integrating social, cultural, and economic issues into their technical considerations.
- Consideration of a **'just' resource allocation**.
 - To strengthen the 'just' component of the transition plans identified in the recommendation, **priority must be given to local groups** (especially Indigenous communities who play a vital role in protecting our planet) in the procurement of resources.
 - Closely related to the above is the need to create **tailor-made financing** that reflects the specific needs and conditions of each territory, so that local communities and grassroots organizations can participate equitably in these processes. In this area, funding transparency must be prioritized, especially by States and international donors.
- Focus on strengthening the **rule of law**.
 - The existence of a well-functioning rule of law is a sine qua non for a **human rights-based approach to climate and environmental policy design and implementation**. Consequently, all measures must be activated (and the necessary resources provided) to create and safeguard its existence and proper functioning, which includes strengthening State capabilities. It is within these frameworks that key principles, such as that of non-discrimination and civic engagement can be fully realized.

- It is necessary to promote measures related to one of the pillars of environmental democracy: **access to justice**. In this sense, the recommendation should also include mechanisms of promotion, access to information, and safeguards that guarantee the access to justice. The latter includes improving and embedding climate literacy in the education system.

Recommendation 4: *Placing indigenous peoples and traditional communities' knowledge, participatory governance and equitable benefit sharing at the core of the design and implementation of the G20 High-Level Principles on Bioeconomy and other relevant G20 instruments, such as the G20 High-Level Principles for Lifestyles for Sustainable Development.*

In this case, the Task Force 2 statement suggested to take the following actions:

The G20 High-Level Principles on Bioeconomy should provide a clear and comprehensive definition of bioeconomy followed by a roadmap to attract financial support for bioeconomy strategies and projects, focusing on the following elements: i) protection and restoration of biological diversity and ecosystems; ii) alignment with SDGs and the Paris Agreement; iii) circular economy; iv) community-centric approach placing indigenous peoples and traditional communities' knowledge and local participatory governance at the heart, including by fully safeguarding the right to free, prior and informed consent, as well as preventing, mitigating and compensating for adverse social impacts; and v) fair and equitable benefits sharing with Indigenous peoples, traditional communities and local populations.

The working groups also identified three dimensions that could improve this recommendation and specifically to better incorporate a human rights approach.

However, before addressing these dimensions, it is worth highlighting some cross-cutting issues that are relevant to all of them.

It is crucial to support the promotion of these debates -on the issues outlined in the recommendation- in local communities, to avoid top-down schemes and unnecessary or ill-defined responses to the challenges they face. A good step in this direction should be to better inform Indigenous peoples, traditional communities, and all -typically invisibilized- groups who are supposed to be at the center of development and biodiversity action plans about the scope and limits of the G20. After that, a second necessary step is to invite them to participate in this type of multilateral governance process and see how they respond, rather than assume that they are always interested and/or willing to participate. Only after all when this is done, it will be time to design participatory processes, round tables, and binding and effective decision-making schemes for arriving at respectful agreements.

The three dimensions identified were the following:

- **Recognition and self-determination.**
 - Given that linking the bio-economy (a market concept) with local communities and traditional knowledge (concepts that are not) seems challenging, there was some consensus on the need for the **constitutional recognition of the territorial sovereignty** of Indigenous and traditional communities as a way to improve their within the borders of individual States before addressing the (broader) bioeconomy agenda.
 - The groups recommended the incorporation of the **evaluation of the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related**

Intolerance, particularly concerning reparations and compensation claims, into the development of racial justice policies for Indigenous peoples and traditional communities.

- When creating and implementing policies and laws, it is crucial to include the **community's cosmovision** in decision-making and policy-making processes. This issue is closely related to the second proposed area of improvement. In this sense, introducing **incentives** for individual States to adhere to the recognition of traditional knowledge and reparations could be a feasible step.
- **Traditional knowledge treatment.**
 - The importance of traditional knowledge should be acknowledged and included in the recommendation, as it is linked to multiple issues, including intellectual property and data protection, to name a few. Before discussing how traditional knowledge can be introduced into participatory debates and incorporated into decision-making processes, it is essential **to establish a precise framework** for dealing with it.
 - Once this framework has been defined, the utility of traditional and ancestral knowledge for **informing policy decisions** represents an opportunity that should not be continuously discounted. It is essential not only to give voice to historically marginalized groups and to listen to them, but also to **incorporate** their cosmovision and wisdom into our own practices and policies.

- **Reparations with an intersectional perspective.**
 - **Reparations for Indigenous peoples and traditional communities that have suffered aggression** were central to our discussions. Reparations must be addressed from an intersectional perspective, recognizing identity differences and understanding diversity as central to advancing a just climate transition.
 - States and private corporations that have committed crimes against local communities and Indigenous peoples should **establish a compensatory fund** -i.e. a global or regional agency- for disproportionately affected sectors within these groups.
 - A strong, multi stakeholder commitment is needed to **abate cultural barriers**. The knowledge, traditions, and worldviews of traditional and Indigenous peoples should not be subsumed and minimized in the face of hegemonic logics. Instead, they should be treated with equal respect and value.

Organizations that participated in the working groups

- Asuntos del Sur, Argentina.
- Asia Pacific Network of Environmental Defenders (APNED), The Philippines.
- Arab Reform Initiative, Lebanon, France and Tunisia.
- A Tenda das Candidatas Institute, Brazil.
- BRICS Policy Center, Brazil.
- Caminharia, Brazil.
- Centro Brasileiro de Relações Internacionais (CEBRI), Brazil.
- Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales (CELS), Argentina.
- Dala Institute, Indonesia.
- E+ Energy Transition, Brazil.
- Green Advocates International, Liberia.
- Instituto Brasileiro de Análises Sociais e Econômicas (Ibase), Brazil.
- International Development Research Centre, Canada.
- Instituto de Políticas Públicas en Derechos Humanos del Mercosur (IPPDH), international organization.
- Igarapé Institute, Brazil.
- Labmundo-Rio (UERJ), Brazil.
- Minority Rights Group Africa, Uganda.
- Observatorio Ciudadano, Chile.
- Plataforma CIPO, Brazil.
- South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA), South Africa.

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