



# TRADE UNIONS GOING GREEN

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES  
IN THE WORLD OF WORK

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## TRADE UNIONS GOING GREEN

### ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES IN THE WORLD OF WORK

In 2018, the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Trade Union Competence Centre (FES TUCC) and the Labour Research Service (LRS) published the first in a series of booklets aimed at providing research-based bargaining support to unions. The first booklet, titled 'South African

Multinational Corporations in Africa: Bargaining with Multinationals', provides a step-by-step approach to assist Global Union Federations (GUFs) and their affiliates in utilising company information when preparing for bargaining processes. As a follow-up to the first booklet, we published a guide on a series of terms which are used regularly in companies' annual reports. The third booklet in the series focused on bargaining for gender equity in the workplace, providing a simple step-by-step approach to including these issues at the bargaining table.

This, the fourth booklet in the series, seeks to encourage unions to initiate campaigns to address environmental issues in the workplace. The booklet will help to

put unions in a position to engage in dialogue for sustainable development policies, while representing the interests and needs of workers.

The purpose of this booklet is twofold: to inform workers and workers' organisations about the potential of a 'just transition', and also to provide practical information on how to ensure this for workers. The transition to a more climate-friendly world is unavoidable, and workers' voices must be heard.

The booklet will help unions understand issues such as occupational health and safety, water pollution control, and reforestation, as well as provide simple tips for including these demands in collective bargaining.



## INTRODUCTION TO ENVIRONMENTALISM

'Environmentalism is used as a general term to refer to concern for the environment and particularly actions or advocacy to limit negative human impacts on the environment.'<sup>1</sup>

The terms 'climate change' and 'global warming' have been around for decades, and along with them have come people and organisations fighting against the impact of climate-induced changes on the planet and, importantly, on human existence. In order to combat climate change, many industries will have to change significantly. This will have a substantial impact

on the workers employed in each industry.

A warming climate will have a devastating effect. Heat and drought will affect crops, which will affect food supply. The heat will produce rising sea levels and stronger storms, which will affect the homes, jobs and businesses that operate in coastal areas. Climate change will mean hundreds of millions of refugees globally due to droughts, floods and famines. No one can say definitively how bad the effects of climate change will be, but we know that millions of people around the world will be negatively affected.<sup>2</sup>

Researchers, social scientists working in the environmental sphere and governments have not paid enough attention to the impact of climate-motivated changes on labour. These changes include regulations, changes in markets and the migration of production. Social scientists working in the environmental sphere

have mostly ignored the impact of these changes on labour. However, unions and workers' organisations across the world have responded quickly by adopting climate change as an issue of trade union policies.<sup>3</sup>

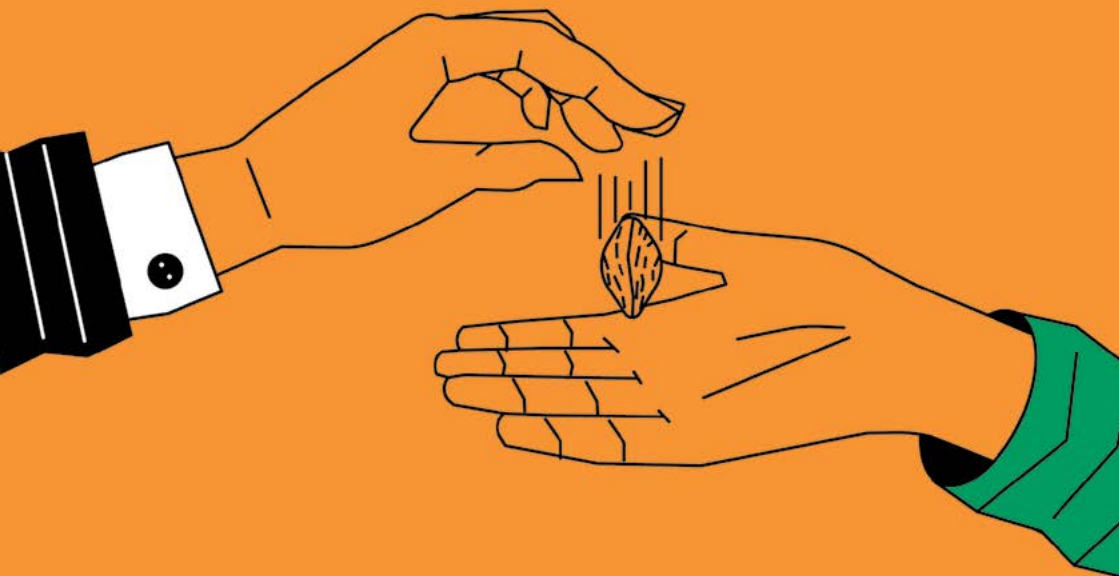
As early as 1990, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) recognised the importance of environmentalism in the world of work with a project titled 'Workers' Education and Environment'. The ILO conducted multiple studies on the subject over the course of the next few years, showing how environmentally sustainable development issues have been integrated into trade union work. This includes issues like occupational health and safety, the transportation of hazardous cargo, water pollution control, coalition building, and many other issues.

In 2021, in the midst of a global pandemic, these issues remain at the heart of workers' concerns.

1. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/social-sciences/environmentalism>

2. <http://aidc.org.za/download/climate-change/OMCJ-booklet-AIDC-electronic-version.pdf>

3. <http://www.interfacejournal.net/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Interface-4-2-Raethzel-and-Uzzell.pdf>



In 2015, countries around the world committed to the Paris Agreement – an agreement committing themselves to transforming their development plans in order to limit global warming significantly by the year 2100. Transitioning to a carbon-neutral economy ‘will affect every aspect of how we produce goods, provide services, move around and consume’.<sup>4</sup>

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## JUST TRANSITION

***‘CLIMATE CHANGE WILL EXACERBATE INEQUALITY AND POVERTY BECAUSE IT REDUCES ACCESS TO FOOD, WATER, ENERGY AND HOUSING. THUS IT IS VITAL THAT SOCIAL JUSTICE STRUGGLES AROUND THESE ISSUES INCORPORATE STRUGGLES AROUND CLIMATE CHANGE.’<sup>5</sup>***

4. [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_dialogue/---actrav/documents/publication/wcms\\_647648.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_dialogue/---actrav/documents/publication/wcms_647648.pdf)  
5. <http://aidc.org.za/download/climate-change/OMCJ-booklet-AIDC-electronic-version.pdf>

The idea of a 'just transition' was first mentioned by American trade union leader Tony Mazzocchi in 1993. Mazzocchi fought for a form of funding for workers who would inevitably be displaced by the transition to a greener economy. By 1997, several unions in the USA and Canada had endorsed the idea of a 'just transition'.

### THERE ARE TWO MAIN IDEAS THAT UNDERPIN THE IDEA OF THE JUST TRANSITION:

1. A just transition is not 'welfare', but a 'claim for public responsibility to facilitate and actively support a transition for the common interest'.<sup>6</sup> Simply put, workers advocating for a just transition are not looking for charitable handouts. *They are looking for a solution that is for mutual*

*benefit – both 'saving the planet' and 'saving jobs'.*

2. 'De-carbonisation' or the move to greener technologies is a controlled transition over which humans, organisations, governments and civil society have control. This means that humans have the ability to actively shape the transition through policy.

The term 'just transition' has gained power across the world and across industries. In 1997, the forerunner of what is now the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) included the term in its statement to the Kyoto Conference. The ILO has continually pushed to have a just transition added to the United Nations' development agenda.

In 2006, trade unions from all over the world

came together to discuss environmental issues for the first time at the Trade Union Assembly in Nairobi, Kenya. In the same year, ITUC was founded and it was also the first time an international union agreed on a programme on climate change. Since then, 'there has been a growing interest among trade union officials to incorporate the environment as an issue of climate change into trade union programmes'.<sup>7</sup>

***IndustriALL describes the goal of a just transition: "to provide a hopeful and optimistic future for all workers, especially for those in industries that may be impacted by efforts to limit greenhouse gases or by the introduction of new technologies."***<sup>8</sup>

If we let this transition happen without the voices of workers, it could result in job losses, worse working conditions, as well as the continued exploitation of low-skilled workers. However, the transition has a place for workers' voices, which will contribute to decent work for all.

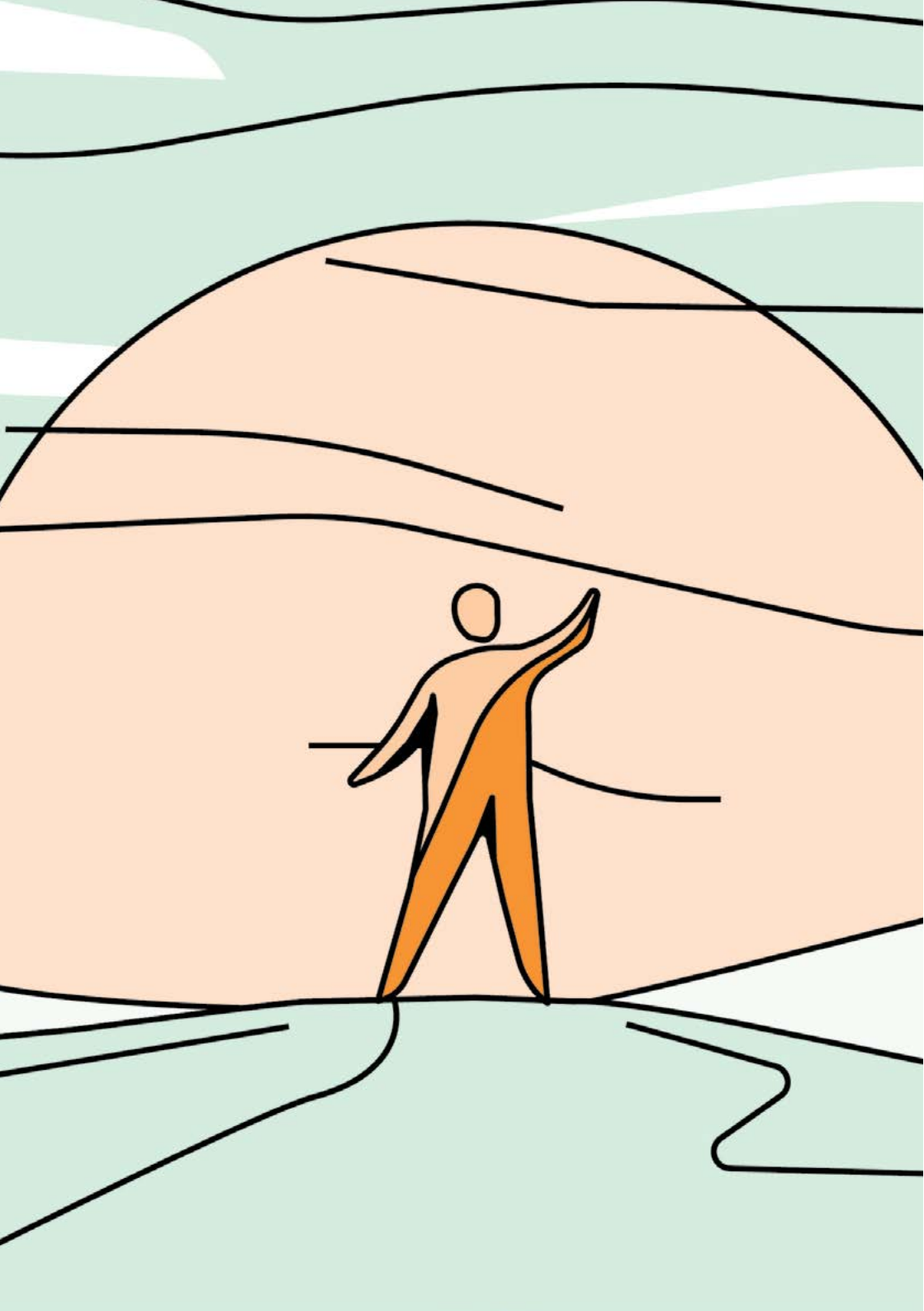
The ongoing advocacy for a just transition has seen a shift in thinking: unlike the capital/labour interconnection that is based on conflicting interests, 'environmental and labour priorities are based on shared interest and the transitional approach is co-operative with corporations, states, and unions at the negotiating table'.<sup>9</sup>

6. [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_dialogue/---actrav/documents/publication/wcms\\_647648.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_dialogue/---actrav/documents/publication/wcms_647648.pdf)

7. <http://www.interfacejournal.net/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Interface-4-2-Raethzel-and-Uzzell.pdf>

8. <http://www.industriall-union.org/a-just-transition-for-workers>

9. Ibid



So, then, what is green collective bargaining? The European Public Service Union (EPSU) describes green collective bargaining as follows:

**IN 1987, THE UNITED NATIONS PUBLISHED THE BRUNDTLAND REPORT WHICH ARGUED THAT SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT TO TACKLE CLIMATE CHANGE SHOULD BE BASED ON THREE PILLARS – ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL. AS ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES PRODUCE MOST GREENHOUSE GAS, BOTH THE PRIVATE AND PUBLIC SECTOR MUST COMMIT TO ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY POLICIES. 'GREEN COLLECTIVE BARGAINING' IS PART OF THE RESPONSE TO CLIMATE CHANGE, SINCE IT LINKS ENVIRONMENTAL SOLUTIONS TO SOCIAL COMMITMENT SO AS TO POSITIVELY TRANSFORM THE ECONOMIC EFFICIENCY OF INNOVATIVE ORGANISATIONS.<sup>10</sup>**

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## GREEN COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Organisations like trade unions should actively be including green provisions in their collective bargaining. The Trade Union

10. <https://www.epsu.org/article/what-green-collective-bargaining>

Congress in the UK lists a series of benefits for unions in integrating green issues into collective bargaining:

- Extending the union consultation agenda – meaning the union has made a space for itself at the table when it comes to discussing green initiatives;
- Achieving cost savings that can contribute to staff bonuses – for example, when big companies like retailers engage in energy efficiency measures, this may lead to cost saving and could contribute

to staff bonuses/ increases;

- Making unions modern and relevant organisations that deal with big issues;
- Encouraging employers to focus on green issues, which can lead to the creation of new green jobs.

Green collective bargaining is not yet commonplace, but some unions have already put initiatives in place:

### **THE JOINT ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE AGREEMENT IN STOCKPORT, ENGLAND**

The Joint Environment and Climate Change Agreement (JECCA)<sup>11</sup>

was negotiated between public service union UNISON and Stockport Council. The Council aims to:

- Reduce its carbon footprint through quantified and transparent annual targets;
- Work with staff, management and stakeholders on training and awareness raising;
- Work closely with Stockport UNISON to promote and encourage the just transition to a local low-carbon economy.

### **A CANADIAN INITIATIVE: THE WORK IN A WARMING WORLD RESEARCH PROJECT**

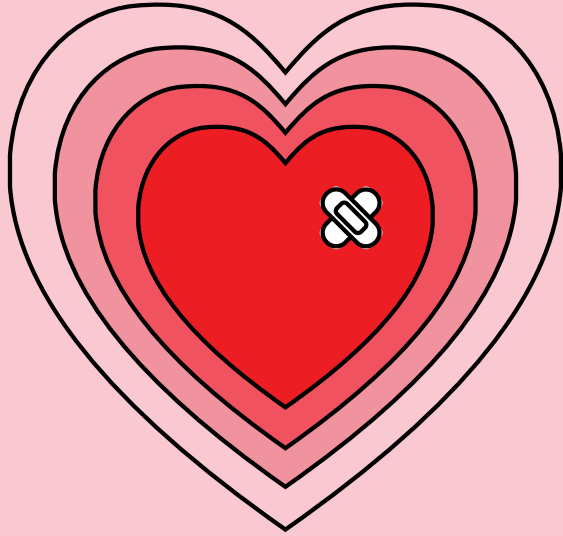
The Work in a Warming World research project gathers all the ‘green’ clauses from Canadian collective agreements that are publicly available.<sup>12</sup> This initiative is interesting for three main reasons:

- It indicates what kinds of action are taking place outside the European Union;
- The database has many diverse examples from both the private and public sectors, providing many ideas for unions;
- The initiative shows how easy it can be to introduce green clauses into collective bargaining.

11. Ibid.

12. <https://warming.apps01.yorku.ca/projects/work-in-a-warming-world/#:~:text=Work%20in%20a%20Warming%20World%20is%20a%205%20year%20collaborative,to%20a%20low%20carbon%20economy> (accessed 8 March 2021)





## HEALTH AND SAFETY

An important way that trade unions and labour organisations engage with nature and green initiatives is by addressing and protecting the health and safety concerns of workers. This includes dealing with issues like water, soil and air pollution when it poses a threat to the health of workers and their families.<sup>13</sup>

13. <http://www.interfacejournal.net/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Interface-4-2-Raethzel-and-Uzzell.pdf>



## THE GENDER DIMENSION

Advocating for environmentally friendly principles in the workplace provides an opportunity to advocate for the rights of women.

The ILO mentions the importance of including women and other marginalised communities in the process: 'Economic activities of women, particularly of poor women living in rural areas, are more

dependent on natural resources. Changes in the environment will therefore have a direct impact on women and their quality of life.'<sup>14</sup>

Women are amongst the most vulnerable when it comes to climate change. It is well known that women have less access to land, credit, technology and other resources that would help them adapt to a changing environment. This is especially true for women working in the informal sector. Therefore, it is important to advocate for gender equity alongside environmentalism.

14. [http://www.oit.org/global/topics/green-jobs/WCMS\\_214247\\_EN/lang--en/index.htm#q\\_8](http://www.oit.org/global/topics/green-jobs/WCMS_214247_EN/lang--en/index.htm#q_8)



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## GLOBAL LOCAL

As with any of the changes we are seeing in the world of work, unions need to investigate how the global phenomenon of climate change will impact their industries locally.

**EXAMPLE:  
LARGE AGRICULTURAL  
BUSINESSES ARE  
ONE OF THE BIGGEST  
POLLUTERS OF THE  
ENVIRONMENT,  
DIRECTLY AFFECTING  
THE HEALTH AND  
WELL-BEING OF  
WORKERS IN THIS  
INDUSTRY, AS WELL AS  
OF SMALL FARMERS.  
FOR EXAMPLE, IN THE  
USA, A PHENOMENON  
CALLED 'TAR SAND  
EXTRACTION'  
IS EXPLOITING  
LOCAL AREAS AND  
DESTROYING LOCAL  
ENVIRONMENTS, WHILE  
ADDING SIGNIFICANTLY  
TO INTERNATIONAL  
GREENHOUSE GAS  
EMISSIONS. NOT ONLY  
ARE LOCAL PEOPLE  
AND WORKERS  
AFFECTED, BUT THE  
INDUSTRY IS MAKING  
A NEGATIVE IMPACT  
INTERNATIONALLY.**

**THIS EXAMPLE  
HIGHLIGHTS THAT  
THE STRUGGLE FOR  
WORKERS' RIGHTS IS  
AN INDISPENSABLE  
PART OF THE STRUGGLE  
TO MITIGATE CLIMATE  
CHANGE'**

What does this mean for unions? Merging the protection of workers with the protection of nature will not only require a shift in union policies, but also in how unions think. In Africa, we have long since stopped thinking of unions as only representing the interests of their direct members. We see unions as social movements, aiming not only to improve their members' lives but 'to transform societies and the present economic system'.<sup>15</sup> This means that unions are already looking beyond themselves to create alliances with environmental movements.

For example, in South Africa, Earthlife is organising courses on environmental issues for unionists and collaborating with the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) on the One Million Climate Jobs Campaign.<sup>16</sup> 'The ... Campaign is an alliance of labour, social movements and popular organisations in South Africa that is campaigning for the creation of a million climate jobs as part of a collective approach to the crisis

of unemployment and climate change.'<sup>17</sup>

There are many layers to this kind of action. They are essential to developing awareness and for engaging governments and business. These campaigns need to be accompanied by strategies that involve workers directly in designing new forms of production, thus engaging them as 'makers of their own future'.<sup>18</sup>

Trade unions and alliances across workers' organisations are powerful:

...the International Trade Union Confederation has 332 affiliated member organisations in 163 countries and territories, with a total membership of 200 million workers. The potential influence of such a body and its constituent members is huge, and if it can be mobilised to take collective action, we might start to see some of the changes which will be necessary across the global North and South slow down and even reverse the pernicious consequences of climate change.<sup>19</sup>

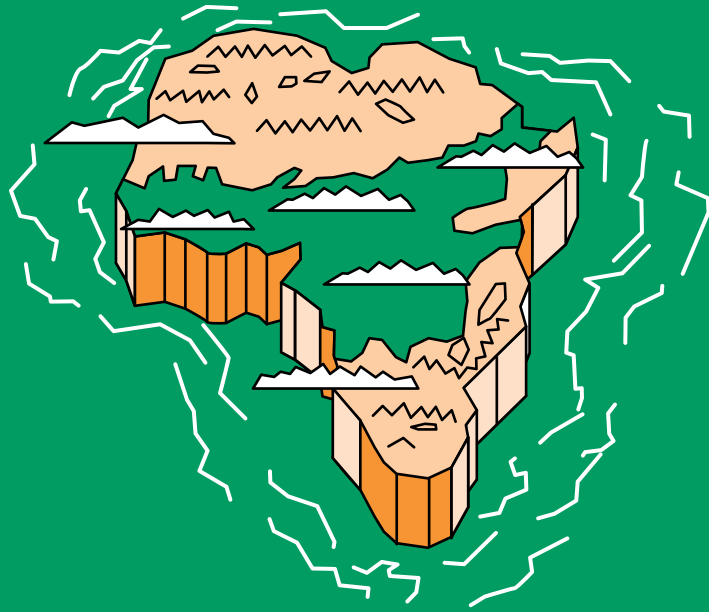
15. Rätzl, N. & Uzzell, D. (eds). 2012. Trade Unions in the Green Economy: Working for the Environment. New York: Routledge.

16. <http://aidc.org.za/programmes/million-climate-jobs-campaign/about/>

17. <http://aidc.org.za/download/climate-change/OMCJ-booklet-AIDC-electronic-version.pdf>

18. Rätzl, N. & Uzzell, D. (eds). 2012. Trade Unions in the Green Economy: Working for the Environment. New York: Routledge.

19. Ibid.



## AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

Despite being rich in fossil fuels, Africa has globally contributed the least to carbon emissions.<sup>20</sup> Current data indicate that Africa contributes about 2.73% of global carbon emissions, compared to 25% by the USA, 22% by the European Union and 12.7% by China.<sup>21</sup> This, combined with the fact that Africa is one of the poorest regions in the world, makes it difficult to argue why the continent should be moving towards greener initiatives. However, climate

change has already affected the region. The poor are the most vulnerable to climate-induced changes such as droughts, floods and food shortages, and so will carry the heaviest burden.

In this context, we must advocate for a just transition where environmental concerns are addressed, as well as the economic and social challenges that accompany them. If these challenges are not addressed, poverty and inequality will continue to worsen across the continent.

**EXAMPLE:**  
**IN 2013, THE GENERAL AGRICULTURAL WORKERS' UNION OF GHANA (GAWU) SIGNED A CBA WITH NORPALM GHANA LIMITED, A PALM OIL PRODUCER IN GHANA CONTAINING THE BELOW SIGNIFICANT CLAUSE ON CLIMATE CHANGE. THE CLAUSE CLEARLY RECOGNISES THE THREAT OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND COMPELS BOTH THE UNION AND THE COMPANY TO RAISE AWARENESS, WORK CLOSELY WITH COMMUNITIES TO MITIGATE THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND TO PROMOTE SUSTAINABILITY.**

The Management and the Union acknowledge the reality of climate change and note that it is threatening quality of life on the planet. The parties agree with the scientific evidence that climate change is a result of unsustainable production and consumption pattern and life styles. [sic]

The management of NGL commits to developing a policy on climate change with the active participation of the workers and their organisation. Such a company policy on climate change shall, among others, seek to:

- i. Raise awareness on climate change.
- ii. Develop capacities for reducing the negative impact of climate change on people, the communities and the operations of the company.
- iii. Promote collaboration with GAWU and other stakeholders to promote sustainable production and consumption patterns that contribute to reducing global warming

20. <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/suedafrika/16973.pdf>

21. <https://www.energyforgrowth.org/blog/infographic-what-is-sub-saharan-africas-contribution-to-global-co2-emissions/>



- Protection of non-permanent workers;
- Education and training (including re-skilling to meet new skills demands);
- Provisions for safety and work at the workplace in line with occupational health and safety guidelines.

### OUTSIDE OF TRADITIONAL BARGAINING

In addition to bargaining within the workplace, there is also a need for national debates to ensure the required skills transition or relevant compensation measures. The ILO makes four key recommendations regarding preparing for the future of work, all of which are relevant for the effects of climate change on labour:

- Lifelong learning for all;
- Supporting people through transitions;
- A transformative agenda for gender equality;
- Strengthening social protection for all.

## FOURTH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION AND COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Climate change and environmental policies are inextricably linked with the fourth industrial revolution. These issues need to be addressed simultaneously. Technology is changing the way that we work. Unions across the world and across industries have experienced job losses and changes in their workplaces due to automation.

There is no doubt that the world of work as we know it will change, whether through the introduction of

automation or because of climate change. Bargaining is a crucial tool in ensuring that workers receive protection. Bargaining processes would benefit from broader support and awareness campaigns. Negotiators in these processes should focus on ensuring the following:

- Guaranteed minimum working hours;
- Job guarantees for the length of the CBA;
- Restrictions on staff dismissals;
- Restrictions on subcontracting;











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