Pathways to System Change

Friends of the Earth International

Transforming a world in crisis to a sustainable and just future

06 / 2023



Friends of the Earth International is the world's largest grassroots environmental federation, with 73 national member groups and millions of members and supporters around the world.

Our vision is of a peaceful and sustainable world based on societies living in harmony with nature. We envision a society of interdependent people living in dignity, wholeness and fulfilment in which equity, and human and peoples' rights, are realised. This will be a society built upon peoples' sovereignty and participation. It will be founded on social, economic, gender and environmental justice and be free from all forms of domination and exploitation, such as neoliberalism, corporate globalisation, neo-colonialism and militarism.

We believe that our children's future will be better because of what we do.

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Executive summary

Our world is in crisis. Climate change, the collapse of ecosystems, the degradation of soils, hunger, poverty, inequality, conflict and the Covid-19 pandemic are all symptoms of a systemic sickness. They have a common root: a system that places profit for a few over the majority of people and the health of the planet.

Corporate capital has become too powerful at the expense of democracy, rights and the health of the living world. It threatens the existence of countless species on our planet. Ultimately it threatens human civilisation; but already it is disproportionately affecting people who have done least to cause the crises. System change has never felt more urgent.

Thousands of practical solutions, programmes, initiatives, services and laws for a more just and sustainable world exist, putting citizens and the environment at the centre. Yet the dominant political and economic systems, at national level and globally, are often neoliberal capitalist, racist, patriarchal, heteronormative and colonial . They work through the exploitation of nature, the working classes, and the bodies and work of women. These forms of oppression and exploitation define much of our politics, laws, trade rules, media narratives and cultural norms.

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This is why Friends of the Earth International is committed to a structural response. The crises are systemic; the solutions must be systemic too.

Friends of the Earth International's vision is of a peaceful and sustainable world based on societies of interdependent peoples living in harmony with nature, and in dignity, wholeness and fulfilment. These will be societies built on peoples' power, sovereignty, rights, and participation, and founded on social, economic, gender and environmental justice and equity. They will be free from interrelated systems of oppression and exploitation.

Our vision describes what we must achieve. This document charts how the transformation should come about, exploring both the theory and praxis of change. It examines the pathways to a more just and sustainable world.

Broadly, we want to transform and repair our societies' relationships with the ecological systems of which humanity is part. We must transform our relationship with food, energy and economies. These are all part of the project of systemic transformation.

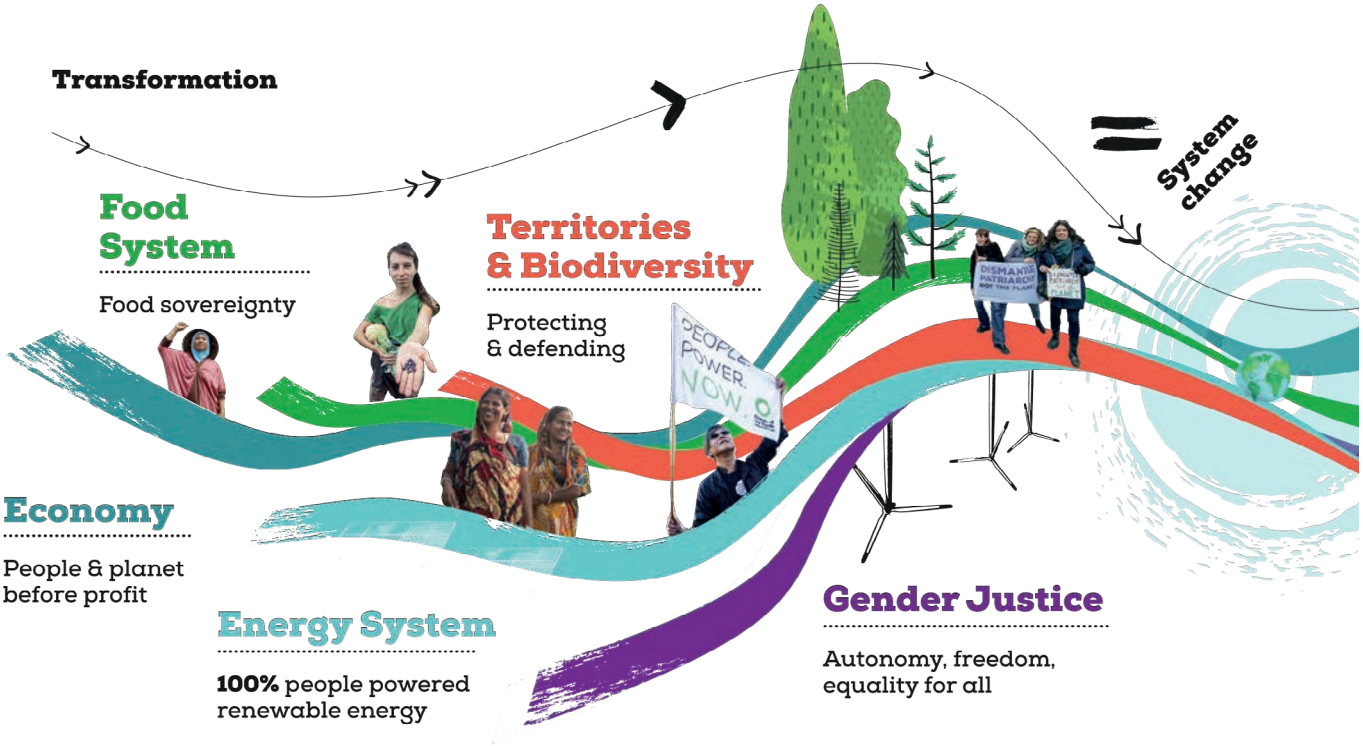
Our struggles are connected: the climate crisis is a racist crisis, the biodiversity crisis is an overconsumption crisis, the hunger crisis is a crisis of corporate power. And just as the crises are interconnected so too are our solutions. We aim to create powerful, reinforcing circles of transformative change in which a victory in one space or project leads to progress in all others.

The solutions with the greatest potential for deep and lasting change share some common characteristics, which we describe in the first section: the centrality of territories; the drive to build power from the grassroots; the attempt to reclaim politics and a progressive role for the state; and the redirection of economics and technology to serve social justice.

We then describe in more detail how these peoples' solutions converge along the following pathways:

- **Gender** - the revolution in gender relations and the status of women;
- **Energy** - the race towards democratically-controlled renewable energy systems that meet people's needs and help tackle climate emissions;
- **Food** - the rise of food sovereignty, where healthy food produced in ecologically sensitive ways is recognised as a common good and a right;
- **Forests & biodiversity** - the effectiveness of community forest management and agroecology as ways of living in harmony with nature, balancing human needs with the planet's biodiversity;
- **Economics** - putting people and planet first through sustainable public services, scaling up cooperatives, fair trade and binding rules on business.

Figure: What are the pathways to system change?



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Friends of the Earth International at the UNFCCC COP27 in Egypt.
© Madeleine Race / Friends of the Earth International

Introduction



The problem

In the space of a few decades our planet's living systems have been driven to crisis point. Around half of the major natural processes that sustain life on Earth are in serious danger. Since the mid-20th century changes in our atmosphere, soils, water systems and ecosystems have accelerated at a rate unseen in the previous 10,000 years. As a result, Earth is rapidly becoming less hospitable to life.[1] The impacts of these changes on nature are manifest in climate chaos, ecological devastation and mass extinction. Compounding these impacts for the most vulnerable people are soaring inequality and lack of essential public services and livelihoods, a crisis of care, a food and water crisis, and a global health crisis. All are symptoms of a systemic problem.

What led us to the brink of catastrophe? For millennia humans lived in relative symbiosis with nature; indeed, many Indigenous and peasant peoples still do. But in the past century our relationship with nature has altered massively as a result of the rise to dominance of capitalism, neoliberalism and neoliberal globalisation led by transnational corporations (TNCs), rich nations and powerful economic sectors. The way we extract, produce, distribute and consume the planet's resources has radically changed. The chemical, physical and biological balance of air, soil and water has been drastically disrupted. Our relentless advance into nature is not only changing our climate and extinguishing species but exposing us to pathogens – like Covid-19 – that were once contained within thriving ecosystems.

The nature of modern neoliberal capitalism

Capitalism – and its doctrine of free-market fundamentalism – has been imposed as the dominant global economic ideology within the past 30-40 years. The pursuit of profit and efficiency dictate how we structure our economies and societies, and how we manage nature. Neoliberalism promotes the commodification and privatisation of nature, economic liberalisation, free trade, privatisation and weakening of public services and social security systems, deregulation and the dismantling of legislation that serves the common good. It guts essential social services and environmental and social protection policies. It champions regressive taxation that benefits corporations and the rich. Touted as a system designed to flourish without the state, in reality neoliberalism relies heavily on state subsidies, state support for markets, state protection of private interests and state repression, while governments cede power to corporations.[2]

1 Rate of environmental degradation puts life on Earth at risk, say scientists | Environment | The Guardian
2 Regulated Destruction - Friends of the Earth International

"We fight for a future where all peoples enjoy dignity and rights and live in harmony with nature. To do this we need to challenge existing power relationships in society, politics and economics. We need to transform our energy system, our food system and our economies and defend our forests and biodiversity. To change the system is to rewrite the rules, build peoples' power and reclaim politics. It is a pathway that we walk along together with allies, social movements and millions of people."

Friends of the Earth International, 2023.

Neoliberal capitalism is deeply ideological. Democracy has been plunged into crisis as the corporate sector has gained influence over decisions that should be determined by public interest – decisions on issues from healthcare to public services, environmental standards to climate policy. People are deprived of their role as political subjects and turned into consumers. New types of governance have emerged, many through rapid, un-consulted changes to constitutions and legislation.[3] Right-wing parties, friendly to corporate interests, have come to power in many countries and even progressive political parties have enacted neoliberal policies. Oppressive governments have been shored up by unscrupulous media and technology giants who have increasing, monopolistic control of information and our data. Our personal data has even been manipulated for electoral processes. It is in the DNA of neoliberalism – just as it is in the DNA of all structures of power and domination – to protect and reinforce itself.[4]

3 Thriving civic space - Friends of the Earth Europe
4 Declaración Final Encuentro Continental por la Democracia y Contra el Neoliberalismo - FAO

Oppression and division

Such regimes clear the path for corporations by shrinking the space for social movements and independent journalists. This happens through the stigmatising of civil society actors; administrative restrictions and undue state interference; criminalisation; participation under pressure; physical harassment and intimidation. Tragically, more and more defenders of territories and peoples' rights are losing their lives to the struggle. In 2019 globally 304 defenders were killed.[5] Some of the greatest threats are faced by peasant and Indigenous women and men defending their lands, homes, forests and rivers from mining, logging and agribusiness.[6] State and non-state perpetrators act with impunity.

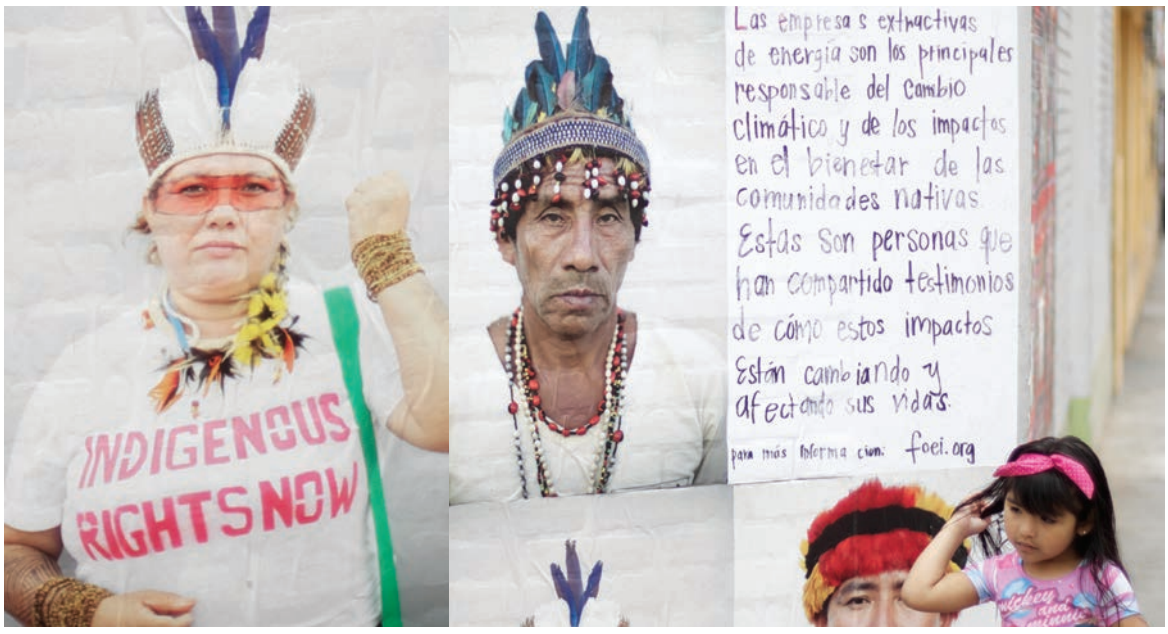
Tragically, more and more defenders of territories and peoples' rights are losing their lives to the struggle. In 2019 globally 304 defenders were killed.

Many governments in power today were elected on campaigns of division and xenophobia. They scapegoat the most vulnerable – refugees and migrants, the homeless, minorities – to justify policies that permit violent suppression. The structures of exploitation and domination they champion – class oppression, patriarchy, white supremacy – are fundamental to neoliberalism's success. Deregulation, privatisation, and the prioritisation of profit and efficiency over peoples' rights lead to an unorganised, impoverished working class. Food producers and essential service workers have little choice but to accept work with inadequate safeguards and meagre compensation.

Such systems are inherently unsustainable and vulnerable to shocks. They posit essential workers as disposable or replaceable, leading to income precarity, high levels of under- and unemployment and a crisis of care. They require the exploitation of women's bodies and work in order that care and domestic work remains free, or barely paid; this is especially the case if their bodies carry further, intersecting oppressions. These systems require society to value some lives less than others so that corporations that destroy Black, Brown, Indigenous, migrants', women's, peasants' and working-class lives have social licence to operate.

Neo-colonialism, inequality and crisis of democracy

Such strategies are by no means new. Historically, colonial powers relied on a narrative of racial and gender inferiority to justify violent expansion into territories and nature, and the appropriation and erasure of peoples and culture. The violence continues today in the form of neo-colonial extractivism, which works by



Mural at Casa Activa with portraits of activists and people affected by climate change and extractive industries, Lima, Peru, 2014.
© Luka Tomac / Friends of the Earth International

5 Front line defenders - Global Analysis 2019
6 Defending territories, Defending our lives - Friends of the Earth International

controlling and exploiting peasants, Indigenous Peoples, women, workers, migrants, territories and nature for the benefit of corporations, international capital and imperialistic states. Public foreign debt, too, plays its part leading to structural adjustment programmes and harmful conditionalities that are part of the systemic exploitation of the global South.

All this takes place in the name of wealth and job creation. Yet neoliberalism has accelerated global inequality at such an appalling rate that the richest 1% of the world's people now hold more wealth than the poorest 99%, and over 700 million people live in extreme poverty.[7] This is an economic system that functions well only for the global elite, as a vehicle for hoarding extraordinary wealth. For the majority it is a corrupt system that is destroying the planet. In 2016 Friends of the Earth International calculated that government revenue lost to tax havens alone could power half the world with 100% renewable energy by 2030. A safe and just future is being stolen from us before our eyes.[8]

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In many countries we are witnessing a crisis of democracy, with right-wing forces coming into power with hate, racist, xenophobic, misogynist and anti-working class and anti-rights discourse and policies. Corporate capture of decision making is becoming a crude reality, alongside the reduction in opportunities for social organisations and movements to express themselves. We are experiencing the erosion of hard-won rights, opening the way for further oppression and exploitation. Communities, grassroots organisations and social movements face increasing persecution and criminalisation – even assassinations – as a systematic strategy to silence their voices and erase their capacity to organise, resist, mobilise and transform our societies.

Collecting palm oil fruit on a plantation in Malaysia.
© Izlan Somai



7 Transforming our Economy - Friends of the Earth International
8 An Energy Revolution is possible: Tax havens and financing climate action - Friends of the Earth International

We need system change

It is time for a transformational shift in the way we organise our societies and economies, and in the way societies relate to each other and to nature. We must overturn centuries of injustice, unpick the rules that protect privilege, and break free from the paradigms that have held too many people back for too long.

This means dismantling the corporate capitalist system and building sustainable societies based on peoples' sovereignty and environmental, social, economic, class, racial and gender justice.[9] In the 21st century everyone should be able to put healthy food on the table, have clean energy and water and receive care when they need it. Our societies should put the sustainability of life at the centre and enjoy a thriving environment and commons. Our economies should be reorganised for that purpose.

A democratic, just and peaceful world, in which peoples have sovereignty over their territories and resources is a long-term struggle. Therefore, the concept of transition is fundamental. We need solutions that lead to holistic, transformative change. Through our bold actions, programmes and policies we are proposing substantive steps that collectively allow us to achieve systemic and lasting positive change. There will be some big steps and some small steps on our pathway towards a just and sustainable future.



Vienna: System change not climate change!
© Mitja Kobal

System change guidelines:



01 Harmony & Justice

- lead towards living in harmony with nature, within Earth's ecological limits, and contribute to ecological, social, economic and gender justice;

02 Equality & Balance

- contribute to equitable power relations and challenge unequal power relations;

03 Challenge

- challenge corporate power;

04 Sovereignty

- contribute to peoples' sovereignty and power.

9 No, Capitalism Will Not Save the Climate | Common Dreams

Transition and change in complex systems

Systems are a combination of elements that act together to form an interrelated whole. Human systems often include values, institutions, structures, rules and cultural behaviours. Systemic change occurs when change reaches most parts of a system, thus affecting the general behaviour and outcomes.

Most large systems are not made up of purely one type of system or relationship, but are mixed, co-existing and even conflicting systems. Often, certain systems or forms of organisation are complex. For example, peasant agriculture feeds the majority of the world within a powerful industrial agricultural system; economics in all countries involve mixed relations between the state, market and social power; and nearly all countries' energy systems have some electricity produced by renewable energy with some community ownership.

The dominant national and global economic, energy and food systems are, to different degrees, harmful neoliberal capitalism, dirty fossil fuels, and industrial agriculture. Our peoples' solutions and pathways to system change outlined in this report come from Friends of the Earth member groups' existing local and national struggles across the globe. They include significant steps such as the passing of a national agroecology law in Uruguay, building of the cooperative movement in Australia, and bringing women-led renewable power to Palestine. To be transformative, impact is important. We must then scale up, replicate and enable successful local initiatives to become national or international policies through people-powered campaigns.

Another world is already happening. Yet we aim to move towards an accumulation of interconnected peoples' solutions, policy changes and social-movement power where the degree of reform achieves substantive system change. The precise point where *system reform* becomes *system change* will be subjective. Change can be represented as a continuum, with one type of system at one end and another type at the other end. Or there may be a tipping point whereby a whole series of changes is triggered, cascades and becomes unstoppable. It may be gradual and predictable or dramatic and nonlinear.

Transformation of different systems may occur at different levels in different places. Even with systemic change it is difficult to say how much continuity there will be with the previous systems, as radical changes might coexist with some all-too-familiar behaviours or impacts.

False solutions

False solutions reinforce the current harmful systems. They generate the illusion that the system can be fixed by paving the way for businesses to profit from the problem without solving it. False solutions might delay or displace the symptoms of crises but they do not confront their structural causes – and often exacerbate them.

On the contrary, false solutions are actually generating new avenues for profit, allowing TNCs to grab more lands and resources from local communities. For example, compensation for biodiversity loss does not prevent the loss of the ecosystems or species that are in danger. Instead, it allows for the privatisation of another ecosystem or territory, opening up new business opportunities for TNCs while allowing them to greenwash their image. False solutions include:

- the privatisation, commodification and financialisation of nature through, for example, biodiversity offsetting, carbon markets, trading, and offsetting schemes including Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD)[10] and Nature Based Solutions;[11]
- geoengineering;
- greenwashing strategies such as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and many certification schemes;[12]
- many negative emissions technologies (NETs) including bioenergy with carbon capture and storage (BECCS);[13]
- Climate Smart Agriculture;[14]
- Sustainable Intensification of agriculture;[15]
- digitisation of agriculture;
- GMOs and synthetic biology.

10 REDD+ fuels human rights abuses, causes of climate change – report - Friends of the Earth International
11 Nature based solutions: a wolf in sheep's clothing - Friends of the Earth International
12 https://www.foei.org/publication/corporate-capture-nature-of-business-report/
13 A Leap in the Dark: The Dangers of Bioenergy with Carbon Capture and Storage (BECCS) - Friends of the Earth International
14 'Junk agroecology': How corporations are co-opting peoples' solutions to the food crisis
15 A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing? An analysis of the 'sustainable intensification' of agriculture - Friends of the Earth International



Indigenous leaders protest carbon pricing mechanisms in Article 6, REDD+ and other false solutions, in Madrid at the global climate march during the UNFCCC COP 25 meeting in December 2019.
© Indigenous Environmental Network

These are models pushed by big corporations and elites to facilitate business as usual. They reinforce the myth that we do not need to transform our economies or societies, but need only make minor adjustments. Meanwhile, the systems of exploitation and oppression persist, violence against women, peoples and nature persists, Earth's ecological limits are irreparably breached and ecological systems and functions are devastated. False solutions allow TNCs to concentrate their power and profit from deepening the crises.

False solutions reinforce the current harmful systems. They generate the illusion that the system can be fixed by paving the way for businesses to profit from the problem without solving it.

Overview of Friends of the Earth International programme based pathways to system change

Cross programme - our vision is of a peaceful and sustainable world based on societies living in harmony with nature. We envision a society of interdependent peoples living in dignity, wholeness and fulfilment in which equity and human and peoples' rights are realised. This will be a society built upon peoples' sovereignty and participation. It will be founded on social, economic, gender and environmental justice and be free from all forms of domination and exploitation, such as neoliberalism, corporate globalisation, neo-colonialism and militarism.

System	Current situation	Current state of solutions
Energy	The dominant energy system is based on fossil fuels, which make up around 80% of total global energy use and contribute the majority of carbon emissions that cause dangerous climate change. The broken energy system leaves some one billion people without access to electricity.	A new energy system is emerging, with rapid and substantial growth in renewable energy. Many cities and countries have plans to develop 100% renewable energy systems. In the global electricity sector in 2021, wind, solar and other renewable energies received more investment than fossil fuels. While much of this was under corporate control there is a burgeoning community energy and efficiency movement and substantive government regulation/ownership that provides an opportunity to scale up and spread this transformation.
Food	Harmful industrial agriculture systems now dominate many farming landscapes globally. They are characterised by input-intensive crop monocultures, high chemical use, corporate control, GMOs and industrial-scale feedlots. One in nine people do not have access to enough food and our agricultural system is a major driver of biodiversity loss and climate change.	There is a powerful growing movement demanding food sovereignty and agroecology led by more than 200 million peasants in La Vía Campesina. Although under threat, small-scale farmers still feed the majority of the world. There are countless models of agroecological transformation at the farm and community level, some at provincial and national levels, and even some supported by government policies. The UN Food and Agriculture Organisation has recognised key elements of agroecology as crucial to building a healthy food system.
Economy	The dominant economic system is neoliberal capitalism. The pursuit of profit and efficiency dictate how we structure our economies and societies, and how we manage nature. While humanity has accumulated more goods and wealth than ever before and achieved substantial reductions in poverty, more than 700 million people live in extreme poverty and we are destroying Earth's life-supporting systems. Neoliberalism promotes commodification and privatisation of nature, economic liberalisation, free trade, privatisation and weakening of public services and social security systems, and dismantling of legislation for the common good.	Thousands of solutions for a new economy exist, yet we need to scale them up to be truly transformational. One in every seven people globally is a member of a cooperative. From health clinics in South Africa to clean water in Uruguay and public transport in Vienna, public services provide the necessities of life to billions of people. Public services, public companies and other general government spending make up a large part of all countries' economic activity and through democratic processes can drive change towards a sustainable and just future. For example, in 2016, 27% of India's GDP and 57% of Finland's was public spending. The governments of Scotland and New Zealand have adopted new wellbeing economy measurements and the growing global movement to dismantle corporate power is winning victories at the national, regional and international levels.

System	Pathways to system change	What transformation looks like
Energy	**1.** Power to the people; community and social ownership of safe, clean renewable energy as a common good. **2.** Reclaim politics, remove obstacles to progress and allow people-centred renewable energy to flourish. **3.** Ensure energy sufficiency for all. **4.** Ensure 100% renewable energy for all. **5.** Finance the energy revolution. **6.** Guarantee rights and livelihoods as we transition to clean energy. **7.** Renewable technology that is climate resilient, locally-appropriate and low impact.	A public, peoples-powered, 100% renewable energy system that guarantees access to energy sufficiency for all and workers' and peoples' rights.
Food	**1.** Ensure social protection and the right to healthy culturally appropriate food for all. **2.** Guarantee income and workers' rights. **3.** Grant rights, access and control over land, territories, seeds, water and biodiversity to local communities, peasant, family, fisherfolk, cooperative and small scale food production and distribution. **4.** Support peasant, fisherfolk family and other small scale producers to transition to agroecological food systems. **5.** Stop agribusiness expansion and neoliberal trade and investment policies.	Everyone has access to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced by socially just, ecologically sound and sustainable methods; and peoples enjoy their collective right to define their own policies, strategies and systems for food production, distribution and consumption.
Economy	**1.** Provide public services for all through tax justice and debt cancellation. **2.** Scale up economies based on social ownership and cooperativism. **3.** Support local markets and fair trade. **4.** Change the goal of the economy to put people and planet first, not profit. **5.** Ensure binding rules to dismantle the power of big business.	The economy is distributive and regenerative by design through sustainable public services, the scaling up of cooperatives, fair trade and binding rules on corporations.

System	Current situation	Current state of solutions
Forests & Biodiversity	Half of the world's forests have disappeared. We are witnessing an unprecedented extinction of species. Four of the nine major global processes that sustain life on Earth have now exceeded safe levels: dangerous climate change, loss of biosphere integrity, land system change and biochemical over-exploitation. The drivers of this rapid destruction of nature are overconsumption by wealthy individuals and countries, chemical use, exports of meat and crops such as soy and palm oil, large-scale plantations, privatisation, mega infrastructure projects, false solutions, commodification of forest and biodiversity and mining.	Friends of the Earth International member groups from Costa Rica, Mozambique, Malaysia and countless other examples demonstrate the power of community forest management to support livelihoods and protect nature. Today Indigenous Peoples and local communities protect and manage 21% of the world's land mass, roughly the size of Africa. This exceeds the size of state-governed terrestrial Protected Areas, which only cover around 14%. We advocate for Community-Based Forest Management, which studies have shown can protect biodiversity better than many traditional conservation schemes. They provide clean water and air, healthy food and livelihoods, while supporting ecological integrity, connection and restoration of diverse ecosystems. Indigenous Peoples and local communities are on the front lines of resistance to the main industrial drivers of global biodiversity loss and climate collapse, and are often threatened with violence as result. The lack of recognition, respect and implementation of Indigenous Peoples and local communities rights is currently a major barrier in their efforts to care for territories and ecosystems.
Gender	Patriarchy is the dominant system of gender relations in much of the world – it is the system that oppresses and exploits women, their work and their bodies for the benefit of men as a social group. Key global indicators on literacy, political representation and economic freedoms demonstrate this gender-based inequality. For example, on an average day, women globally spend about three times as many hours on unpaid domestic and care work as men. The UN estimates that up to 35% of women have experienced sexual or physical violence. The patriarchal system organises our societies through the sexual division of labour, and is maintained by traditions, norms, education and material resources.	A global intersectional feminist movement is winning significant cultural and political struggles. Millions of women are asserting the right to respectful relationships and more equal sharing of care work with men and the state. Women are protagonists in the defence of our territories and the fight for autonomy over our bodies, lives and labour force. Many governments have an increased focus on providing public services to build gender justice through specific programmes that have increased education rates for women, childcare provisions and political representation in some countries.

System	Pathways to system change	What transformation looks like
Forests & Biodiversity	**1.** Increase Indigenous peoples' and local communities' control of territories, working collaboratively with them to increase capacity and build social movement alliances. **2.** Strengthen national legislation and public policies to promote and facilitate community forest management. **3.** Respect and implement the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities to land, self-determination, traditional knowledge, and binding consultation on any proposed project or policy that will affect their territory. **4.** Pass national legislation and policies to limit corporate control of forests and biodiversity. **5.** Stop carbon markets, false solutions, certification schemes, corporate control and corporate activities that impact on Indigenous Peoples, local communities, forests and biodiversity. **6.** Implement the rights-based elements of the UN CBD Global Biodiversity Framework. **7.** Work towards future biodiversity agreements, ensuring we live within planetary boundaries, address the root causes and drivers of biodiversity loss, and promote agroecology and other community-based solutions.	Thriving, healthy peoples and nature where Indigenous peoples' and local communities' governance and control of the commons empowers communities to look after and benefit from nature without over-exploiting it.
Gender	**1.** Reclaim the body-territory. **2.** End the sexual division of labour. **3.** Build a feminist care economy, feminist just transition and food sovereignty. **4.** Build power with feminism at its heart.	A gender-just world where everybody enjoys autonomy, freedom and equality, and is able to share equitably in the distribution of power, knowledge and resources. Achieving this means recognising the history of injustice, oppression and subjugation faced by women as a social group.



A political framework for peoples' solutions

01

The socio-economic crises facing humanity are systemic; the solutions must be systemic too. The solutions are numerous and diverse but they share important characteristics.



CESTA/ Friends of the Earth El Salvador's "No Bicycle, No Planet" campaign won the 2021-2022 Transformative Cities People's Choice Award.
© James Kao / CESTA

Instead of the logic of accumulation our solutions are structured around the sustainability of life; around environmental, social, economic, class, gender and racial justice, peoples' sovereignty and participation; and internationalism. They are born of and nurtured by the convergence of social movements and organisations around a common political agenda. They nourish that agenda and enable the formulation of a peoples' political project.

Our solutions are built by political actors who have fought oppression to transform societies through peoples' power. We refer to such solutions as peoples' emancipatory proposals or projects, or simply peoples' solutions.

Key characteristics of peoples' solutions

01 They are built by political actors who have historically fought against oppression and exploitation, incorporating a class, feminist, anti-racist, anti-colonialist and anti-capitalist perspective.

02 They vindicate and reclaim the political arena and public policies to guarantee peoples' rights, while encouraging organisation and self-management.

03 They reclaim economics from a justice perspective.

04 They reclaim the territories and seek to reverse reductionism and commodification, privatisation and the financialisation of nature.

05 They reclaim knowledge and technology.

These characteristics are the product of Friends of the Earth International's collective learning through struggle, along with other social movements, Indigenous Peoples, Black communities and people of colour, and grassroots organisations and communities.

Let's look in more detail at the key characteristics of peoples' solutions.

01

Peoples' solutions are built by political actors who have historically fought against oppression and exploitation, incorporating a class, feminist, anti-racist, anti-colonialist and anti-capitalist perspective.

Organised peoples have historically built emancipatory proposals which establish the pillars of a new society. They offer a comprehensive, structural response to the systemic socio-economic crises caused by capitalist accumulation and exploitation.

These solutions are peoples' political projects based on unity among political actors from a class, feminist, anti-racist, anti-colonialist and internationalist perspective. They encompass both the struggle against systems of oppression and efforts to transform our societies.

Feminist movements

Given the centrality of productive, reproductive and care work and the sustainability of life, the feminist movement has developed the basis of a grassroots, anti-capitalist feminist economy that aims to break away from the dichotomy of production/reproduction. It aims to reverse the sexual division of labour and ensure economic autonomy for women. An emancipatory project will only ensure freedom once the role of women as political actors is acknowledged and protected.

Food sovereignty movements

The peasant movement developed the principle of food sovereignty to which other movements subscribe. It aims to put peasants' rights at the centre of the debate and political actions, as well as the rights of fishing communities, Indigenous Peoples, Black communities and people of colour, so that they can continue to produce food. Food sovereignty movements also seek to protect the right of the working class to have enough healthy, varied and culturally appropriate food. La Vía Campesina (LVC), the global movement of peasants and rural peoples, defines food sovereignty as peoples defining their own strategies, policies and agroecological systems to produce, distribute and consume food, based on small-scale peasant production and recognising the central role of women.

Alongside LVC, Friends of the Earth International campaigns to defend seeds as part of peoples' heritage, for the benefit of humanity. Food sovereignty provides us with a way of understanding collective ecological goods, which are a result of co-evolution between people and nature.

Indigenous Peoples

For hundreds of years, Indigenous communities have struggled for recognition of Indigenous rights and the protection of their lives, cultures and territories. These collective struggles resulted in the adoption of the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) by the UN General Assembly in September 2007.[16] Awareness of Indigenous Peoples' rights and struggles has increased. But genuine recognition - especially of the rights to self-determination, including collective rights to land, resources and territories - is still to be realised.

Many Indigenous Peoples have lived in harmony with nature from time immemorial. Their traditional knowledge, defence of territories, practices and culture offer a huge source of inspiration to the rest of the world. Simply supporting, and not undermining Indigenous rights and ways of living would provide vital protection for the world´s remaining ecosystems. Community Forest Management – or Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas - are the best way to preserve nature and biodiversity. Friends of the Earth International and our member groups work to build alliances with many Indigenous nations and peoples at the local, national and international level.



Joining allies on the streets of Geneva to denounce corporate impunity and demand climate justice.
© Victor Barro / Friends of the Earth Spain

16 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples | Division for Inclusive Social Development (DISD)

"We renew our commitment to work with Indigenous communities to defend their territories, protect ecosystems, preserve indigenous cultures' sustainable systems and practices and work for real peoples' solutions to the climate crisis."

Friends of the Earth Asia Pacific.[17]

Economic justice movements

In response to injustice people have always organised collectively in groups, organisations, collectives, movements, and unions to demand a better future. In many countries trade unions are traditionally one of the strongest organised voices for workers and economic justice. Friends of the Earth International and our member groups are a proud ally of many trade union and economic justice actors. From the Homeless Workers Movement (MTST) in Brazil to Public Services International and alternative economics think tanks, movements for economic justice are our comrades on the pathway to system change.

The proposal for a just transition - to radically transform the dominant energy system - has come from a consensus between the labour movement and Indigenous groups. Many organisations, social movements and local communities around the world have joined them. The proposal comes from the struggle against an energy system that props up capitalist accumulation, destroys lands and livelihoods, endangers the health and rights of communities and is causing the climate crisis.

It is a profoundly unjust and racist system that has the most severe impact on Indigenous Peoples, Black communities and people of colour, peasant communities, the working class and women. These actors are working together to create the type of transformation we urgently need, from a class, anti-racist, anti-colonial and anti-patriarchy perspective.

Internationalism

Internationalism takes root in collective political spaces. We have learned from history, through peasants and the workers' movement and through our own struggles, that the broken capitalist system cannot be defeated at a national or even regional level. It needs cooperation through new international relationships that could reverse neo-colonial rules and regulations such as those in free trade agreements. Internationalist solidarity should be the basis of global political action to combat the systemic ecological, social and economic crises and advance cooperation between peoples across borders.

17 International Day of the World's Indigenous People - Friends of the Earth International

02

Peoples' solutions vindicate and reclaim the political arena and public policies to guarantee peoples' rights, while encouraging self-organisation and self-management.

As a federation we believe in political action and democracy. We know that we must reclaim politics to achieve system change. We view campaigns that vilify politics with great concern, as they seek to make our society reject this fundamental part of communal life. Powerful economic sectors and corporate media present politics as essentially corrupt, and emphasise good governance so that our societies do not participate in the political struggle. In this way the public realm is taken over by private interests, and the CEOs of large corporations come to govern.

Our solution is to build peoples' power. We seek a strong and vibrant democracy based on peoples' participation and we involve ourselves in the collective construction of long-term people power. We draw from history and other movements in learning how we can achieve power to realise system change.

We firmly support the convergence of social movements to build a common political agenda that directs our coordinated political actions towards a change in the balance of power.

We mobilise and create alliances. We create movements that are based on our demands with people on the ground, communities and local organisations. We can also do this in unions, feminist organisations, at national and global levels, as movements and as political actors.

As social movements we know that politics is about decision-making that affects how our societies are organised and their relationship with nature. It is also about meeting the needs of humanity.

We are engaged in an ideological struggle against the colonisation of people's minds by systems of oppression aimed at taking political power from the people. Thus, to reclaim politics means participating in a battle of ideas, disputing social imaginaries and hegemony. Reclaiming the political arena and public policies includes reclaiming the state itself. Historically, peoples have questioned the way the state is organised to protect the privileges of the elite and an exploitative class. They have fought for policies and regulations that protect their rights and the common good.

People's victory at the UNHRC.
© Victor Barro / Friends of the Earth Spain



The role of the state

We aim to redefine the state's role as the protection of the common good, the provision of care, the sustaining of life and strengthening of the public sector. In the capitalist system structured on class, gender and racial exploitation, the state is often forced to respond to the interests of groups that concentrate economic power, such as wealthy corporations and oligarchs. We demand that the state be structured according to its responsibilities as a distributor of wealth and as a guarantor of rights. In that regard, we advocate for a change in public policies.

For our initiatives to be viable we need policies that correspond to the rights and needs of the working classes, women, migrants, Indigenous Peoples and Black communities and people of colour. Fair electoral processes are therefore necessary to determine the administration of the state.

There are real-world differences between repressive and progressive governments. Those governments that impose repressive policies to defend private property and economic interests; that legitimise and encourage racism and xenophobia; that dismantle collective bargaining and the rights of the working class; and that deny women's rights and sexual health and abortion are not the same as governments that advance rights and strengthen systems of social protection, universal public health and care systems, and guarantee the rights of Black communities and people of colour and Indigenous Peoples.

Policies should support peoples' and land rights

Peoples' solutions call for public policies that meet the peoples' needs and respond to their interests. They call for policies that support peoples' organising and self-management to create agroecological food systems, renewable energy systems, community forest management, production cooperatives and services. For example, the possibility of collective bargaining fosters stronger unions and better organising of the working class.

The right to land is fundamental to any emancipatory initiative such as food sovereignty; it will be a reality only if there are public policies to back it up. Institutes for agrarian reform and distribution of land are part of the policy tapestry that promotes democratisation of access to land as a right. These are spaces where we can dispute the hegemony of the capitalist system.

Building peoples' power demands peoples' self-determination, the autonomy of Indigenous Peoples, historical reparations and the enforcement of the rights of Indigenous People, Black communities and people of colour. We must urgently decolonise. This will require justice to be done after centuries of oppression and colonial exploitation, including genocide. Building peoples' power means attacking the colonialist logic imposed on our societies, and the interests that benefit from and sustain it.

A new multilateralism

Building peoples' power requires strengthening internationalism, integration between peoples and a new multilateralism based on solidarity. This new multilateralism can translate to, for example, special and differential treatment based on common but differentiated responsibilities. Otherwise, the interests of the most powerful countries will prevail, leading to transnational corporations imposing conditions on less powerful states. A new multilateralism must ensure the primacy of human and environmental rights over free-trade agreements and investments. It must combat globalised neo-liberalism and the power of large transnational corporations. Corporate power leads to the organisation of production in global value chains that exploit the working classes, especially women, Black people and communities, people of colour and migrants. Multilateralism must prevent the spread of ideologies based on hate, misogyny and xenophobia.

Friends of the Earth International is active in a number of intergovernmental spaces, bringing voices from the ground, and demanding global peoples' solutions. We mobilise with allies annually at the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change[18] to demand climate justice, equity and action. In 2014, a people's victory[19] was celebrated at the United Nations Human Rights Council, which established a new Intergovernmental Working Group (IGWG) to develop an international legally binding instrument to regulate transnational corporations and other companies with respect to human rights.[20]

18 UNFCCC COP - Friends of the Earth calling for climate justice
19 Victory! UN Human Rights Council agrees to take action against human rights abuses by corporations - Friends of the Earth International
20 UN binding treaty on transnational corporations and human rights - Friends of the Earth International

In response to the threat of biodiversity collapse and the global effects of deforestation, Friends of the Earth International has been participating in the Convention on Biodiversity since 2004.[21] We have advocated for global recognition of agroecology in the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC) and the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism for relations with the UN Committee on World Food Security.[22]

03

Peoples' solutions reclaim economics from a justice perspective.

System change means reclaiming the economic system. Peoples' solutions look to change the capitalist mode of production and organise the processes that produce, reproduce and protect life. This implies understanding that the economy is about the way society is organised and its relationship with nature, to ensure peoples' needs are met.

Striving for economic justice means creating new social relations that recognise the central role of work, care and life. The objective is to improve peoples' living conditions through processes that look after ecosystems, instead of focusing on accumulation and economic growth. This implies recognising the sustainability of life and care work as the organising principle of economic processes, dismantling the sexual division of labour and ending the exploitation of women's bodies and work. It also demands an end to the dichotomy between productive and reproductive work and reaffirms the importance of women's autonomy.

A radical transformation of the systems of production, distribution and consumption of goods and services demands that we challenge the logic of the market that prioritises profit over people. Developing peoples' economic initiatives requires strengthening resistance and mobilisation. For this reason, resistance, organising and transformation go hand in hand.

Cooperatives

Cooperatives and self-management exemplify how the production of goods and services can be reorganised so that the means of production are collectively owned by the working class. They ensure there is no exploitation of workers. As such, they foreshadow the world we wish for and advance the system change we are fighting for.

Self-management involves autonomy, organisation and sovereignty. It is a form of resistance against the hegemonic tools of capital. And it is one face of the transformation towards a system based on economic, social, environmental and gender justice and peoples' sovereignty.

Yet self-management faces many challenges in the context of capitalist economics. Therefore public policies are required to ensure that the means of production, goods and services are accessible for all. Self-managing companies struggle when forced to compete with corporations in 'race to the bottom' free market economics.

Another key economic issue is the defence of public companies and services owned by states, municipalities, communities or cooperatives. Public services allow basic rights to be realised. They also respond to basic human needs and boost economic production. Free trade and investment agreements threaten the state's room for manoeuvre with regards to public policy and undermine its capacity to regulate the economy fairly.

"We need to engage in a battle of ideas, in order to reverse the attack on democracy and the very notion of justice that is being perpetrated by the right wing and concentrated economic powers."

Karin Nansen, Friends of the Earth International's Chair 2017-2021

21 What is the Convention on Biological Diversity - CBD - COP15 - Friends of the Earth International
22 Food sovereignty - Friends of the Earth International

04

Peoples' solutions reclaim the territories and seek to reverse reductionism, commodification, privatisation and the financialisation of nature.

The territory is a social, ideological and material space where ecological systems, culture, ancestral knowledge, work, struggle, politics and society interact. Territories have huge potential to be a space where resistance takes place and hegemony is disputed to build peoples' power and sovereignty.

Fighting for the right to land, water and seeds means strengthening peoples' control over territories and collective goods through peoples' initiatives. It entails democratically determining the management and care of public goods.

A holistic system change vision links the urban to the rural and reclaims territories as spaces for production and the reproduction of life and for the creation of the material, political and social conditions to realise rights and meet needs. This is how the capitalist logic of occupying and using territories to increase profits can be challenged. Common goods can be protected and the notion of public goods can be expanded in opposition to purely economic interests. The defence of public spaces can take multiple forms; all put people at the centre, and reject the dynamics of capital that prevail.

Peoples' initiatives question the reduction of nature to tradable market units to be priced and privatised. Emancipatory proposals reject the privatisation, commodification and financialisation of nature, one of the most grotesque manifestations of the current phase of capitalist accumulation. Financialisation of nature represents a new expansion of the influence of capital on peoples and territories. Commodification of the territory is an attack on the territory.

System change requires a departure from the logic of individualism, recovery of the concept of community, opposition to the privatisation of common spaces and goods, and a challenge to the expansion of mercantilist dynamics. The communal also refers to the political organisation for collective management of nature.

Even within communities and their territories class exploitation and patriarchal oppression exist, often founded on historical institutions and practices. For this reason, community projects are not enough and a peoples' political agenda is needed, one that integrates national and international frameworks.

05

Peoples' solutions reclaim knowledge and technology.

Peoples' solutions reclaim knowledge and technology and society's right to democratically define the course of technological development. They underscore the collective dimension of technological development and the importance of dialogue between diverse knowledge systems. They do not start from an opposition to technology. Technological advances have been a key part of human history. Through collective creative processes nurtured by collective knowledge, techniques and tools, technologies have developed to achieve greater freedom. Climate science is a critically important basis for Friends of the Earth's advocacy and demands.

Yet technology can be used to increase extraction, environmental harm, worker alienation, capital gains and the economic and political power of the companies that own it. Where knowledge is privatised, science, technology and decisions on their development are concentrated in the hands of a few. They are used for making profit and often increase exploitation of the working classes and nature.

In emancipatory political projects, technology is regarded as a product of the co-evolution of humans and nature. It is seen as a tool to reduce the amount of human labour necessary to meet society's needs and protect the natural world.



International Women's Day march in Australia.
© Friends of the Earth Australia

Gender justice & dismantling patriarchy

02

The capitalist system thrives on the sexual division of labour, the lack of value assigned to care and the direct oppression of women. Grassroots feminism is fundamental to systemic change.



Feminism is a conceptual-ideological-political framework, a world vision, a praxis and a movement. For Friends of the Earth International it is constructed from the grassroots up, and is local and global, rural and urban. It is relevant to all and representative of regional diversity and different realities. The feminism we are constructing and formulating has a class perspective and is rooted in the collective experiences of women, but also anyone facing the impacts of patriarchy. Grassroots, anti-capitalist feminism aims to transform all women's lives by dismantling patriarchy and the classist, racist, capitalist, (neo)colonialist and heteronormative systems of oppression with which patriarchy is entwined. These are the systems that exploit women's bodies and the planet.

Our pathways towards gender justice and dismantling patriarchy are:

Pathway 01

Reclaiming the body-territory

The body is the primary territory through which oppression-exploitation is experienced and through which resistance-solutions are envisioned and constructed. Women are frontline defenders both of their bodies and of other territories such as forests, lands and rivers. For many women, particularly Indigenous Women, connection to the territories is spiritual and historical; it is founded on women's knowledge of Earth care passed down through generations for millennia. While protesting for human rights and environmental protection in Brazil, for example, Indigenous Women use the words: "Our territory, our body, our spirit."[23] For many Indigenous Women, these concepts are indivisible.

It is women's defence of their body-territory that lays the foundation for women's fight for autonomy over their bodies, lives, fertility and work. In most societies, patriarchy is reinforced and reproduced through the limitation of women's rights by regressive laws (such as anti-abortion laws), traditional practices, and societal institutions (including education, family, religion and the judiciary). Women's bodily autonomy is further threatened by the increasing medicalisation of natural processes such as menopause, menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth and postpartum depression; these have come to be defined as medical problems that require intervention.[24] The violent encroachment of the pharmaceutical industry into the lives of women and trans/non-binary people endangers their health for the purpose of increasing the profits of pharmaceutical companies. Reclaiming science and healthcare is key to reclaiming the autonomy and collective rights of women.

23 Our Bodies, Our Spirits, Our Territories: Indigenous Women Take to the Streets in Brazil | Cultural Survival
24 World March of Women, "Critica Feminista al Poder Corporativo: Textos para la Acción", 2020

Care work keeps people, our societies and our natural world alive. Women are reclaiming the body and our territories as spaces for the production and reproduction of life. Women reclaim these territories to create the material, political and social conditions where collective rights can be realised in order to meet peoples' needs. In this way, we can challenge the occupation and use of territories as a means of accumulating profit. We must reclaim these territories in the rural context but also in cities, so that common goods are protected, public spaces are defended and women's autonomy is achieved.

Pathway 02

Ending the sexual division of labour

To build sustainable societies we must understand that, globally, our societies and economies have been organised to benefit men as a group, through control over women, their work and their bodies. Neoliberal capitalism, in particular, is deeply patriarchal: the sexual division of labour reinforces the historical hierarchy that affords a higher financial and symbolic value to 'masculinised' work, and a much lower value to 'feminised' work.

Capitalist systems depend on the exploitation of workers' bodies. For that they require social reproduction and this leads to the control of women's bodies. Violence and the threat of violence against women and LGBTQI people are used to maintain patriarchal power relations, punishing people who deviate from the prescribed norm.

This is exacerbated by the economic difference between men and women. Women often lack money for their own needs or those of their families, and are often financially dependent on their husbands or male family members. Women's work and nature are exploited and treated as if they are infinite and elastic resources. The system depends on infinite wealth accumulation based on ransacking nature and controlling and exploiting women's time, energy, and (re)productive capacities. Those reproductive capacities extend to fixing the damage caused by the system itself.

Pathway 03

Building a feminist care economy, a feminist just transition and food sovereignty

A key non-hegemonic form of collective organising towards a care economy is through feminist, solidarity economy initiatives and cooperatives which are about reasserting peoples' control over the economy. These initiatives centre on collective power, democratic decision-making, women's autonomy, transparency, sustainability, the reinvention and revival of sharing, self-management and the egalitarian distribution of economic returns. Many solidarity economy initiatives have been built by women's and feminist movements and organisations, as resistance to the capitalist economy and as a building block of the new care economy.

"The sexual division of labour organises the work of women and men on the basis of the division of the private sphere, where work related to social reproduction takes place (domestic and care work, both invisible and non-remunerated), and the public sphere, linked to the market, paid or salaried work, decision-making and the symbolic value associated with this. This [division] is promoted and perpetuated in society as if it was biologically predetermined and becomes normalised for the benefit of capitalism and men as a group. Capitalism, particularly neoliberal capitalism, requires women's unpaid reproductive work in the home (e.g. childcare, domestic labour, low-paid care jobs, healthcare jobs) or in society to generate profits for capital. The sexual division of labour not only organises the women's work in the private sphere, but also in the market where female workers are often employed in areas of work and sectors that are an extension of care work (health, education and other services) and are usually badly paid without job security."

Natalia Carrau, REDES / Friends of the Earth Uruguay. [25]

25 Why Gender Justice and Dismantling Patriarchy? - Friends of the Earth International

To stop the climate and other inter-related crises we are facing it is critical to end fossil fuels and dirty energy according to the principles of science, ecological limits, equity and historical responsibility. This requires a monumental and rapid shift from a fossil-fuel based economy to a feminist care and solidarity economy that meets peoples' needs and provides sufficient climate-resilient, locally-appropriate and low-impact renewable energy for all.[26] Well paid jobs in the care sector are a key element of the Just transition. Nursing, child care, aged care, counselling and domestic work are all low-carbon jobs and services that are essential to society.

In recent years the concept of a just transition has become a key demand for the working class, peasants, Indigenous Peoples, and climate justice movements. Grassroots, anti-capitalist feminist movements and activists within Indigenous and other movements are at the forefront of just transition initiatives. Their ambitions are based on social, gender and racial justice, solidarity, the centrality of life, decentralising power structures and dismantling power relations. To achieve a fair and equal society where women can fully enjoy their rights and self-determination, we must put a model of consumption and production founded on agroecology and food sovereignty at the centre.

Pathway 04

Building power with feminism at its heart

The grassroots, anti-capitalist feminist movement builds alliances between political subjects from a class, feminist, anti-racist, anti-colonialist, anti-heteronormative, and internationalist perspective. So the struggle against patriarchy is an organic part of other struggles led by collective actors that stand up against systemic oppression: Quilombola/Afro-descendants/Black communities, Indigenous Peoples, LGBTQI, non-binary and gender-non-conforming peoples, and the working classes and their trade unions. These collective actors and alliances are building new social relations.

Through policies and productive processes that are nurtured by, and look after, ecological systems we can improve living conditions for everyone. Recognising care work as central to the sustainability of life - and indeed to all economic processes - we prioritise our fight to end the sexual division of labour and exploitation of women. We demand public policies and investment that correspond to the rights and needs of the working classes, women, migrants, Indigenous Peoples and afro-descendant communities.

This requires an end to governments that impose repressive policies to defend private property and economic interests; legitimise racism and xenophobia; dismantle the rights of the working class and collective bargaining; and deny women's collective rights and sexual health and abortion. In their place we need governments that advance rights and strengthen systems of social protection for all women, men and trans/non-binary people; strengthen and invest in universal, high-quality public health, care, education and transport; and guarantee the rights of afro-descendant communities and indigenous peoples.

This grassroots, anti-capitalist feminism is key to system change. Gender justice means environmental justice. We must continue to build solutions together as women, as peoples, as an international federation and with our allies, including La Vía Campesina[27] and World March of Women[28] who, like us, are fighting for system change. Further, we must continue to support women's leadership and protagonism and create and expand safe spaces for women to build their collective power, reinforcing the Latin American concept and practice of women as political subjects.

To realise these demands, we are mobilising and creating alliances. We are building movements that allow us to organise in our territories, communities and local organisations.

"To realise these demands, we are mobilising and creating alliances."

26 People Power Now Manifesto - Friends of the Earth International
27 Vía Campesina
28 World March of Women



Basma Giacaman, Director at Al Basma Center Arab Women's Union and manager of the solar energy system that runs the centre's facilities.
© Hussein Zohor /PENGON

case study

Women as leaders in clean & sustainable energy Palestine

For many years PENGON/ Friends of the Earth Palestine has advocated for energy sovereignty in Palestine. Working with communities under siege in Gaza and marginalised Bedouin communities in the Jordan Valley, PENGON has supplied solar units so that families have clean energy.

Along the way PENGON grew to understand the impacts of energy scarcity on women, particularly on Bedouin women. In these communities, women are responsible for domestic care work and for producing yoghurt and cheese from sheep's milk. Energy scarcity made this labour burdensome and time-consuming. Women were working longer days than men, leaving them little opportunity to do other things such as study or support their children's education. Women were also under-represented in formal decision-making, notably regarding clean energy.

An energy revolution is a gender revolution

PENGON recognised a parallel between women's political disenfranchisement and the disproportionate effect of energy scarcity on women. The group's response was a project that would empower women to be active decision-makers in the clean energy sector – focusing on women in Bedouin communities.

The project involved women and women's organisations in drawing up proposals for Palestine's clean energy future. Following women-led workshops, a framework was set for mainstreaming gender in Palestinian clean energy policy, including proposals for gender planning



and budgeting. Interviews with women from Bedouin communities fed into a fact sheet, which included recommendations for the government to support women as leaders in clean energy. A legal review identified gaps in energy laws in relation to gender and was used as a lobbying tool by PENGON and partners.

To scale up the impact, PENGON has launched a 100% renewable energy Gaza campaign that is demanding global financing and technology transfer to enable a transformation of the energy system. They have started to connect different systemic changes - food, water and energy and an end to the Israeli occupation under the banner of a Just Recovery from COVID. When people have power there is hope for all forms of justice, and for a more harmonious relationship between communities and ecosystems.

Building skills and providing direct routes into decision-making processes, particularly for marginalised women, has empowered thosen involved and highlighted their contributions. In effect, PENGON's work here challenged existing patriarchal power relations while building towards energy sovereignty for Palestine.

Global efforts for a just and equitable energy transformation

To scale up this transformation requires system change at an international level. Friends of the Earth International therefore mobilises with allies annually at the UNFCCC to demand climate justice, equity and action. We take the solutions, like PENGON's 100% renewable energy Gaza campaign to these spaces. Civil society and grassroots resistance, mobilisation and transformation are vital in the pathway to system change.



Left: Rasmeya Ali Jmassi in the Gaza Strip. "My daughter used to study using a battery operated light, and the mobile. It was really hard for her. At night when the batteries were empty we used to sit without lights." Now her daughter is able to study in the evening, creating long-term positive impacts for her education.
© Hussein Zohor /PENGON

Below: Jamelah Hasasnah working on the hydroponics and aquaponics system powered by solar energy, Al Basma centre Arab Women's Union, Beit Sahour, Palestine.
© Hussein Zohor /PENGON





A woman who has been trained in solar-engineering in Tinginaput, India.
© Abbie Trayler-Smith / UK Department for International Development

Transiting our energy system for climate & energy justice

03

We need a new energy system - one that is public, peoples-powered, 100% renewable and that guarantees access to energy sufficiency for all and workers' and peoples' rights.



The pathway towards climate and energy justice must be based on equity, justice, energy sufficiency and energy sovereignty.

Stopping the climate crisis requires an urgent shift away from extracting, financing, and using dirty energy. Developed countries and the global and corporate elite bear responsibility for having emitted the most carbon and creating the climate crisis: they fund, enable, and control the way we produce, distribute and consume energy. So they must take the biggest responsibility for transforming the energy system in their own countries and supporting the energy transformation in developing countries.

Extraction of oil, coal and gas has devastated local communities, and burning them has warmed our atmosphere and destroyed communities. Treating energy as a commodity instead of a common good and a human right has led to armed conflict and imperial conquest. Mega hydro-power schemes have led to countless human rights abuses and environmental violations, while pretending to be a green or clean energy source. Nuclear energy, industrial agrofuels and biomass, and waste-to-energy incineration are a threat to communities and ecosystems around the world.

The richest nations fund, subsidise and enable this life-threatening system and perpetuate it through consumption of dirty energy. Because transnational corporations have a stranglehold over many governments and institutions, political systems favour big polluters over their citizens' rights and needs. Those big polluters are pushing unworkable, unproven and dangerous technologies such as carbon capture and storage (CCS) and bioenergy with carbon capture and storage (BECCS) as solutions to the climate crisis. Their real aim is to keep control of our energy system and continue profiting from their harmful polluting business model.

Neoliberal capitalism, an unsustainable development model, and powerful vested interests are stifling a true energy revolution. By liberalising energy and patents, new renewable technologies benefit corporations to the detriment of peoples, especially the poorest and most vulnerable. Many powerful government-owned and private fossil companies have no plan to reduce their fossil fuel extraction in line with the 1.5°C degree climate target and are wedded to a traditional developmentalist model of economic growth over people and planet. Oligarchs, multinational corporations and vested interest groups wield incredible power in the energy sector, which they use to influence policy makers and markets to protect their profits. The free-trade doctrine locks Southern countries into dependence on primary export economies and resource extraction. This is a profoundly unjust and racist model in which the most oppressed, marginalised and vulnerable – overwhelmingly poor, Indigenous, Black and Brown people – suffer the impacts of dirty and harmful energy projects and the climate catastrophe.

Our energy system has failed. Over 700 million people lack electricity and almost 2.5 billion are without clean cooking facilities. Energy scarcity and energy poverty affect women most acutely because it is mainly women who source and burn fuel for cooking.[29] In the past decades the richest 10% of the global population have been responsible for the same emissions as the rest of the world combined. Over the course of just 25 years, the richest 1% have emitted twice as much carbon as the poorest 50%. The fossil-fuel-dependent, capitalist economy has failed to improve the living standards of the poorest and increased the consumption of the richest.[30]

We must turn our efforts towards a system that serves everyone through a just transition to energy sovereignty and a public, just, peoples-based energy system. One that centres the sustainability of life, peoples' rights and livelihoods, and women's autonomy and political protagonism.

Cooking traditional food in South Africa.
© Zurijeta / Shutterstock



29 Irena: Tracking SDG 7: The Energy Progress Report, 2022
30 Oxfam, Confronting Carbon Inequality, 2020

Pathways to transform the energy system

Pathway 01

People must control their energy as a common good

The sun and wind are shared resources. They have a cultural and spiritual value to peoples all over the world, and particularly to Indigenous Peoples. As a natural resource, energy belongs to no one and therefore should be available to all. It is a common good. Our task is not to replace the current profit-driven dirty energy system with a profit-driven clean one; it is to give peoples political and social control over their own resources and their lives, to be managed in the interests of all.

Everyone has the right to enough safe and renewable energy to meet their needs and support a dignified life. Renewable energy should be under public or community ownership and effectively regulated to ensure environmental protection, minimise the impact on biodiversity, preserve local cultures, provide safe and healthy livelihoods, and address climate change.

People everywhere are fighting to take back democratic control of the energy sector; to de-privatise and de-commodify energy; and to ensure that energy becomes a right that is enjoyed by all. Across the world, trade unions, towns and municipalities, communities of faith, and schools and universities, are leading the way defending and advancing public renewable energy, both state-owned and community-owned renewable projects and energy co-operatives.

Pathway 02

Reclaim politics, remove obstacles to progress and allow people-centred renewable energy to flourish

Decisions about the production and consumption of energy must be democratic, participative, open and accountable. We must reclaim politics so that our political system truly works for the people - not transnational corporations and elites. This reclaiming of the political space must happen at the local, national and global level – from local municipalities to the UN climate negotiations. Peoples must be enfranchised to take control in energy decision-making. Decisions must be delegated to the local level, allowing for municipal, sub-regional, national and regional planning and coordination. This is how we will empower communities to define their energy needs according to their cultures and ways of life. And this will enable us to cut energy waste and build peoples' power.

Under the right political and economic conditions, the peoples-led energy revolution will flourish. Favourable policies and incentives must be decided by peoples and communities, and should go hand in hand with an end to subsidies and incentives for dirty and harmful energy. This also means an end to false solutions, a rejection of geo-engineering and the dismantling of harmful trade agreements which hinder peoples' climate solutions.

Pathway 03

Energy sufficiency for all

Energy sufficiency for all means universal energy access at a level that respects everyone's right to a dignified life. It also means an end to energy waste, through energy efficiency and energy saving, and an end to overconsumption by corporates and elites – those who currently hold the economic, political and social power. Energy access for all is a basic human right and a necessary condition of a dignified life.

We need energy for fuel and electricity to cook our food, to have habitable homes and workplaces in hot and cold places, to ensure that everyone has access to basic services like health and education, to communicate and travel and to share and access information via the internet. We need energy for lighting and to ensure clean water supplies for adequate sanitation, irrigation and to run small scale agricultural industries and other small businesses.

Pathway 04

100% renewable energy for all

The need for a global transformation to a renewable energy system is urgent and must go hand-in-hand with a managed but rapid phase-out of fossil fuels and extractive projects, and a total ban on any new dirty energy projects such as fossil fuels, nuclear, mega dams, industrial agrofuels and biomass, and waste-to-energy incineration. Energy will be generated from climate-safe sources with low social and environmental impacts. This means no energy sources that:

- are high carbon or produce significant quantities of other dangerous greenhouse gas emissions through their production, combustion, distribution, or the direct or indirect land use change caused by their development;
- abuse the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities; ;
- result in deforestation or forest degradation;
- result in the production of toxic waste;
- result in significant air, land or water pollution;
- deplete non-renewable resources.

Energy technologies will also be appropriate to the needs of the communities who are using them and to their local and regional environmental, economic, social and cultural contexts.

Pathway 05

Finance the energy revolution

We know that 100% renewable energy for all is possible - in 2016, we calculated that there is enough money in tax havens to power Africa, Latin America, and Asia with 100% renewable energy by 2030.[31] The money to finance the energy revolution exists.

To address climate change, we must also address historical and current injustices and inequality, including repayment of the climate debt and the reversal of current free trade and investment deals. Under the right political and economic conditions, the peoples-led energy revolution will flourish.

Pathway 06

Guarantee rights and livelihoods as we transition to clean energy

The need for a global transformation to a renewable energy system is urgent. As dirty energy industries shut down it is crucial that jobs offer strong unionisation, collective organising, re-training, and rights and conditions for workers. There must be well-planned policies and frameworks in place to protect workers and their communities. Workers must be equipped with skills to make the transition to newer sectors. The rights of all workers must be guaranteed, and workers must have control over decisions that affect their lives and livelihoods. A just transition requires a high level of participation from the millions of workers across the energy, agricultural and transport sectors, and from communities where dirty energy projects are situated. It is equally important that the materials and land used to develop renewable energy infrastructure are sourced in a way that respects the rights of local communities. We must not replicate the practices and paradigms of the extractive industries.

Strong labour rights and environmental standards are needed for the entire supply chain, from sourcing raw materials to manufacturing and distributing technology. The transformation of energy infrastructure in the North must not impoverish and endanger workers and communities in the South. We reclaim technology in the service of people - solar and wind power combined with the planet's infinite resources of sun and wind.

Friends of the Earth International and many of our member groups have been working closely with peasant and feminist movements, and labour unions, to develop joint demands and recommendations for a just transition. Approaching climate action through a just transition lens provides a framework for shifting to an economy based on energy democracy, food sovereignty, worker and community control over the environment and protection of the right to water, food, land and energy for all.

31 An Energy Revolution is possible: tax havens and financing climate action

"The proposal for a just transition that would allow us to radically transform the dominant energy system has come from a consensus between the working class and Indigenous Peoples, and now many organisations and social movements and local communities from around the world have joined them. It comes from the struggle against an energy system that props up capitalist accumulation that also destroys lands and livelihoods, endangers the health and rights of communities and is causing a climate crisis that threatens all ecological systems and cycles that make life possible." **Tom Goldtooth,** Indigenous Environmental Network.

Pathway 07

Renewable technology that is climate resilient, locally appropriate and low impact

Renewable energy should be as small-scale and decentralised as possible, and all rural and urban communities should have access to technology, knowledge and skills. Our energy system should protect biodiversity, strengthen the land rights of communities and Indigenous Peoples and should not lead to exploitation of workers in the production chain.

Energy infrastructure, including supply and distribution, must be as decentralised as possible. This is the case where energy solutions come from local opportunities at both small and community scale, and where energy is generated near the point of use, either connected to a local distribution network system supplying homes and offices, or as stand-alone systems separate from the public network. Decentralisation will help ensure energy access for people in remote and rural areas; will facilitate subsidiarity and community or local ownership and control; and will reduce energy wastage in distribution because energy and heat will be produced close to the point of use.

Some large-scale renewable energy infrastructure such as large-scale wind or concentrated solar energy may be needed to complement decentralised supply to large towns and cities and essential public services and infrastructure. However, decision-making over any such large-scale infrastructure should be subject to the democratic and participative decision-making process set out above.

On the southern Philippine island of Mindanao, the Legal Rights and Natural Resources Center have been working with a T'boli-Manobo indigenous community to create a solar-powered off-grid system.
© E.M. Taqueban / Legal Rights and Natural Resources Center





Women working together to thrash rice in India.
© Abhijit Dey, www.abhijitdey.in

Building food sovereignty

04

The ways we produce, distribute and consume food shape communities, the lives of individuals and the world around us. Justice and peoples' sovereignty must therefore define our food systems.



The concept of food sovereignty was proposed by La Vía Campesina in 1996. It has since been embraced by thousands of organisations and social movements worldwide. The concept emerged as a response to the systemic socio-economic and environmental crises caused by the green revolution agribusiness model.

That model is built on the exploitation and oppression of peoples and nature. Food sovereignty, by contrast, is built on the historical memory and paths of peasants, Indigenous Peoples, family farmers, fisher folks and other artisanal producers, urban and rural workers, women and Black peoples/Afro-descendants, and their organisations. It is founded on a class, feminist, anti-racist, anti-colonialist and internationalist perspective. But food sovereignty also puts these peoples and sectors at the centre of the debate and political actions so that they can continue to produce enough healthy, varied and culturally appropriate food that is accessible to the urban and rural working class. It is important to the concept of food sovereignty that the people producing food enjoy decent living conditions in their territories.

Food sovereignty is born of, and nurtured by, the convergence of social movements and organisations around a common political vision and agenda. That agenda reclaims the political arena and public policies for the sustainability of life and for environmental, social, economic, gender, racial and intergenerational justice, peoples' sovereignty and participation, and internationalism. It demands peoples' right to participate in decision-making. And it brings together grassroots struggles that are defending land, territories, seeds, water and biodiversity, promoting agroecology, local markets, cooperative production and fighting the agribusiness model and neoliberal trade and investment policies.

"Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through socially just, ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their collective right to define their own policies, strategies and systems for food production, distribution and consumption."

Nyéléni Declaration, 2007

People power and food sovereignty

Working towards food sovereignty involves the collective construction of peoples' power, learning from history and from other movements to coordinate joint political actions to change the system. It means getting involved in a battle of ideas: we are arguing for food as a common good and a right; and we are defending territories as spaces of life built by, and for, the peoples and their organisations and movements.

Reclaiming politics includes reclaiming peoples' participation in making public policies and regulations for the development of agroecological food systems, community forest management, production cooperatives, public services and social protection; and for ensuring access to and control over seeds, land, water and other natural commons. Public policies should recognise the indispensable role of social organisations by supporting popular self-organisation.

Transforming the industrialised food system

Food sovereignty is a political movement and a pathway towards the transformation of the agribusiness mode of production, distribution and consumption. It entails collective organising around the sustainability of life and care work. Food sovereignty initiatives develop and scale up the socio-economic relationships between those who produce food on a small scale, and the working class who consume it. These are relationships where solidarity, cooperation, justice, sovereignty, participation, and internationalism take precedence over free markets and trade, profit and individualism. Such initiatives improve peoples' living conditions, recognise women as political subjects, reaffirm their autonomy, and demand the dismantling of the sexual division of labour, in both the private and the public spheres, and an end to the exploitation of women's bodies and work.

Types of food sovereignty initiatives

Across the world peoples' food sovereignty initiatives and projects include: agroecological production; networks to save, reevaluate, produce and exchange seeds; community forest management; local/territorial markets; community-supported agriculture; consumption cooperatives and collectives; urban and rural production cooperatives; solidarity and feminist economy; and worker-owned and managed companies.

Peoples are also struggling for comprehensive and popular agrarian reforms. These would ensure collective access to land and to the means to make the transition to agroecology for those living and working in rural areas, and the 're-peasantization' of agricultural production.[32]

To scale up these initiatives it is crucial to support peasant, family, Indigenous and artisanal producers and workers' organisations to build strong collective political subjects and organisations; bring struggles together through horizontal pedagogies such as peasant-to-peasant exchanges of agroecological knowledge and practices, participatory research systems and agroecology schools; and ensure that peasant-Indigenous-family-artisanal and workers' organisations play the leading role.

Food sovereignty is about system change

Food sovereignty initiatives are essential to systemic solutions. This is because they create spaces to resist the negative impacts of transnational value chains. Local markets are based in the local community, so there is a shorter distance between producer and consumer. They promote better remuneration for peasants, workers, artisans and fisherfolk, and fairer prices for the working classes. Local markets also encourage better social, cultural, political and economic relationships. Shortening distances that goods travel helps tackle the various socio-environmental crises and helps strengthen peoples' control over economic processes from production to consumption. In local markets it is community actors who create and appropriate value, rather than that value being syphoned off into transnational value chains.

The production of food, clothes, utensils, tools and services by communities and workers' collectives and cooperatives is the basis of local economies and food sovereignty in many countries. Building these socio-economic relationships requires making the means of production accessible while also ensuring that produce is commercially viable. Thus, there is a need for state and public institutions to have robust public procurement systems to ensure a stable market for peasant, Indigenous, family and artisanal production, cooperatives, grassroots women's organisations and Afro-descendant communities. Policies for public procurement of food, for example, ensure income for peasants and contribute to the health of working-class children as they can access high-quality, healthy food. Such policies also help peoples reclaim control over the food system, and they strengthen the role of peasant and family farming.

32 "Re-peasantization can be understood as 'the process through which agriculture is restructured as peasant agriculture. It may also refer to a quantitative increase in the number of peasants", Rita Calvário (2017): Food sovereignty and new peasantries: on re-peasantization and counter-hegemonic contestations in the Basque territory, Journal of Peasant Studies, Vol 44, Issue 2.



Local women removing husks from corn, Bantaeng, South Sulawesi, Indonesia.
© Sony Herdiana / Shutterstock

Popular food sovereignty initiatives claim peoples' rights to land, water, seeds and biodiversity as a way to strengthen democratic control over, and care for, territories and collective and public goods. They resist the commodification of lands, forests, water, plants and non-material goods, for example, knowledge, food practices and culture. The political organising needed to manage natural goods collectively is a way of confronting the privatisation of the means of producing and reproducing life. This type of organising is complementary to public management of services for the common good.

Food sovereignty and technology

Food sovereignty reclaims peoples' right to democratically define the course of knowledge and technological development, underscoring its collective nature and the importance of a dialogue between diverse knowledge systems. Food sovereignty does not arise from an opposition to technology – in fact, technological advances in food production have historically come about through peasant, indigenous, family and artisanal producers' collective and creative processes. They are part of the co-evolution of humans and nature.

Agricultural biodiversity and knowledge is fundamental to biodiversity. The peasant food web has bred 7,000 species of domesticated plant species (with 2.1 million varieties), and maintained 50,000–60,000 crop wild relatives. In contrast, the 'industrial food chain' works only 137 crop species, just 16 of which account for 86% of the world's global food production.[33] However, when agribusiness privatises knowledge, science and technology, and when decisions on their development and application are concentrated in the hands of a few profit-driven actors, technological advances often increase exploitation of the working class and nature.

Agroecology and food sovereignty

Agroecology is a key pathway towards food sovereignty. It provides a living, coherent, transdisciplinary and holistic framework for studying practices and their effects, and how food systems can adapt to, and restore, the biocultural systems on which they depend. Fundamental to agroecology are peoples' diverse and collective knowledge, practices and tools.

33 Who Will Feed Us? The Industrial Food Chain vs. The Peasant Food Web

Agroecology: an agenda for political action to build peoples' food sovereignty

As stated in the Nyéléni Declaration of 2015,[34] agroecology is a way of producing food, a way of life, a science, and a movement to transform food systems towards ecological, social, gender, economic, racial and intergenerational justice. The transformative potential of agroecology to feed the world and move away from the destructive industrial food system has been recognised by several scientific and UN reports.[35, 36, 37]

Agroecology follows natural processes to deliver self-sustaining food production. It grows a greater diversity of crops and breeds, drastically reduces the use of externally-purchased inputs, and does not use agrotoxics, antibiotics, artificial hormones, GMOs or other dangerous new technologies. It also recycles nutrients, for example using plant and animal waste as manure.

Agroecology has developed through innovation, research, and crop and livestock selection and breeding by peasant and family farmers, Indigenous Peoples, fisherfolk, pastoralists and others.

Practices include intercropping, traditional fishing and mobile pastoralism, and integrating crops, trees, livestock and fish, manuring, compost, local seeds and animal breeds, etc. The practices are based on principles such as:[38]

- **for peasants, family farmers and other small-scale food producers:** diversifying crop varieties, local seeds and livestock breeds; integrating crops (protein, cereals, pulses, fruits, and vegetables), trees, livestock, fish; manure application and composting; enhancing biological interaction throughout the system; minimising the use of, and dependency on, non-renewable external resources and inputs (e.g. for nutrients and agrotoxics) and dependency on energy from fossil fuel; rainwater harvesting; community ecosystem monitoring; solar food drying and storage; agroforestry.
- **for traditional, artisanal or small-scale fisheries:** community-based management to conserve and regenerate fish populations, fishing grounds, coral reefs, mangrove swamps and other fish habitats.
- **for traditional migratory and cross-border pastoralism:** conservation of grazing territories and their use for meat, milk, fibre and fuel.
- **for forest dwellers:** living from the diversity of non-timber forest products and preserving biodiversity.
- **for Indigenous Peoples:** access to natural resources in their territories, in particular for hunting and gathering.

These practices have benefits such as reduced costs, autonomy from corporations, diversified income streams, risk management for crop failures, and varied produce to improve nutrition. Agroecology also has the potential to regenerate ecosystems which have been devastated by industrial farming.



Exchange of Native Seeds and Experiences in Agroecology, El Salvador. **© Martín Drago / Friends of the Earth International**

34 In 2015, delegates representing diverse organisations and international movements of small-scale food producers and consumers gathered in Nyéléni Centre in Sélingué, Mali, to come to a common understanding of agroecology as a key element in the construction of Food Sovereignty, and to develop joint strategies to promote Agroecology.
35 HLPE. 2019. Agroecological and other innovative approaches for sustainable agriculture and food systems that enhance food security and nutrition. A report by the High-Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security, Rome. (Available at: http://www.fao.org/3/ca5602en/ca5602en.pdf)
36 IPBES. 2019. Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. Bonn.
37 IPCC. 2019. Climate Change and Land: IPCC special report on climate change, desertification, land degradation, sustainable land management, food security, and greenhouse gas fluxes in terrestrial ecosystems.
38 Agroecology: Innovating for sustainable agriculture and food systems - Friends of the Earth International

As a **way of life or socio-economic system**, agroecology:

- values the life of peoples and planet over profit;
- is based on a long-term vision that goes beyond agriculture to transform the whole food system;
- draws on social, economic, political and ecological approaches, integrating them with ancestral and customary knowledge and practices of peasants, Indigenous Peoples and other small-scale food providers;
- is based on shared principles but practised according to the reality and culture of each people's territories, while respecting nature and common, shared values;[39]
- requires the re-shaping of markets so that they are based on the principles of solidarity economy and the ethics of responsible production and consumption, promoting direct and fair, short distribution chains;
- creates space and power for women and youth to take leadership;
- ensures justice and dignity for workers;
- implies full recognition of peoples' autonomy;
- has collective rights and access to the commons as fundamental pillars.

As a **social movement**, agroecology is

- an agenda for action to challenge and transform structures of power and to put the control of seeds, biodiversity, land and territories, waters, knowledge, culture and the commons in the hands of the peoples; that is, to achieve food sovereignty.
- led by peasant, family, Indigenous and artisanal food producers, and workers and their allies.
- seeks to transform our food systems rather than reform the industrial models.
- includes the struggle for gender justice and to dismantle patriarchy, offering a pathway towards women's autonomy and rights.
- scaled up by collective organisation and action into local food economies that challenge corporate control of our food system.

Agroecology follows natural processes to deliver self-sustaining food production. It grows a greater diversity of crops and breeds, drastically reduces the use of externally-purchased inputs, and does not use agrotoxics, antibiotics, artificial hormones, GMOs or other dangerous new technologies. It also recycles nutrients, for example using plant and animal waste as manure.

39 Agroecology: Innovating for sustainable agriculture and food systems - Friends of the Earth International

Pathways to peoples' food sovereignty

Friends of the Earth International is committed to food sovereignty initiatives as a key pathway to transform the system. We work hand in hand with our strategic ally, La Vía Campesina, and are part of a strong and growing food sovereignty movement led by peasant, family, Indigenous and artisanal food producers and workers.

Through campaigning and advocacy, supporting grassroots struggles, exposing corporate power and injustice, organising, and building movements for change, we demand: food for people, not for profit; value and support for peasant, family, Indigenous and artisanal producers and workers; recognition of women's role and autonomy; dismantling of the sexual division of labour and an end to the exploitation of women's bodies and work; re-localisation of food systems; democratised control and ownership of decision-making and resources related to food; respect and support for grassroots knowledge and innovation; harmony with nature through agroecology.

To these ends, we demand that governments enact public policies and measures for:

Pathway 01

Social protection and the right to healthy culturally appropriate food for all

- Ensure access for all to healthy and nutritious food, water, health care services and housing, guaranteeing no evictions.
- Implement, improve and expand public programmes for children and for all those going hungry or losing their livelihoods.
- Control the price of food and other commodities and prevent speculation.

Pathway 02

Guaranteeing fair incomes for producers, and rights and decent living conditions for workers

- Ensure stable and decent incomes for peasant, family and artisanal food producers.
- Ensure the employment and minimum income of workers, whether in formal or informal conditions, including social security.
- Provide specific protection for seasonal and displaced internal or external migrant workers with documentation problems, or residents in precarious situations.

Pathway 03

Grant rights, access and control over land, territories, seeds, water and biodiversity to local communities, peasant, fisherfolk, family farmers, cooperative and other small-scale food production and distribution

- Act on the recommendation by the High-Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the UN Committee on World Food Security that all governments have to "support local communities and citizens to increase local food production (including home and community gardens) through appropriate stimulus packages (in cash and kind) to enhance food resilience".[40]
- Prioritise peasant, family and artisanal food production and distribution to local consumers as indispensable to ensuring the right to healthy and nutritious food.
- Ensure the functioning of local markets and direct sales, including support for new protection standards for everyone involved.
- Strengthen decentralised and mobile public procurement programmes that can guarantee sales for peasant, family and artisanal producers and make healthy and nutritious food available for the people who need it most.

40 CFS High-Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and nutrition (HLPE) (2020) Impact of COVID-19 on Food Security and Nutrition (FSN), Interim Issues Paper Version 1. Page 7. Available at: https://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/cfs/Docs1920/Chair/HLPE_English.pdf

- Ensure access to optimal land for food production, especially for women and young people.
- Implement programmes for the rescue and exchange of native and criollo seeds.
- Improve irrigation, road and storage infrastructure.
- Facilitate access to credit and financing.
- Implement programmes to support peasant, family agriculture and artisanal production and workers' organisations.

Pathway 04

Support peasant, fisherfolks and other small-scale food producers producers to transition to agroecological food systems

- Taking account of the links between the recent epidemics, new epizootics and agribusiness (either via destruction of habitats and/or livestock farm intensification), we demand immediate measures to start a transition to agroecological food systems and to move away from the industrial agriculture model.
- Ensure access to optimal land for food production, especially for women and youth.
- Implement programmes for the rescue and exchange of native and local seeds.
- Implement programmes to support peasant, family agriculture and artisanal production organisations.
- Support the expansion of local and peasant markets to bring producers and consumers closer together.
- Strengthen/create training programmes in agroecological peasant production for young people.
- Support participatory research for the development of agroecology.

Pathway 05

Stop agribusiness expansion and neoliberal trade and investment policies

- Stop the rollback of environmental regulations, for example on agrotoxicos, deforestation and pollution.
- Stop trade and investment agreements that boost the expansion of the industrial agrifood system and harm peasant, family and artisanal production.
- Freeze subsidies for agribusiness transnational corporations, their parent companies and the national links in their value chains.



Ibu Rumsiah from Kalimantan, Indonesia, resisting the Indramayu coal fired power plant.
© Luka Tomac / Friends of the Earth International



Women transplanting tomatoes at a farm in the Upper East Region in Navrongo, Ghana.
© Hamish John Appleby / IWMI

case study

Agroecology, climate & gender justice
Ghana

In Ghana small-scale farmers produce 80% of the country's food. Some 70% of subsistence crop farmers are women and many live in poverty.

Traditional practices such as seed-saving are under threat from big agribusiness and companies dealing in genetic modification. Ghana is also highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, experiencing prolonged droughts and floods.[41] A lack of crop diversity puts the country at a particular risk of food shortages when climate shocks hit.

Most support for Ghana's agricultural workers goes towards larger, commercial farmers (usually men), neglecting small-scale, women farmers.

Food sovereignty, gender and climate justice go hand in hand

Recognising this, Friends of the Earth Ghana decided to take a systemic approach. To address gender and climate injustice, and ensure food sovereignty for Ghanaian communities, the group focused on training and supporting women to access new, sustainable agriculture techniques.

Through training and skills-building, rural women were better equipped to voice their needs. As skilled

41 Climate Change Profile: Ghana - Relief Web



To honour and protect traditional seeds and knowledge, Friends of the Earth Ghana also supported farmers to establish community-level seed-saving facilities. These measures pave the way for better crop diversity and improved food security. With a wider range of crops, better preparedness for climate impacts, and access to food processing facilities, the women can add value to their produce, granting them more economic independence and security.

Calling for system change globally

Friends of the Earth International is part of a strong and growing movement led by peasant, family, Indigenous and artisanal food producers and workers, which includes the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC) and the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism for relations with the UN Committee on World Food Security.

By mobilising in this global policy making space, Friends of the Earth is able to bring the grassroots struggles and solutions to the international level as part of the pathways to system change.



Left: Farmers working in their village gardens of Cyeza, Muhanga, Rwanda. **© Sarine Arslanian / Shutterstock**

Below: Agroecological farming in Namaacha, Mozambique. **© Amelia Collins / Friends of the Earth International**

advocates, women are active in policy making, and demand support to enable them to adapt to climate change. Practical training and support were also given to women across the country. Tree seedlings for agroforestry products and food processing facilities were made available for them to use.

Women lead the way in balancing human and planetary needs

The farmers are now putting new skills to use, planting trees on their lands, practising sustainable agriculture and agroforestry and adapting their farming systems.





Protestors with seeds at the United Nations climate negotiations in Durban.
© Luka Tomac / Friends of the Earth International

Protecting people & biodiversity through community forest management

05

Half of the world's forests have disappeared and we are witnessing an unprecedented extinction of species with birds, mammals, and amphibians going extinct at least 100 to 1,000 times faster than in the previous million years.[42] The drivers of this rapid destruction of our natural world are overconsumption, chemical use, exports of meat and crops such as soy and palm oil, large-scale plantations, privatisation, mega infrastructure projects and mining.



Yet forests provide livelihoods for over 1 billion people, many local communities and Indigenous Peoples. They help to regulate our climate, and are home to some of the most species-diverse habitats on Earth.

Friends of the Earth International works with local communities and Indigenous Peoples to defend forests and strengthen communities' rights and community forest management. We campaign against industrial large-scale plantations, monoculture, destructive logging and the commodification and financialisation of forests and biodiversity.

We urgently need to protect forests and biodiversity in our fight for a sustainable future for everybody. One of the most important ways of doing this is through community forest management (CFM).

Community forest management: balancing human needs and nature

Community forest management is a cultural, spiritual and historical practice and way of life developed by Indigenous Peoples and local communities. Through CFM, Indigenous Peoples and local communities manage their territories in ways that conserve nature while providing social, environmental, cultural and even economic benefits.

Community forest management is also a critical tool in the drive to reach the internationally agreed target of stopping deforestation by 2030. At present communities manage only around 8% of the world's forests. To meet the 2030 target, more of the world's forests need to be formally in the care of communities and Indigenous Peoples.

To defend, promote and strengthen CFM is to show that it is possible to live in harmony with nature. It is not limited to managing forests and the timber in them; it is a holistic approach, encompassing water, biodiversity, and sacred places. It relates to appropriate technologies, ancestral knowledge and community planning and resource use. All of this goes beyond the kind of forestry referred to as 'sustainable forest management', which too often is about serving the interests of corporations at the expense of forests and communities.

Community forest management draws on the historical struggle of Indigenous Peoples and local communities to protect their ways of life and to resist the exploitation of nature. Their struggle, in turn, has helped other social actors commit to building popular power. And that power is what is needed to transform societies, structuring them around the sustainability of life, environmental, social-economic and gender justice, peoples' sovereignty and participation, and internationalism.

Neoliberalism sees nature as an entity separate from humanity; some see it simply as a provider of economically quantifiable ecological services. According to this view, humanity needs nature, but is not part of it; nature needs to be managed, with parks under private or military control, while Indigenous Peoples living in forests and other ecosystems are represented as detrimental to nature.[43]

This model has been shown not to work. It leads to greater exploitation of nature and fails to recognise that the people who live in and with nature are the ones who protect it the most.[44] CFM is not something new; it is an age-old practice proven over centuries to contribute to the protection of all ecosystems. Protecting what has been proven to work is worth more than inventing new practices, technologies or ways of life.

Why community forest management is a transformative solution

Community forest management is about political power. CFM involves Indigenous Peoples and communities having political control over their territories and resources through horizontal decision-making, transparency and accountability. The territory becomes a central space to build power and popular sovereignty. Peoples' solutions challenge the logic that the territory is simply a space to occupy and use to increase profit. They are committed to reclaiming territories as spaces for the production and reproduction of life and the production of materials; and as spaces to create the political and social conditions for rights to be realised and needs to be satisfied.

CFM strengthens collective rights and community organisation. Through CFM Indigenous Peoples and communities get to define their own ways of organising, their mechanisms for accountability, and how benefits are shared. CFM demands orderly administration and processes of self-governance, and holistic policies that ensure sustainability, fair distribution and respect for the territory and its resources. Rights to land, self-determination, ways of life and traditional knowledge are strengthened; as is the right to binding consultation on any proposed project or policy that will affect the territory or the community. Without these rights CFM would not be possible. States must therefore guarantee the conditions for these rights to be upheld.

Community forest management promotes gender justice. Autonomous and participatory decision-making is a key element in CFM. It is important that all groups in a community, including women, take part in these processes around forest management. However, women often face limitations to participation in decision-making spaces; and women's voices are often replaced by men's. CFM can contribute to gender justice, for example, by strengthening and implementing women's rights, the use of the forest and its resources and community representation vis-à-vis other communities.

"Framing community forest management with a feminist perspective allows us to see nature from other angles that are also implicit in caring for forests; to do so through emotions, sensibility, spiritual practice. It allows us to see ourselves again and recognise ourselves."

Theiva Lingam, Friends of the Earth Malaysia / Sahabat Alam Malaysia.[45]

Community forest management contributes to social and economic justice. There are many examples of communities around the world whose lives are better when they control their natural resources. Rural populations, particularly those referred to as poor according to their economic resources, often have a symbiotic relationship with their local environments. For them, poverty is more than the lack of money or possessions; it is directly related to their access to natural resources and their involvement in decision-making over these resources. CFM is closely associated with local use of a resource, where the natural rhythm of the forest is respected and its biodiversity can thrive. It is not designed to supply the production and consumption chains of the dominant capitalist markets, or compete in those markets. Instead, it is grounded in local markets that often generate economies founded on solidarity.

43 FAO - IDFAC (FAO and IDFAC. 2021. Indigenous and tribal peoples and forest governance. An opportunity for climate action in Latin America and the Caribbean. Santiago. FAO.; Pagdeea, A. (2006. What Makes Community Forest Management Successful: A Meta-Study From Community Forests Throughout the World. Society & Natural Resour- ces: An International Journal. Vol 19(1): pp33-52) and Friends of the Earth International (Community Forest Management, an opportunity to conserve and restore resources vital to the Good Living of human societies; 2018; Forty years of community forestry, a study of its scope and effectiveness; Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, written by Don Gilmour, Rome, 2016, 188 pages.
44 Community forest management - Friends of the Earth International
45 Gender Justice and Community Forest Management - Friends of the Earth International



John Muyisha and his community in Kalangala, Uganda, have lost their land. One day, BIDCO, a Kenyan company, arrived and told him that the land was now theirs.
© Jason Taylor / Friends of the Earth International

Community forest management is rooted in community and place. CFM tends to be characterised by strong ties between a community, their territory and their ancestors. Ancestry relates to many aspects of life including energy, health, identity, culture, the spiritual and freedom itself. It can be the basis of a community's values and rules, and therefore can facilitate effective community governance of the territory. In fact some researchers suggest a community's 'social heritage' relates directly to the success of its resource management, including through CFM.[46] 'Social heritage' generally refers to the number of links and social norms of a community or social group. The richer this tapestry, the more trust exists within the community, and therefore the easier it will be to maintain accountability and community control.

CFM enriches agroecological approaches and promotes sustainable economies. CFM relates closely to other solutions, sharing common principles such as collectivity, resistance to oppression and the building of more just and equitable societies.

CFM has clear environmental benefits. Forests, biodiversity, water, and climate all benefit from CFM.[47] These natural goods are taken care of so that they continue to benefit the whole community. They remain a common good.

- **Preventing deforestation and forest degradation.** A comparative study[48] that analysed satellite images of 40 protected areas and 33 CFM schemes in Mexico, South America, Africa and Asia concluded that the areas under CFM had a lower annual deforestation rate, and one that was less variable than areas under absolute protection regimes. Forests under absolute protection had a deforestation rate of 1.47% while areas managed by communities limited deforestation to 0.24%. The authors point out that absolute conservation is beneficial in specific cases but that it should be integrated with CFM in regional conservation strategies. They state that "CFM is a key tool to take into account within national strategies to stop deforestation."
- **Conserving and enhancing biodiversity.** CFM has a direct impact on the conservation of biodiversity in forests. But there's more: communities linked to the forest make use of biodiversity often based on ancestral knowledge, enhancing and shaping the biodiversity of the forests where they live. An analysis[49] of over 500 experiences of 'common heritage' management around the world, whether of territories, forests or fisheries, concluded that "most of these groups showed essential features to improve community wellbeing and obtained beneficial results both in economic terms and in terms of improvement of resources such as water basins, forests and pest management."
- **Stabilising the climate.** Forests are a highly effective safeguard against climate change: they regulate the water cycle and basins and aquifers. They also help prevent and alleviate disasters caused by floods, tsunamis and landslides. Forests are an important reservoir of carbon and deforestation is one of the most significant sources of emissions. So avoiding deforestation is essential in tackling climate change. CFM must be a key component in any serious strategy to avoid deforestation at global level.



Above: Man with a basket of fish.
© La Vía Campesina



Right: Women fisherfolk conducting a workshop using mangrove resource, Sahabat Alam Malaysia.
© Friends of the Earth Malaysia

47 Forest governance by indigenous and tribal peoples. An opportunity for climate action in Latin America and the Caribbean - FAO
48 Porter-Bolland L. et al, 2012. Land use, cover change, deforestation, protected areas, community forestry, tenure rights, tropical forests. Forest ecology and management. Vol 268:6-17. In Amigos de la Tierra Internacional, El manejo comunitario de bosque. una oportunidad para conservar y restaurar recursos vitales para el Buen Vivir de las sociedades humanas, 2018, p.9
49 Pretty J., 2003. Social Capital and the Collective Management of Resources. Sciencie #302, Dic 2003, 1912-1913. In Amigos de la Tierra, op.cit, p.10

Friends of the Earth International has identified the following forests and biodiversity-related pathways towards system change

Pathways at the local level

Pathway 01

Increase Indigenous Peoples' and local communities' control of territories, work collaboratively with Indigenous Peoples and local communities to increase capacity, build and reinforce social movement alliances.

Pathways at the national level

Pathway 02

Strengthen national legislation and public policies to promote and facilitate CFM.

Pathway 03

Respect and implement the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities to land, self-determination, traditional knowledge and binding consultation on any proposed project or policy that will affect the territory.

Pathway 04

Pass national legislation and policies to limit corporate control of forests and biodiversity.

Pathways at the international level

Pathway 05

Stop carbon markets, false solutions, certification schemes, corporate control and corporate activities that affect Indigenous Peoples, local communities, forests and biodiversity.

Pathway 06

Agree to an ambitious rights-based UN global convention on biodiversity with the aims of ensuring we live within planetary boundaries; addressesing the root causes and direct drivers of biodiversity loss and promoting agroecology and other community-based solutions.



Food sovereignty workshop on seeds. **© Redes / Friends of the Earth Uruguay**



Ibu Mardiana from Tamiang Layang village, Indonesia.
© Luka Tomac / Friends of the Earth International

case study

Community forest management: turning the tide on deforestation

Indonesia

Indonesia has one of the highest deforestation rates in the world. 15.8 million hectares of forest were lost between 2000 and 2012.[50] Deforestation is primarily caused by big businesses clearing land for palm oil and other plantations, logging for timber unsustainably and carrying out major mining projects.

For decades Friends of the Earth Indonesia/WALHI has been developing a community-led model to protect the country's forests. It is based on recognising the land rights of subsistence farmers, collective management of non-timber forest products and traditional knowledge. WALHI is currently working with farmers and peasant unions across the country to defend land rights and promote community control of natural resources. WALHI supports their struggle by providing free legal services, training in community organising and connecting local producers directly with consumers.

By developing land rights together with community forest management the aim is to secure people's livelihoods and the environment at the same time. Their approach is working. Not only have individual communities won land rights in the courts, but families have benefited from improved vegetable sales. This model is already being massively scaled up due to its success. The government has promised 12.7 million hectares of forest area for community forest management.[51]

50 Deforestation accelerates in Indonesia, finds Google forest map - Mongabay
51 Gov't Allocates 12.7 Million Hectares for Social Forestry- Cabinet Secretariat of Republic of Indonesia



disputes between state and private corporations controlled by oligarchs, and limited resources owned by the community and supporting institutions. This inspiring initiative has achieved so much on the pathway to systemic change, but much more is needed to be done.

Mobilising at the international level for system change

Friends of the Earth International builds on this national work with global advocacy at the UN Convention on Biodiversity. The Global Biodiversity Framework encourages states to recognise and respect the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, including over their traditional territories, particularly related to land-based conservation. Peoples around the world can use this to win recognition for and access to land. Mobilising to call for system change in international fora such as these, Friends of the Earth International and allies are able to advocate for the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities in the fight for a sustainable world with societies living in harmony with nature.



Left: Palm oil protest, COP 21, Paris, 2015. **© Luka Tomac / Friends of the Earth International**

Below: Pa Yusep in an abandoned mine bordering rainforest near Gunung Karasik village, Indonesia **© Luka Tomac / Friends of the Earth International**



In 2022, the total area of community based managed areas assisted by Friends of the Earth Indonesia/WALHI has reached 1.1 million ha. A total of 161,019 households from 28 provinces benefit from the protection and development provided by this Community-based Area Management.[52] Yet many of the community lands for redistribution are still waiting for permits. The biggest challenges in efforts to protect and develop the Community-based Area Management are the existence of poor regulation, land

52 Community based area management - Walhi



'Stop the Trojan Treaty!' protest against TTIP.
© Lode Saidane / Friends of the Earth Europe

Transforming our economy to put people & planet first

06

To realise economic justice and free ourselves from neoliberalism and harmful capital accumulation, economic strategies need to be distributive and regenerative by design.



The world is facing many destructive and linked crises including growing inequality, climate change, poverty, pollution and human rights violations. The current economic system is perpetuating and exacerbating these crises.

Economic justice solutions aim to meet peoples' needs, improve peoples' wellbeing and guarantee environmental, social and gender justice. Real solutions put people and the planet at the centre of economic systems and expand the role of cooperation, community management, workers' control, public services and sustainable planning in all aspects of life.

Thousands of practical solutions exist based on the needs and cultures of different peoples. Our challenge is to scale up the impact of these solutions to achieve the transition needed for system change.

Friends of the Earth International has identified five key pathways towards the systemic transformation of our economies[53]

Pathway 01

Provide public services for all through tax justice and debt cancellation

From health clinics in South Africa and clean water in Uruguay to public transport in Vienna, public services are necessary for hundreds of millions of people around the world.[54] They also drive economic activity and so can play a leading role in the shift towards a more sustainable economy.

We must ensure peoples' rights and reclaim the public sphere and political arena from an economic justice perspective. Public services can be used to guarantee peoples' access to water, health, energy, education, communication, transport and food. These are the basic necessities for human existence. The effectiveness of public services relies on real democratic systems and the meaningful participation of communities and peoples in budgeting, planning and implementation.

To pay for public services we need a fair, transparent and redistributive tax system. Tax justice is one of the most effective ways to build a more sustainable society. History has shown that we cannot and must not count on the charity of the wealthy. Even today, many large corporations evade or avoid paying tax. This must be rectified through significant taxes on multinational corporations, financial transactions, capital gains, inheritance and the wealthy elite. Friends of the Earth International calculates that revenue lost between 2015 and 2030 to tax havens could power half the world with 100% socially-controlled renewable energy.[55]

53 Friends of the Earth International, 2018. Transforming our economy: Scaling up the solutions
54 Friends of the Earth International, 2018. Transforming our economy: Scaling up the solutions
55 An Energy Revolution is possible: tax havens and financing climate action - Friends of the Earth International

Unjust debt has often been used as a tool of exploitation and continues to undermine public budgets, particularly in Southern countries. To enable public services to realise peoples' rights, the global South's debt must be cancelled, and the principles of climate reparations and ecological debt applied.

Pathway 02

Scale up economies based on social ownership and cooperativism

More than 1 billion people worldwide are already members of cooperatives.[56] Cooperatives are worker-controlled workplaces, but they are also a political, social and economic movement. Based on the principles of collective power, horizontal decision-making, women's autonomy, transparency, sustainability and the redistribution of economic returns, cooperatives allow us to reclaim popular control over the economy. By removing profit as an overriding goal, cooperatives allow workers to pursue other social and environmental goals and values. They are living proof that other ways of organising our productive activity are possible.

Yet without sufficient support cooperative initiatives can struggle to grow from small projects to transformative solutions with a broader social and economic impact. We must ensure that the social economy has access to finance and supportive regulation, learning from emerging 'sharing cities' such as Seoul and Amsterdam. In Quebec, Canada, 10% of all economic activity comes from the solidarity economy,[57] and in Brazil it has lifted millions of people out of poverty.[58]

An exciting new development is the reclaiming of science, knowledge and technology through creative commons. Social ownership of technology enables millions of people to benefit from scientific advances - examples include open-source free word-processing software used by tens of millions, open design, Wikipedia, and the Linux computer system that is the backbone of the internet.

Pathway 03

Support local markets, fair trade and reclaim the territory

A transformed economic system will be based on sustainable local and regional economies linked through equitable trade relations.

Trade liberalisation has rigged the game, writing the rules in favour of multinational companies and debasing social and environmental standards. Harmful policies like Investor State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) enable multinational corporations to sue governments for enacting public policies. This must be stopped.

We need an international trade system based on cooperation, not competition. By reclaiming control of our territories and cities, prioritising sustainable local economic activity and building global solidarity, we can transform trade into exchanges with the potential to foster the equitable distribution of products, skills and creativity. We must establish the primacy of human rights obligations over trade and investment agreements and over trade policies that enable governments to trade in environmentally and socially harmful products.[59]

Locally-owned businesses and community actors enrich whole communities because they enable wealth to circulate locally, leading to more decent jobs and a thriving local economy. A study by the University of California revealed that when consumers bought produce from local farmers markets, twice as much money stayed in the community.[60] Supermarkets and transnational corporations recycle a much smaller share of their revenue back into the local economy. Local production and consumption also lead to lower carbon emissions, and strengthen food sovereignty, protecting the rights and livelihoods of small-scale producers. Public procurement policies to buy food directly from local agroecological peasant and other producers, especially women, are key to local production systems that are just and respect territories. Cities offer increasing opportunities to strengthen this local and territorial economy, with numerous initiatives happening across the world.

56 Dave Grace & Associates, 2014. Measuring the Size and Scope of the Cooperative Economy, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, page 1
57 Walljasper, J, 2017. What Quebec Can Teach Us About Creating a More Equitable Economy, Shareables, 11 April 2017
58 Lopes, A M, 2014. Solidarity-Based Economy and Social Inclusion: Unisol Brazil, a New Kind of Brazilian Cooperatives, International Training Centre- International Labour Organisation, 2014, page 44
59 Trade:time fora newvision - The alternative Trade Mandate
60 Hardesty, S. et al, 2016. Economic Impact of Local Food Producers in the Sacramento Region, University of California, UCDAVIS, UCCE, September 2016, page 1

Pathway 04

Change the goal of the economy to put people and planet first

We need a new economic paradigm that puts peoples' rights and living within planetary boundaries first, not profit or economic growth. For too long, a narrow, neoclassical and neoliberal economic ideology has dominated, and has contributed to the current inequality, overconsumption and climate crises. It is time to reclaim economics from a justice perspective. Embracing these approaches implies shifting to alternative measures of wellbeing and economic progress to replace gross domestic product (GDP) as the default indicator. New economic indicators should value domestic labour, include environmental health and measure inequality. They should be built through democratic processes that include all voices, including women, working class, anti-colonial, and racial justice perspectives that have been excluded from mainstream economic theory.

We demand a new economics for people and planet which values the reproduction of life; recognises our interdependence as human beings; and re-organises the care and domestic work traditionally undertaken by women so that the responsibility is shared between men, women and the state. This transformation is essential to building our resilience against health and environmental crises. The new economic paradigm is already being built in universities, cities, communities, and province-level governments. Our challenge is to scale it up to reclaim economics systemically.

Pathway 05

Ensure binding rules to dismantle the power of big business

Ending the impunity of transnational companies which dominate the economy, violate human rights and destroy the environment is crucial to systemic change. To transform the economy we need binding rules to dismantle the power of big business.

Many transnational corporations (TNCs) are now richer and more powerful than the states trying to regulate them. TNCs are rarely held to account for their violations. This is a result of weak human rights and environmental laws, and states' failure to enforce them, plus harmful free trade and investment agreements.

Friends of the Earth International is part of a global movement of more than 800 organisations, along with the UN Human Rights Council, the Vatican and many governments, fighting to establish a new, legally-binding international treaty. The treaty would place binding rules on big business, curbing the power of TNCs and providing affected peoples with access to justice, compensation and renewal of their livelihoods. There are also many struggles happening at the national and regional level to demand rights for people and rules for corporations.

East Dudhipur village community meeting, Bangladesh.
© Luka Tomac / Friends of the Earth International





Eric Dooh overlooking the oil devastated landscape of the Goi community. Eric Dooh became one of the plaintiffs in the case against Shell.
© Amelia Collins / Friends of the Earth International

case study

Game-changing win against Shell

The Netherlands

In a historic step towards a liveable future for everyone, led by Friends of the Earth Netherlands we took energy giant Shell to court for causing climate change - and won. In May 2021 the District Court of the Hague, The Netherlands, held Shell liable for causing dangerous climate change. It ruled that by 2030 the company must slash its carbon dioxide emissions by 45% compared with 2019.[61]

It is the first time a court has ruled that a major polluter must align its plans with the Paris climate agreement. It's also the first time a change in policy - rather than compensation - has been demanded from a polluting company.

The verdict has enormous consequences for other big polluters globally, setting a legal precedent around accountability and responsibility in supply chains. It could trigger a wave of litigation to force others to stop extracting and burning fossil fuels. And with just 25 fossil fuel companies and state-owned entities responsible for more than half the world's greenhouse gas emissions, we could be witnessing a tipping point.[62]

61 Historic victory: judge forces Shell to drastically reduce CO2 emissions - Friends of the Earth International
62 Just 100 companies responsible for 71% of global emissions, study says | Guardian sustainable business



The verdict sends a clear signal that the rules of the game have changed: profit can no longer be pursued at the expense of the climate. Our hope is that this verdict will inspire a wave of climate litigation against big polluters globally, forcing them to stop extracting and burning fossil fuels. This is system change in action.

Mobilising for internationally binding rules on business

National legal victories are not enough, we need international action to stop corporate human rights violations. We need collective global action to challenge the power of transnational corporations. In 2014, a people's victory was celebrated at the United Nations Human Rights Council: the adoption of Resolution 26/9.[63] This established a new Intergovernmental Working Group (IGWG) to develop an international legally binding instrument to regulate transnational corporations and other companies with respect to human rights.[64] Annually Friends of the Earth International joins the Global Campaign to Reclaim Peoples' Sovereignty, Dismantle Corporate Power and End Impunity to participate in negotiations and mobilise for a binding treaty to stop corporate impunity.



Left: Standing hand-in-hand for a just transition. **© Friends of the Earth Netherlands / Milieudefensie**

Below: Milieudefensie celebrating outside court. **© Friends of the Earth Netherlands / Milieudefensie**



Grassroots mobilisation leads to transformation

This is no overnight success. We can draw a direct line between the Shell verdict and years of grassroots activism and advocacy of which Friends of the Earth International has been part. This is the movement that has consistently pushed for international agreement on just and ambitious emissions targets and for national laws to galvanise action on the ground.

63 Elaboration of an international legally binding instrument on transnational corporations and other business enterprises with respect to human rights A/HRC/RES/26/9 | UN Human Rights
64 Open-ended intergovernmental working group on transnational corporations and other business enterprises with respect to human rights | OHCHR



Giving voice to the voiceless in Guatemala.
© Friends of the Earth Spain

Internationalist solidarity

07

Our Internationalist Solidarity System serves to respond rapidly to violations and mobilise internationalist support for threatened peoples and communities, according to their needs and wishes.[65]

65 Internationalist solidarity - Friends of the Earth International



Working on internationalist solidarity means accompanying struggles against injustice in any part of the world, feeling them as our own causes. As individuals, we play an important role in organising ourselves for the transformation of our societies in pursuit of system change. Solidarity means standing up and mobilising against all forms of oppression, such as patriarchy, racism, colonialism, and against the violence exercised against our peoples that aim to take away our capacity to organise and struggle.

Our Internationalist Solidarity System (ISS) arose from the need to give an internationalist response to the current political-economic context. The world has witnessed a resurgence of conservative ideologies and a rise in neo-fascist, authoritarian power. The growing demand for natural resources is driving land grabbing and the exploitation of nature, while threatening and systematically attacking peoples and communities who defend their territories and rights. In 2020 alone, Global Witness recorded 227 lethal attacks – an average of more than four people a week – linked to the exploitation of natural resources.[66]

We support our member groups in preventing violations, and fighting the interests of transnational corporations and states that are complicit in such crimes. Through our Internationalist Solidarity System we ensure that defenders of territories and peoples' rights, together with their communities and social movements, have the capacity to pursue a system change agenda, aimed at protecting the environment and securing collective rights. Through the ISS, we can respond rapidly to violations and mobilise internationalist support for threatened communities, according to their needs and wishes.

Realising this solidarity means articulated action among social movements and organisations to demand social, environmental, economic and gender justice and to defend the sovereignty of peoples around the world. It means organising ourselves to raise our voices, denounce injustice and effectively support those who suffer injustice, oppression, persecution and rights violations.

Our Internationalist Solidarity System is led by a decentralised team, acting from the local up to the global level. It works through four main axes: political formation; documentation and analysis; rapid response; and mobilisation.

- **Political formation** seeks to expand the political awareness of defenders and educate the general public about their role as political subjects. We use popular education methods, informed by up-to-date political context analysis with particular focus on the rights of peoples and defenders. We host spaces for learning and exchange, such as workshops, webinars and events, often with allied movements such as La Vía Campesina and World March of Women.

66 The industries causing the climate crisis and attacks against defenders | Global Witness

- **Documentation and analysis** involves mapping and analysing patterns of threats and violence against defenders. We are building an evidence base and collective history of struggles against injustice worldwide, which exposes the systemic nature of attacks. This helps us to anticipate and prevent attacks, and can be used to push for measures that address the root causes of injustices. It will strengthen social movements with a collective understanding and more capacity to act in internationalist solidarity.
- **Rapid response mechanisms** are in place for emergency situations faced by defenders, their families and communities. Responses include immediate security measures, relief assistance and ongoing monitoring and support for justice processes.
- **Mobilising political action** means getting activists, groups and social movements to act together, with coherent messages and collective demands.

When a request for solidarity comes to the ISS, the team assesses the situation and decides the short and long term response – from providing funds to secure a person in danger, to asking groups to write letters to pressure governments, or using social media to voice demands and attract attention. We are strategic in the use of different entry points for exerting political pressure – governments, UN special rapporteurs, European-level mechanisms, and the general public.

Friends of the Earth International values the recent advances in the international recognition of individual human and collective rights. However, despite progress in creating legal frameworks to address rights issues, violations continue and are even increasing due to the current global model of production and consumption that is imposed by neoliberal economic globalisation. We work to promote the concepts of environmental rights and environmental justice, and work for the recognition of new rights. We believe that the only way to tackle the interconnected global crises of climate, biodiversity, food, economy, care, and values, is through system change, grounded in internationalist solidarity.



A rallying cry for life: Thousands of people gathered on the Environmental Axis of Avenida Jiménez for a historic mobilisation during the National Strike in Bogotá, 4 December 2019.
© Alfonso Cañón / Equipo de comunicaciones Censat Agua Viva

case study

Internationalist solidarity with the People's uprising
Colombia

In 2020 Colombia exploded in mass protest, with millions taking to the streets against three decades of neoliberalism that had stripped back public services and left more than half the country living in poverty.[67] The government has also failed to comply with the peace agreements signed with the FARC in 2016.

Yet this people-powered movement faced severe repression. In December 2020, we joined CENSAT Agua Viva/Friends of the Earth Colombia in categorically condemning the systematic violence inflicted by the government and urgently called for a redoubling of internationalist efforts in support of the Colombian people. Our member groups joined solidarity protests happening around the world and sent letters to Colombian embassies stating:

67 Internationalist solidarity to condemn systematic violence against the Colombian people - Friends of the Earth International



"We are monitoring with concern the grave situation of human rights violations caused by the disproportionate use of force by officers of the law. According to the NGO Temblores, in six days of demonstrations, there have been 1181 cases of police violence, including 142 victims of physical violence, 761 arbitrary detentions, 216 violent interventions by security forces, 56 cases of firearms discharged, 9 victims of sexual violence, 17 victims of eye injuries, 56 complaints of disappearances in the context of the demonstrations, and 26 homicides. A government that resorts to military force to quiet the demands of its people is not a democratic one. We call on the Iván Duque administration to uphold its international human rights obligations, put an immediate stop to the assassination of demonstrators, and provide guarantees of the right to protest and mobilise."

In May 2021, we reiterated this call and showed solidarity with the national strike and mobilisations against President Duque's tax reform bill.[68] Our film *Colombia on Fire to Defy Neoliberalism* sought to raise awareness of and show solidarity with the peoples' struggle.[69]

68 Internationalist solidarity to condemn systematic violence against the Colombian people - Friends of the Earth International
69 Colombia on fire to defy neoliberalism - Friends of the Earth International



Women going through the TOSTAN Community Empowerment Programme, where participants learn about their rights.
© Jonathan Torgovnik

Conclusion

The scale of the challenge we face is daunting. The vision that drives us forward is based on our commitment to transformative strategies founded on peoples' power and sovereignty, and environmental, social, gender and economic justice. We are part of the movements implementing and scaling up solutions all over the world, based on this vision and our common principles.



By reclaiming politics we are asserting popular sovereignty over our energy, food and economic systems, our seeds, our territories and our bodies.

By approaching our solutions through a popular, grassroots feminist lens, we are organising with other social movements and building more caring and sustainable societies, in harmony with nature, free from all forms of oppression and exploitation.

Following the paths of a just transition, just economies, food sovereignty, and community forest management and biodiversity, we are respecting Earth's ecological limits while building the power of the people.

We recognise that climate justice also means recognising historical debt and securing class justice and solidarity within and between communities, countries and continents.

Practising agroecology and community forest management, and supporting Indigenous Peoples, small-scale farmers, peasants and local communities, leads towards healthier and more sustainable relationships between peoples, and between peoples and nature.

Building alternative economies based on peoples' wellbeing, cooperation, sharing, and the fair distribution of wealth, enables us to challenge corporate power, and leads us towards more equal and resilient societies.

The pathways to system change are deeply interconnected. In the face of global crises those connections are more visible, more necessary and more urgent. The actions we take now have the power to shape the world for millennia to come. This is a moment to reaffirm our radical hope. A revolution of solidarity and compassion is blossoming at the grassroots. People everywhere know that alternatives exist and work. We must use this moment to unite and build power as movements for justice.



The Shaman of the Huni Kui people expresses the sadness of seeing their home in the Brazilian Amazon destroyed by forest fires, August 2019. **© Douglas Freitas / Friends of the Earth Brazil**

Glossary

Feminism

A theory and analysis of power and oppression, a political tool in the fight for transformation, equality, liberation and women's autonomy, and a socio-political movement that collectively takes up the fight against patriarchy and oppression.

The patriarchal system has transformed the ideology and language of feminism into a taboo and replaced it with the language of gender that was heavily institutionalised and depoliticised during the 1990s and 2000s.

Friends of the Earth International defends the reclaiming of feminist, anti-patriarchal language as part of our discourse. We aim to show in practice that feminism is constructed from the grassroots up, from local to global and between rural and urban, that it is relevant to all women and men, and that it is representative of regional diversity and different realities. The grassroots, anti-capitalist feminism we are constructing has a class perspective and is rooted in women's collective experiences in societies in which our bodies are marked by mutually reinforcing oppressions.

We believe it is possible to transform all women's lives through the dismantling of patriarchy and the classist, racist, capitalist, (neo)colonialist and heteronormative systems of oppression with which patriarchy is intimately linked. A key step in this direction is the deconstruction of the sexual division of labour and the reorganisation of domestic and care work, with shared responsibility between men and women and with state support.[70]

Financialisation of nature

The interference of the financial sector in nature. It segregates the functions of nature from each other and from their cultural and spiritual value.

It separates nature into specific elements (for example air, water, biodiversity, pollination), puts a price on these elements and assigns value titles to them. Such process forgoes the fullness, the interconnectedness and the intrinsic, cultural and spiritual values of nature. New property titles issued on each element are acquired by corporations to offset their overuse or the pollution of the environment. The trading of these titles in financial markets allows the actors responsible for environmental conflicts and injustice to generate new profits. Meanwhile nature and the commons become scarcer and more expensive, and decision-making rights over how to manage territories are increasingly transferred from communities to corporations.[71]

Free, prior informed consent (FPIC)

Friends of the Earth International calls for solutions that ensure affected communities' right to free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) and rights of redress. Transformation will only take place on the basis of respecting the will and other rights of Indigenous Peoples and affected communities, and customary law. This holds for the building of infrastructure or the extraction of material inputs needed to build energy infrastructure and develop and produce new technologies.[72]

Impacted peoples / local communities

Communities affected by environmental degradation, territorial grabbing, corporate power and violation of fundamental rights.[73]

70 Source: Friends of the Earth International Gender Justice Dismantling Patriarchy Conceptual Framework
71 Source: Friends of the Earth InternationalSystem Change Guidance, 2014
72 Source: Good Energy Bad Energy, 2013
73 Source: Friends of the Earth InternationalSystem Change Guidance, 2014

Internationalism

Working on internationalist solidarity means accompanying struggles against injustice in any part of the world, feeling them as our own causes. Solidarity means standing up against all forms of oppression – such as patriarchy, racism and colonialism – and the various forms of violence which rob people of their capacity to organise and struggle for justice. Internationalist solidarity is when different groups of people, social movements and organisations articulate their demands for justice in a coordinated way. It allows us to stand together, in different parts of the world, to denounce injustice and offer concrete support to those who face oppression, persecution and violations of their rights.

Neo-colonialism

We understand neo-colonialism as the violent appropriation, extractivism, control, exploitation, homogenisation and erasure of peoples, culture, peasants and Indigenous Peoples, territories and nature. Mega-projects linked to extractivism, for example, are destroying women's relationship to their territories and livelihoods and increasing the exploitation and control over women's bodies through sexual violence, trafficking, forced prostitution and labour as underpaid cleaners and other service providers. These trends clearly show the links between neo-colonial economic interests and patriarchy. This violent appropriation is carried out by, and serves to satisfy the economic interests of, transnational corporations, international capital (for example, banks) and imperialist states. Some liken the appropriation and control of territory promoted by states such as Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) to European colonialism. Another school of thought distinguishes the two processes on the basis of structural differences.[74]

Paradigm

When we talk about a paradigm, it does not refer to something finite and absolute, but a horizon that is collectively constructed and gives meaning to our social, political and cultural practices.

Patriarchy

is the term given to the system that oppresses and exploits women. It is founded, to a large extent, on the sexual division of labour and nurtured by the biological determinism of socially constructed gender roles. Patriarchy organises societies for the benefit of men as a social group. Traditions and norms, educational resources, access to information and material resources are used to maintain this hierarchy and power. Patriarchy has permitted the domination of that which is considered masculine thought, discourse and mind-set (the logical and rational qualities associated 'naturally' with men) over that which is considered the feminine (the emotional and sensitive qualities associated 'naturally' with women) to become institutionalised in our cultures and values.

Women's oppression is based on an economic difference between men and women: women often lack money for their own or their families' needs, and are often financially dependent on their husbands or male family members. Violence and the threat of violence against women are used to maintain patriarchal power relations, with women suffering institutionalised, domestic, sexual and verbal / psychological violence and harassment when they step out of their 'natural' roles. For example, patriarchal norms justify the sexual abuse of a woman who was out in the streets at night or who was wearing 'provocative' clothing; patriarchy justifies domestic violence against a woman if the dinner was late or the children are not in bed; patriarchy means a woman may be sexually harassed in the workplace or pressured to have sex with superiors in order to get a job or promotion.[75]

74 Source: Friends of the Earth International Gender Justice Dismantling Patriarchy Conceptual Framework
75 Source: Friends of the Earth International Gender Justice Dismantling Patriarchy Conceptual Framework

Peoples' sovereignty

The use, management and conservation of natural resources, as defined in UN General Assembly resolution 1803 (XVII) of 14 December 1962, "Permanent sovereignty over natural resources". "The right of peoples and nations to permanent sovereignty over their natural wealth and resources must be exercised in the interest of their national development and of the well-being of the people of the State concerned."[76] The term peoples' sovereignty includes energy and food sovereignty, but it is broader than that - it gives peoples political and social control over their own natural resources, identities and culture, to be managed in the interest of all with equity and justice. It enables self-determination.[77]

Racism

is the institutionalised system of oppression benefiting the white population. It is an ideology of white supremacy that undermines people of colour (Black, Indigenous, Asian, non-white) through the exploitation of their lives, labour, bodies and minds and the extermination of traditional knowledge (known as epistemicide), values, cultural practices, language and links with nature that are replaced by the dominant ideology. Xenophobia and exploitation are justified historically and in modern times by claiming people of colour are inferior, and this status quo is maintained through the use of violence and criminalisation. Women of colour suffer even greater oppression and greater exploitation of their bodies and work through the linking of racism-patriarchy-capitalism.

Patriarchal, racist institutions operate in favour of capitalist accumulation. The appropriation of women's bodies and work is used to subsidise capitalism through the reproduction and care of workers. At the same time women's bodies are appropriated to provide emotional support to communities impacted by (neo)colonial extractivism and climate disasters. In parallel, the labour force of people of colour is violently exploited through slavery (historically) and market discrimination (currently) that keeps the non-white population in underpaid and undervalued jobs, the informal market and precarious employment conditions.[78]

Sustainable society

Friends of the Earth International does not use the concept of 'sustainable development'. Our vision is of a peaceful and sustainable world based on societies living in harmony with nature. We envision a society of interdependent people living in dignity, wholeness and fulfilment in which equity and human and peoples' rights are realised. However, we have not yet developed in-depth elements and indicators of sustainable society.[79]



Friends of the Earth Togo solar oven exhibition at the national forum on Just Energy Transition.
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76 General Assembly resolution 1803 (XVII) of 14 December 1962, "Permanent sovereignty over natural resources" | OHCHR
77 Source: Friends of the Earth International System Change Guidance, 2014
78 Source: Friends of the Earth International Gender Justice Dismantling Patriarchy Conceptual Framework
79 Source: Friends of the Earth International System Change Guidance, 2014



People Power! A community meeting at an eco-village, Banishanta union, Sundarbans, Bangladesh.
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The Joghban Clan in Liberia organised and came together to resist their land being grabbed. © Jason Taylor for Friends of the Earth International

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Tanzania
Togo
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Malaysia
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Palestine
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Philippines
Russia
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Sri Lanka

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Belgium (Flanders & Brussels)
Belgium (Wallonia & Brussels)
Bosnia and Herzegovina
Bulgaria
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Cyprus
Czech Republic
Denmark
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