

ForumCiv's policy on the environment and climate with a rights-based approach

Decided by: The ForumCiv Board
Date of decision: 23 January 2012
Last update: 31 August 2017
Period of validity: Until further notice
Authorised by: Secretary General

ForumCiv's official position statements on environment and climate with a rights-based approach

The role of civil society in ecologically sustainable development

ForumCiv believes that civil society organisations have a very important role to play in the double challenge to eradicate poverty by strengthening people's rights and democracy while transitioning to sustainable development.

Environmental organisations, development organisations, local communities and other social movements have a vital role to play in demanding that politicians in rich and developing countries to be accountable for climate mitigation and adaptation, and for ensuring that the rights of marginalised groups, democratic decision-making processes and social justice are the focus of meaningful negotiations and fair decisions for different national governments and global bodies.

Marginalised groups as women and men in local communities are suffering from the effects of environmental damage and climate change, and it is mainly these people whose rights are undermined or neglected. Their capacity to understand how the environment and climate change influence their rights is very important. Also their capacity to mobilise, organise themselves, analyse their situation and find strategies for change, as well as their influence in decision-making processes in local and national government. They must participate in the transition to the sustainable use of ecosystems and an effective mitigation and adaptation to ever greater climate change to guarantee their rights and a sustainable development.

ForumCiv cooperates with civil society partners working in developing countries with mobilisation, awareness raising, and advocacy towards politicians locally, nationally and globally.

ForumCiv works in partnership with the rest of civil society:

To ensure that civil society organisations have a key role in raising the awareness of and mobilising women and men, influencing politicians and participating in decision-making processes for the transition to the sustainable use of natural resources and ecosystems; and strengthen the capacity of marginalised women and men to produce strategies and take part in effective climate adaptation.

See background sheet 1 and the rest for more detailed position statements on the role of civil society.

2. Governmental responsibility for respecting the rights of marginalised and discriminated groups

Climate and environmental change are already hitting marginalised and discriminated people the hardest, whether it is in rural or urban areas. The vast majority of people without sufficient food or access to water live in rural areas and are poor peasants, landless farmer workers, hunters or fishermen/women. Peasants living in poverty are the worst and most vulnerable and are therefore severely affected by environmental and climate change. Rural areas are also the home of the majority of the poor population without water, sanitation and electricity.

Marginalised women and men living in urban slums lack sufficient access to essential resources such as clean water, clean energy and decent housing. Slums are also often situated in hazard areas that are particularly vulnerable to flooding, erosion and other natural disasters, all of which are expected to increase as the climate worsens.

Women are at particular risk and they almost always have responsibility for collecting water, cooking and caring for the family's young, old and ill. They often remain in their homes and lack the information and resources needed to handle unpredicted extreme weather conditions. Poor access to clean water and energy means that women and girls in particular have to devote much of their time collecting water and wood for cooking and heating. The power relations that prevail between the sexes in most poor countries, especially in families living in poverty, add to the forces depriving girls and women of education, healthcare and income. A lack of access to energy reinforces these patterns.

The vast majority of small peasants are women, and women produce most of the food in poor countries. In spite of this, women own only 1% of the land and have difficulties obtaining loans because of cultural discriminatory laws. Women and girls also suffer more from malnutrition than men and boys. Other marginalised groups that risk suffering from the consequences of climate and environmental change are children, the elderly, the sick and the disabled.

National and local development plans that include poverty reduction, National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPAs) and Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Action (NAMAs) must be based on the effects that climate and environmental change have on the inviolable rights of women and men to have food, clean water, clean energy, natural resources, sustainable living and housing, education and health. These principles must also apply in global climate summits, trade agreements, agreements on biological diversity and debt cancellation. National and local governments and international bodies must decide on political and economic instruments that stimulate and force the necessary changes.

ForumCiv works in partnership with the rest of civil society:

To ensure that governments are transparent, accountable and that they recognise and respect the rights of marginalised and discriminated women and men, and enable them to participate in decision-making, planning, following-up and evaluation activities regarding the sustainable use of natural resources and ecosystems while claiming accountability for their rights. This applies in relation to development, mitigation and adaptation plans in the local community, as well as nationally and possibly regionally and globally.

See all background sheets for more detailed position statements

3. Development cooperation designed to environment and climate change

A shift in power relations to the benefit of marginalised and discriminated women and men is needed if mitigation and adaptation are to contribute to poverty reduction and the guaranteeing of the rights of marginalised women and men. Governments must be pressed to organise democratic decision-making processes for mitigation and adaptation plans and budgets. The

participation of civil society in this respect is essential to effective mitigation and adaptation in the countries.

ForumCiv works in partnership with the rest of civil society:

To ensure that development cooperation targeted at ecologically sustainable development and at supporting climate mitigation and adaptation demands democratic decision-making processes and changes of power relations for the interests of marginalised and discriminated women and men in all mitigation, adaptation and development plans in receipt of support. Equality targets and women's participation shall be included in all decision-making for achieving sustainable development.

See all background sheets for more detailed position statements

4. Environment and climate change

The earth's natural resources and ecosystems are essential to our survival. Natural resources are the basis of all life and without them there can be neither economic nor social development. The planet's resources are being over-exploited and depleted at an unprecedented rate, with serious and ever worsening consequences. The effects of climate change are already being observed in some parts of the world, as extreme weather conditions become ever more frequent, droughts become longer and more severe, the glaciers – the source of drinking water for billions of people – melt away, and sea levels rise.

Biological diversity, without which ecosystems would be unable to supply women and men around the world with essential goods and services, is being reduced at an alarmingly accelerated pace. The environment and climate crisis is making it difficult for countries to meet the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the goals regarding the reduction of poverty and hunger, education and health. Unless the current trend is reversed human survival will be jeopardised. A sustainable use of the Earth's natural resources and ecosystems is necessary for eradicating poverty, fulfilling the rights of women and men, and for distributing the planet's resources more equitably.

ForumCiv works in partnership with the rest of civil society:

To ensure that ecosystems and natural resources are managed sustainably. Humankind's use of natural resources must not exceed the planet's capacity to supply them. The Earth's temperature may not rise more than 1.5 °C above pre-industrial temperatures if we are to avoid the serious consequences of global warming. Global emissions of greenhouse gasses should approach zero by the year 2050, and in Sweden by 2030. The rich countries must set a precedent by radically reducing their own emissions while transferring extensive resources to poor countries to enable their own environmental adaptation and mitigation.

See background sheets 2, 3 and 4 for detailed position statements

ForumCiv gives particular emphasis to certain rights that are particularly affected by climate and environmental change, and that are also part of the solution: the right to clean energy, food, clean water, natural resources and sustainable living and housing.

5. The right to food

Agriculture, fishery and, to some extent forestry, will have to provide food for 9-10 billion women and men on the planet by the year 2050. There is sufficient nutritious food in the world to feed everyone, but despite this over 900 million women and men have nothing to sustain them. Agriculture currently accounts for about 17 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions, mainly through the keeping of livestock and the use of industrial fertilisers. Intensive farming with artificial irrigation and the widespread use of pesticides and artificial fertiliser has depleted the soil. Competition for land is increasing in step with rising meat consumption, biofuel production and longer droughts.

ForumCiv works in partnership with the rest of civil society:

To ensure that agriculture is radically changed and managed in a sustainable manner for the sake of the environment and so that an additional few billion women and men can feed themselves. Access to food must be distributed more equally in the world.

See background sheet 5 for detailed position statements

6. The right to clean water

The depletion of the Earth's land resources is closely linked to the depletion of its fresh water resources. Access to clean drinking water is essential to all life on the planet. The right to clean water is therefore a central concern. People need drinking water and water for cooking, hygiene and sanitation. Clean water is also needed for the production of foodstuffs, for industry, and for energy. Environmental and climate change threaten access to drinking water, which is scarce in many parts of the world. Approximately 1.1 billion people lack access to the 20-50 liters of water¹ that is needed every day for drinking and cooking. Population growth and new consumption patterns are putting pressure on water resources. Over the past century, water use has risen twice as quickly as the global population. Over 30 per cent of the world's population is already affected by water shortages.

ForumCiv works in partnership with the rest of civil society:

To ensure the sustainable use of clean drinking water for domestic purposes, agriculture and industry. Similarly, the control and management of small-scale wells and water sources must be decentralised and involve the communities and groups affected.

See background sheet 6 for detailed position statements

¹ www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/diseases/WSH03.0

7. The right to natural resources

Marginalised groups are often dependent on arable land, pastures, forests, fishing waters and hunting grounds for their subsistence and survival. The majority have no ownership rights or formal rights of use over natural resources that they have been using in generations. Indigenous peoples have rights to the natural resources that they have traditionally used, but these rights are often not respected by their governments.

Environmental and climate change exacerbate competition for natural resources including for example landgrabbing.

ForumCiv works in partnership with the rest of civil society:

To ensure that governments formalise collective and individual user rights for land and other natural resources traditionally used by marginalised communities and indigenous peoples. Similarly, the control and management of land and other natural resources must be decentralised and involve the communities and groups affected.

See background sheet 7 for detailed position statements

8. The right to clean energy

Access to energy is fundamental to the fulfilment of many human rights, such as that to produce and prepare food, to build houses, and to have access to healthcare, clean drinking water and a domestic electricity supply. Women's and men's access to energy impacts on a wide range of concerns, such as education, health and income. People in many countries overuse and waste energy, while people in other parts of the world live in a state of energy poverty. For sustainable development the energy ought to be clean and renewable.

ForumCiv works in partnership with the rest of civil society:

To ensure that the world's energy systems in their entirety switch from fossil fuels to renewable sources and that energy poverty is eradicated. This requires the extensive transfer of resources from rich countries to poor. Similarly, the control and management of small-scale renewable energy sources must be decentralised and involve the communities and groups affected.

See background sheet 8 for detailed position statements

9. The right to sustainable living and housing

Half of the global population live in towns and cities. Urbanisation is on the increase and when towns and cities expand, the challenges expand with them. Urban areas claim valuable arable land, while residential areas are built far from urban centres, which leads to more transportation and often an increase in private car use. Slum areas will grow both in number and size mostly due to a huge and fast urbanisation in most developing countries. It is estimated that almost 900 million women and men will be living in slum areas by the year 2020. Towns and cities also impact on the environment through changes in land and water use

and contribute to global warming, while their populations become more vulnerable to the consequences of climate change, such as droughts, flooding and rising sea levels.

ForumCiv works in partnership with the rest of civil society:

To ensure that future urban development impacts less on the environment and climate while meeting the population's needs for sustainable living and housing, food, clean water, decent waste solutions and energy.

See background sheet 9 for detailed position statements

The policy implementation at an overall level in ForumCiv

ForumCiv's vision from June 2012 is: "A fair and sustainable world where all people have the power to change." In the policy platform ForumCiv describes its values including a sustainable world.

ForumCiv's official statements on environmental and climate issues and the guidelines to be developed on the basis of the policy will govern how the units of the organisation can integrate environmental and climate issues from a rights perspective into their activities. This will be reflected in ForumCiv's overall plans for operations and unit plans.

Management responsibility

ForumCiv's management team is responsible of integrating an environmental and climate perspective throughout the organisation by its integration into the Operational plan and unit plans.

Environmental and climate work will be part of the monitoring of the Operational plan. GS is responsible for reporting to the board from Head office and different areas in the Operational plan. The heads of units are responsible for reporting the results from their units