

Sustainable access to food, energy and water

The main challenge of building a sustainable world is to ensure the right of each and every one of the world's people to resources and basic services. Furthermore, we have the inescapable obligation to do so in a responsible manner for both us and the rest of species while ensuring the rights of future generations and without exceeding the carrying capacity of the Earth's natural resources.

The scale of this challenge is still tremendous. In 2008, almost 900 million people worldwide lacked access to clean water and only 57% of the global population got its drinking water from a piped connection, while the number of people without access to sanitation has reached 2,600 million. Seven out of ten people without access to such sanitation live in rural areas.

In energy terms the challenge we face is no less important. The world's primary energy demand rose by 5% in 2010, pushing global CO₂ emissions up to reach a new high. 1300 million people worldwide live without access to reliable electricity, which represents 20% of the world population and 2,700 billion people don't have any other access to energy for cooking than unsustainable biomass. Subsidies that encourage wasteful consumption of fossil fuel jumped to over 400 billion dollars in 2010. Despite the priority in many countries to increase energy efficiency, global energy intensity continues to worsen. Against this background, disasters such as those at the Fukushima Daichii nuclear power plant have cast doubts on the current systems of energy supply.¹

If stringent new action is not forthcoming by 2017, emissions from the energy-related infrastructure will exceed the 2 °C rise in global warming, thereby exceeding the level of climate change impacts associated with global warming that are still manageable. Against this backdrop, energy efficiency and renewables are increasingly being pushed towards centre stage as the option that makes it possible to combine the energy supply for everyone, in a clean, safe and fair manner and renewable energies are also a major source of employment, now providing over 3.5 million jobs worldwide.

The situation of the food system is also very serious. The number of people suffering from hunger has increased in recent years and the price of food has gone up everywhere due to speculation among other reasons. The number of undernourished people increased by about 20 million between 2000 to 2008. The number of workers that have had to cut back on food, health, basic needs has never been so great as during the food crisis. Soaring food prices have increased the world's poor by hundreds of millions.

This underlines the critical role of governments and their duty to humanity to address this situation. Responding to these concerns must be immediate and consistent with the problems faced in a context of population growth. The world's population will grow from 7 billion now to more than 9 billion in 2050. Providing access to resources and services as a human rights issue involves developing policies and taking the steps necessary to ensure this access to all people and to do it in a sustainable manner.

In addition we are going through a critical period in terms of environmental issues; the ways in which economic development has traditionally given access to these resources generates serious environmental problems. Climate change serves to highlight that we cannot continue to rely on fossil fuels for our energy production. Many regions experiencing water stress means we

¹ http://www.iea.org/weo/docs/weo2011/executive_summary.pdf

have to rethink the way we use water, understand and respect water cycles and seek long term solutions. The spread of agriculture based on intensive use of agro-chemicals, Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) and water is aggravating world hunger and, in the meantime, it is causing serious environmental and social problems. Climate change triggers a spiral of impacts affecting water availability and food production which is primarily experienced by the farming population. We need to scale up towards universal access that recognises the limits of the earth's resources and these demands a radically different approach.

Furthermore, in recent decades the movement towards greater economic deregulation and speculation means these basic services are subject to major speculation and commercialisation and financialisation².

In countries where basic services (water, energy, waste management) have been privatised, the quality of service has been reduced, poor working conditions have been experienced (due to the outsourcing of production chains, among other factors) and sustainability criteria related to production and management have not been incorporated, which has led to higher levels of inequality and increasing levels of pollution and environmental impact.

This deregulation has also had an impact on food commodities. Deregulation in trade and financial markets has mainly favoured agrofood multinationals based in industrialised countries and not the working rural and urban poor across the globe. The effects of the world trade system can be seen in the large increase of import bills of low-income food deficit countries, which have more than doubled their mortality rate in five years. Contrary to the promises of free trade advocates, trade liberalisation has not ensured equity and food security for all. Much of the problem can be ascribed to multinational corporations that control the majority of the international trade in maize and other grains, as well as massive subsidies granted to large-scale farms in the United States and Europe combined with free trade agreements (bilateral, regional and global) that deprive developing countries farmers from having a place in the market. Global trade growth has so far brought the monopolisation and oligopoly control in world grain markets and in banana, cocoa and tea trading. This has damaged the world food system and has not provided greater food security or advances in workers' rights. In any case, workers' rights and working conditions should be observed regardless the company size, this is applicable to small, large of multinational companies.

In an effort to make quick returns and seek new investment options away from the traditional markets, hedge funds investors have sought out agricultural commodity markets in search of high-yield gains. The massive increase in speculative investment and the sector financialization has been a contributing factor in pushing up prices for basic food staples.

The three major resources of land, energy and water are connected by the same crisis of inequality driven by increasing privatisation and corporate control and dominated by market dynamics. While universal provision of access to resources and services remains an eminently practical goal, it requires a shift in global priorities and wide-scale redistribution through a system of international sharing monitored by an effective and representative United Nations.

Governments must assume their role of authority as legislators to seek out better ways to manage natural resources, whether it be water, energy, land or food. Direct control over various aspects of resource management by institutions as well as preserving public spaces for water or land management as an important tool in generating employment, democratising access to

² Financialisation in relation to food production refers to the process whereby prices of food are set by the value that food commodities achieved at the stock market, generally this value is set through future contracts according to <http://www.lr21.com.uy/economia/468593-financializacion-de-alimentos>

land, better occupation of the territories and the rational use of resources should also be carried out.

In order to address these challenges it is fundamental to focus on human rights. But "focusing on rights" is more than just another element in the Rio +20 negotiations. Rights that have already been earned should not be called into question. For example, in 2010, the United Nations General Assembly recognised access to water as a human right or the right to food which was recognised in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948.

In a bid to highlight the current and future challenges related to the provision of basic services to all people, we call on governments to:

1. Strengthen the role of states as promoters of sustainable development, launching a development project that provides universal, equitable and environmentally responsible access to basic quality resources and sustainable and affordable universal services.
2. Governments need to recognise the limits of the market actors and dynamics in meeting the three dimensions of sustainability. Governments must assume more direct role in delivery of services, not just a guarantor of market conditions and transfer payments
3. Equal access to resources for both men and women, young and elder, rural and urban populations.
4. Strengthen national social protection systems to accommodate provision of these services to the population: social protection housing has to progressively include the inclusion of such services.
5. Establish regulatory mechanisms to tackle speculation in food commodities and water.
6. Increase democracy in the decision-making process, in information sharing and assessment processes relating to the control and sale of resources. Private stakeholders must adhere to the same regulatory standards and the same measures of accountability as public entities.
7. Compliance with ILO conventions on water services, on food and energy production. Improve living conditions in rural areas including youth employment and eradicate all forced labour.
8. Promote land reforms that enable land ownership among small farmers, particularly women, in an effort to promote organic farming using indigenous seeds.
9. Require justification of the actual availability of water in order to meet the needs of existing water users as a prerequisite for authorising and undertaking new projects involving significant consumption of water resources.
10. The need for regulations that promote efficient use of water and energy across the board from technology manufacturers to suppliers and consumers. Promote "demand/saving" policies and comprehensive planning.
11. In countries where there is none, create a state-wide agency that standardises the basic conditions of urban water supply, monitoring quality in the provision of services, ensuring efficient management and respect for the environment and providing information to citizens.

At Rio +20 our trade union organisations commit to:

1. Increase workplace campaigns on the efficient use of resources, on reducing consumption and reusing resources as well as educating those in homes and communities on the above.
2. Promote green energy generation systems based on renewable energies and support the most vulnerable countries that aim to promote clean energy production, such as

- those developing island states that have launched initiatives to become carbon neutral or even carbon negative.
3. Increase our efforts and mobilise our members in our "right to water" campaign- Pressure national donors and International Financial Institutions to adopt policies favourable to public ownership and management; promote cooperation among public water utilities.
 4. Support community-based groups in developing alternative ways of water, sanitation and energy supply.
 5. Campaigns to promote organic farming and raise awareness among our members on the use and dangers of agro-chemicals and promote campaigns against the use of genetically modified crops.
 6. Encourage trade unions to actively participate in decision-making on water, energy and food, as well as to improve their knowledge and awareness on these issues, including trade unions continue to resist all attacks against labour rights, especially outsourcing and precarious work. Commit to building transparency, accountability, combat corruption at all levels and participation in decision making.
 7. Promote sustainability policies for pension funds investments.
 8. Develop regional trade union research capabilities and support campaigns on sustainability.