

PRINCIPLES FOR A JUST RECOVERY BASED ON ENVIRONMENTAL, SOCIAL, GENDER AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE

FROM SYSTEMIC CRISES TO ENVIRONMENTAL, SOCIAL, GENDER AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE.

The COVID-19 crisis, which goes well beyond being a tragic health crisis, is the consequence of an economic system that prioritises profits over peoples' rights and the environment, and of governance systems which are controlled and captured by the interests and power of transnational corporations. The capitalist, patriarchal and racist system and free market doctrine have led to a profound rupture between our societies and nature, as well as the destruction of livelihoods and the privatisation and financialisation of nature.

The systemic, inter-related socio-ecological crises we face — namely climate, biodiversity, food, water, economic and care crises — and this global pandemic share the same root causes: a system designed for capital accumulation and neoliberal, corporate-led globalisation. The expansion of agribusiness and other extractive activities, a key feature of colonial history and neoliberal globalisation, leads to the destruction of biodiversity and habitats, land grabbing, and the devastation of territories and livelihoods, in turn threatening peoples' health.

Neoliberalism has led to the privatisation and weakening of public health and social security systems and public services, the dismantling of workers' rights and flexibilisation of labour, and increased exploitation of women's work and bodies. It has given extraordinary powers and privileges to transnational corporations (TNCs), while reducing the role and position of the State, leaving our world more vulnerable to the impacts of crisis.

COVID-19 is also exposing the magnitude of the care crisis in our societies, which has developed over centuries through the failure of the **patriarchal, racist, capitalist system** to care for peoples, nature and territories. The system relies on women's work and bodies to fill the gaps in under-funded and/or corporate-run services, and to fix the damage caused by the capitalist, neocolonialist system of exploitation.

Friends of the Earth International believes that a “**just recovery**” built on **environmental, social, gender and economic justice** is urgently needed to address all the impacts of the current COVID-19 crisis, which are being compounded by neoliberal doctrine.

Such a recovery must be centred on the wellbeing of peoples and the planet and be based on a justice perspective, in order to contribute to solving other underlying systemic crises. We propose four principles for a just recovery:

1. Abandon neoliberalism and austerity, and put in place immediate policies and measures founded on justice, recognising ecological limits;
2. Recovery measures should be built on and enhance multilateral co-operation and internationalist solidarity;
3. Build and strengthen democracy and guarantee the realisation of human rights and peoples' rights;
4. Governments must respond to the multiple systemic crises — of the pandemic, inequality, climate, food, biodiversity, and care — and their root causes, by pursuing a transformative system change agenda.

Recovery should in no way mean returning to what was considered “normal” before the COVID-19 crisis. The previous status quo was the very origin of this crisis and its impacts. Our societies have been structured by systems of oppression (patriarchy, racism, class exploitation, neocolonialism, imperialism, heteronormativity), with profound environmental, social, gender and economic injustices and an unhealthy concentration of power and resources.

This is a moment to rebuild our societies and build a new economy under different paradigms, principles and values. This is the time to put the sustainability of life at the centre, give priority to the fulfilment of peoples' rights, ensure women's economic autonomy and political role, and protect livelihoods and the planet.

FRIENDS OF THE EARTH INTERNATIONAL JUST RECOVERY PRINCIPLES

We call for the following principles to be the basis for all national/regional decisions around bailouts, tax concessions, regulatory frameworks and public spending, and all the necessary international/multilateral measures intended to take us through COVID-19 and the ensuing socio-economic crisis into sustainable and just societies founded on peoples' sovereignty and participation.

1 ABANDON NEOLIBERALISM AND AUSTERITY AND PUT IN PLACE IMMEDIATE POLICIES AND MEASURES FOUNDED ON JUSTICE, RECOGNISING ECOLOGICAL LIMITS.

This pandemic and associated crisis, which exacerbates the already existing structural social/environmental crises, has made even clearer the urgent need to abandon neoliberalism and for the State to play a fundamental role in guaranteeing the realisation of peoples' rights. On this note, it is extremely necessary that States adopt immediate public policies and measures to respond to the COVID-19 crisis and its impacts.

The dispute over the role of the State once again becomes crucial. Our struggle is to prevent the State from being structured and organised merely to support capital accumulation and the interests of TNCs and national economic groups. We must redefine its role on the basis of the common good, in terms of caring for life and the sustainability of life, and invigorating the public sphere. For this reason, governments must not pay for the losses of corporations with public money, but rather nationalise and put public services and key economic sectors under state/community/co-operative ownership and control. This is to ensure that public services, including health, water and sanitation, transport, energy, education and care services, among others, are equitably and universally accessible to the whole population. We have already seen how public services managed under business and market principles become weak and poor quality, reaching only some segments of the population, as the objective of companies is to make profits, over and above providing the service.

We must urgently undo neoliberal reforms that have dismantled the rights of the working class and made their lives and livelihoods more precarious. Reversing the privatisation of social security by financial capital is also necessary. Privatisation seizes workers' savings, uses them for speculative ends and invests them in projects that destroy the climate, biodiversity and livelihoods, and grab lands and territories.

Recovery packages and public spending must support first of all indigenous peoples, black and afro-descendant communities, people of colour, migrants, women at the grassroots, and the working class — which

includes workers in the formal and informal economies, like peasants, family and artisanal producers, fisherfolk and local communities, who are struggling as a result of the crisis.

All public finance should have the multiple purpose of socio-economic recovery and environmental, social, gender and economic justice. It should allow for the redistribution of wealth and women's autonomy as well as integrating the principles of grassroots feminism.

A response based on justice requires more public investments in: national and local productive economies; public and care services (including care for children, the elderly, the sick and people with special needs); campaigns and services for the prevention of violence against women and LGBTQ people, and support/protection for survivors; the creation of dignified jobs guaranteeing non-exploitative conditions for all workers (particularly for front line and key workers, the majority of whom are women); and an income to allow the working class to bear the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and its socio-economic consequences.

Public finance must contribute to **climate justice, energy sovereignty, food sovereignty and agroecology, collective management of biodiversity, and community forest management**. It must guarantee the right to land, territories, cities and housing, through holistic popular agrarian and urban land reforms, and support co-operative production systems.



Abeer Butmeh from PENGON/Friends of the Earth Palestine campaigns for a Binding Treaty at the UN, Geneva 2019
© Victor Barro, Friends of the Earth Spain

Funding for recovery packages and public expenditure urgently demands a deep reform of just taxation systems, in which the bulk of taxes are paid by wealthy individuals and companies, not the working class. The crisis will not be solved with donations by big companies or TNCs, which use such tactics to present themselves as showing solidarity, while they continue to expand greenwashing strategies and avoid paying taxes needed to solve the crisis.

A just recovery means no bailouts for transnational corporations, their parent companies and the strongest national links in their value chains. This is especially important for the ones most responsible for systemic crises: fossil fuel and mining companies, agribusiness, airlines, and any companies based in tax havens. We have to learn from the 2008 financial crisis, in which inequalities deepened and large companies gained profit and power while the bill was paid by the middle and working classes.

In cases where governments do offer support to other types of businesses, such as small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), strict conditions must be attached to any public finance. All public policies and public money must ensure that the long-term health of peoples and our planet are given priority. They must prioritise women, indigenous peoples, afro-descendant/black communities, people of colour, workers, peasants, family and artisanal producers and fisherfolk, whilst considering the climate, biodiversity and the long-term health of peoples and our planet.

States must ensure that companies comply with climate, biodiversity and environmental legislation and clean up the environmental damage and pollution they have caused. Given that a just economic revival must include the urgent need to move away from the fossil fuel dependent economy and the primary and extractive production matrix, those working in polluting industries must be supported to transition to new jobs in clean industries, as economies are rebuilt.

Companies that have received public finance or tax relief must not pay dividends to shareholders until public funds are repaid, and until they have agreed to a just phase-out of their polluting activities.

Governments must stop harmful trade and investment negotiations aimed at further entrenching the economic and political power of TNCs at the expense of the Global South and the peoples of the world, as well as at reducing the policy space of States desperately needed to address the crisis. Furthermore, they must carry out assessments of the existing agreements and their impacts, and initiate processes for their annulment when there is evidence that they are detrimental to the environment and peoples' rights. It is particularly important to dismantle the Investor State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) mechanism which enables corporations to sue governments, and to include

policies and measures designed to protect peoples before, during and after the COVID-19 crisis.

In order to secure justice for peoples and binding rules for TNCs, governments must commit to an ambitious United Nations international legally binding instrument on Transnational Corporations and Other Business Enterprises with respect to human rights. Such an instrument must put an end to the impunity of TNCs and achieve justice for those affected by human rights violations. They must also commit to strong national binding legislation on TNCs and human rights.

RECOVERY MEASURES SHOULD BE BUILT ON AND ENHANCE INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY AND MULTILATERAL CO-OPERATION.

Internationalism is key to globalising our struggle and hope. Internationalism across movements and borders will help to build collective responses to this crisis, organising and mobilising our communities and social movements to demand that our governments secure resources to support those most in need. Only through the struggles of grassroots political actors, with women playing a leading role, can we design a just recovery that allows for structural changes and real solutions to the crises we face. Solidarity and mutual aid among the working class and its social movements will enable us to get through this crisis together.

International regulations must put peoples' rights and environmental, social, gender and economic justice at the centre. Countries must have policy space to make progress on the structural changes needed to address the root causes of the COVID-19 crisis and other systemic crises. This means that the primacy of human rights and peoples' rights over trade and investment agreements must be enshrined in international law.

The reality is that most Southern countries cannot afford bigger public budgets and the necessary large-scale investments to guarantee the rights of their peoples, which are severely threatened by COVID-19 and its consequences. Therefore, all Global South debt must be cancelled. In fact, as the Global South is a "creditor" of historical ecological debt, the principle of payment and reparations for the climate and the ecological debt must now be applied. New public finance grants from the Global North and international financial institutions to the Global South must also be provided, not in the form of loans but as non-refundable grants without attached conditionalities.

All countries should work together to avoid tax evasion and avoidance, and to make sure that corporations and wealthy individuals pay their fair share through taxes.

Governments must also act in a coordinated way to regulate the financial sector, prevent speculation, and limit and stop financial and capital flows from the Global South to the Global North. Such flows deprive Southern countries of the resources they need to deal with the COVID-19 crisis, in turn deepening the economic crisis and causing massive depreciation of their currencies.

Any treatment, vaccination or medicine for COVID-19 must be made available to all under the same conditions, and they should not be subjected to patents or other Intellectual Property Rights. It must be guaranteed through international agreements and measures that health is a right and not a commodity, and is thus not up for negotiation. All peoples must have the right to health, and internationalist solidarity must prevail to save lives.

While some nations have sent medical professionals and equipment to different countries, providing humanitarian aid as a proof of altruism and solidarity, the US government continues its lethal economic blockade against countries like Cuba and Venezuela. In the context of the pandemic, it becomes even more urgent to cease economic blockades that are in clear violation of international humanitarian and human rights law. The same applies to the occupation of countries like Palestine.

3 BUILD AND STRENGTHEN DEMOCRACY AND GUARANTEE THE REALISATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND PEOPLES' RIGHTS.

We call for the defence and strengthening of democracy through empowering peoples' participation and reclaiming politics by demanding that it serves peoples' rights and needs and ensures the sustainability of life and the protection of ecological systems. Governments must put an end to policy capture and the misappropriation of the political arena by TNCs, national economic powers, and elites.

We already see that some governments and corporations are using this moment to approve fossil fuel, mining and other detrimental infrastructure projects and to eliminate, weaken or delay environmental, fiscal, financial, labour, safety regulations and scrutiny. In some cases, governments are pushing ahead with such projects, despite the dangers they pose to workers. Governments are also approving mergers and acquisitions of companies allegedly facing economic problems, which would lead to further corporate concentration.

All detrimental corporate projects, including fossil fuels, mining, dams and the expansion of agrocommodities, should be halted immediately. New approvals by governments or public or private financial institutions must also stop.

The health crisis must not be allowed to serve as a cover for advancing big polluters' and neoliberal corporate agendas, including further deregulation, while attention is focused elsewhere. Governments must refrain from weakening or undermining policies and regulations that control and regulate big polluters, as well as those aimed at protecting public health and essential services, at the behest of these companies. Instead, significant limits must be imposed on unchecked corporate power, and there must be increased/strengthened legislation and regulations on this. The false solution of environmental offsetting must be halted as it allows for continuous destruction of ecosystems.

Peoples' rights and human rights must be protected at all costs, including the right to voice opposition, raise criticism, and protest. Criminalisation of social movements, organisations and communities must come to an end. The pandemic must not be an excuse to undermine democracy and "fast track" harmful policies and projects. Communities have the right to say no and the Right to Free, Prior and Informed Consent. It is also crucial that there is space for democratic debate, as well as accountability and transparency in decision making across all branches of government.

The internationalist struggle against conservatism, fascism and right-wing groups is vital to bring together our strengths and raise our voices against those who seek to impose the most perverse and detrimental forms of domination and exploitation, which become even more deadly in the crisis context of the pandemic.

Coups d'état and dictatorships must be overturned, and all necessary measures must be taken to prevent further attacks on democracy aimed at enforcing the rule of transnational corporations, national economic powers and new neo-colonialist and imperialist arrangements. Right wing and oppressive governments who are using this tragic situation to increase militarisation of our societies and territories and impose surveillance tactics and techniques must be stopped.



Marching for the climate at COP 25 in Madrid, Spain 2019
© Babawale Obayanju, Environmental Rights Action (Friends of the Earth Nigeria)

Conservative, right-wing governments and religious institutions are using the COVID-19 crisis to justify shutting down and reducing women's access to pre-natal, sexual and reproductive care (including by classifying abortion as a "non-essential" service). This process of erosion of women's autonomy and rights over their lives and bodies must also be stopped.

We urgently need to build a world where the right for freedom from violence is fulfilled, especially for women, black/afro-descendant communities and people of colour, LGBTQ people, and defenders of territories.

States must adopt and enforce policies that prevent and stop all types of violence (including domestic violence and femicide, which have increased brutally during lockdown). Governments must commit to establishing strong binding legislation for transnational corporations and other business enterprises at national, regional and international levels, to bring justice to communities and social movements suffering from human rights violations and violence perpetrated by said companies. In line with international human rights law, governments must also be held accountable to their people.

GOVERNMENTS MUST RESPOND TO THE MULTIPLE SYSTEMIC CRISES – OF THE PANDEMIC, INEQUALITY, CLIMATE, FOOD, BIODIVERSITY AND CARE – AND THEIR ROOT CAUSES, BY PURSUING A TRANSFORMATIVE SYSTEM CHANGE AGENDA.

The COVID-19 crisis has brought to light how the destruction of ecosystems facilitates the spread of pathogens that affect our health. Agribusiness and the production of agrocommodities generate enormous public health problems through the destruction of natural habitats and/or the intensification of cattle-raising and animal husbandry. This must be stopped.

Restoring the relationship between our societies and nature and ecological systems is necessary and urgent. A just and healthy recovery means responding to the serious crisis of loss of biodiversity, forests and other ecosystems worldwide. Natural areas must be respected, and further destruction prevented, as deforestation and pressure on ecosystems were at the origin of the pandemic. To this end, the collective rights of peoples must be recognised, implemented and respected, in order to maintain their age-old practices of collective management of territories. Governments must support indigenous peoples and local communities who practice Community Forest Management, as they are the ones that defend and take care of the territories where ecosystems thrive. It has been scientifically proven that forests under the control of

indigenous peoples and local communities have a higher degree of conservation and a higher rate of biodiversity than forests conserved under traditional protection mechanisms (such as National Parks). At the same time, this type of practice guarantees better conditions for the food and health of these peoples.

A just recovery requires policies to transform the food system away from polluting industrial agriculture towards food sovereignty, by supporting peasant, family and artisanal producers. We must refocus on building up national and local food supply — with public stocks, reserves, agricultural support policies, price support mechanisms, public procurement programs, and supply and demand control measures. Multi-year planning programmes to shift to agroecological systems must be approved and supported; redirecting subsidies to support peasants and family farmers, especially women. The right to food and food sovereignty must take priority over trade agreements. Holistic popular agrarian land reforms must be urgently implemented, that guarantee access and control of land and territories to peasantry, family farmers, artisanal producers, and indigenous peoples. The intellectual property rights systems which privatise seeds must come to an end. It is also urgent to phase-out the use of agrottoxics in agriculture and antibiotics in meat production, which have several adverse effects on health, such as antibiotic resistance and weakening immune systems, and threaten ecosystems.

A just recovery means building a new economy that is distributive and healthy by design, which values people, planet and care, not just economic growth. An economy embedded in a society where energy, transport, communications, housing, water and sanitation, education, health, care work and social security are recognised as rights and are available for all through public services funded through just taxation. This includes free public care systems for children, the elderly and sick, among others, thereby putting an end to the disproportionate burden of care work on women, which results from a patriarchal system and sexual division of labor. Thousands of economic solutions and co-operatives already exist; it is vital to support and scale up the solidarity and social economy. Sustainable local and regional economies linked together through equitable trade relations are the backbone of a transformed system.

It means responding to the COVID-19 and climate crises simultaneously, applying the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and moving away from a fossil fuel dependent economy. It entails the transformation of the corporate dirty energy system to a State/community-owned and controlled 100% renewable energy future, that guarantees access to energy for all. This requires investment in renewable, nationally/locally appropriate, climate-safe, affordable and low impact energy. The Global North must pay its historical climate debt, providing the Global South with public financing to power this energy transformation. Sharing,

transfer, development and local adaptation of low-impact energy technologies are also key, crucially requiring intellectual property systems to be dismantled. It is critical that we reduce energy dependence and energy waste, specifically ending overconsumption of energy in developed countries, whilst ensuring energy sufficiency for everybody to have a dignified life. A just recovery must contribute to a just transition towards energy sovereignty, in which peoples' rights are at the centre, particularly the rights of workers, women, indigenous peoples, black/ afro-descendant communities, people of colour, peasant communities and fisherfolk.



Farmer Herculano Macaringue harvests lettuce on his agroecological plot in Namaacha, Mozambique 2019
© Amelia Collins, Friends of the Earth International

TIME FOR SYSTEM CHANGE

The pandemic is unveiling and aggravating the brutal inequalities of capitalism between and within countries. It is undermining our core human needs and peoples' rights and leaving millions vulnerable to losing access to their means of survival. The extreme vulnerability of working class communities and women in the current crisis comes as a result of the systematic dismantling or denial of their rights.

The path to a just recovery should be founded on emancipatory, peoples' paradigms, projects and initiatives that confront the logic of capital accumulation sustained and imposed through systemic oppression and exploitation.

Policies and measures must be geared towards enabling a just recovery centred on the peoples most affected by this crisis. They must avoid further exploitation of women's

work, further flexibilisation of labour (including through digitalisation at the service of maximum exploitation), and more exclusion, inequality and poverty. Violations of peoples' rights, the impunity of transnational corporations, and the expansion of socially and environmentally unjust and damaging projects must be stopped.

At the same time, Friends of the Earth International rejects any kind of policy or measures that, in the name of recovery, enhance current or new injustices, and/or deepen the systemic crises. Such measures will not lead to recovery, but deterioration.

It is time to build peoples' power by strengthening common political agendas among social movements, to drive forward a collective political project founded on environmental, gender, social and economic justice and peoples' rights and sovereignty.

Published August 2020

Friends of the Earth International Secretariat
P.O.Box 19199
1000 GD Amsterdam
The Netherlands

Tel +31 (0)20 6221369
www.foei.org
info@foei.org
twitter.com/FoEint
facebook.com/foeint

