



COP21 People's Summit event: A reality check - climate change and impacts on the ground

6 December, Paris, France

The impact of climate change on human rights is a two-fold problem. For one, man-made climate change has significant effects on several human rights, such as the right to life, health, food water and housing, among others. On the other hand, also certain actions to address climate change can directly result in adverse human rights impacts. Experience, especially with the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), has shown that while mitigation actions may be well intentioned, in some cases, they have caused harm to the environment and people.

The event "A reality check: climate change and impacts on the ground" was held in the Paris People's Summit on December 6, to illustrate this two-fold problem and how it can be addressed. The event showcased realities from the ground of some of the most marginalized groups to climate change. Speakers reflected on how lessons learnt from climate mitigation projects can inform the design of future climate finance projects and underlined the need for strong human rights protection under the Paris climate agreement.

Initiated by Carbon Market Watch, the event was organised jointly with the Interamerican Association for Environmental Defense (AIDA), Human Rights Watch (HRW) and the Indian grassroots association Paryavaran Mitra.

The debate was opened by Juliane Voigt, policy researcher at Carbon Market Watch, who highlighted the severe impacts of climate change on human rights. Building on the experiences made with the CDM, she pointed out key asks for the Paris agreement, such as robust human rights language in the operative text of the treaty. Mahesh Pandya, director of Paryavaran Mitra, gave an overview of CDM project implementation in India and highlighted shortcomings and possible ways forward. Maria-Jose Veramendi, senior attorney at AIDA presented the Belo Monte case, a mega hydro damn in Brazil that will have severe impacts on the environment and the local communities once in operation. The last speaker, Katharina Rall, research fellow at Human Rights Watch, showed a movie about the impacts of climate change in Kenya and how those threats relate to the COP21 negotiations.

The lively debate was opened and moderated by Abby Rubinson, independent consultant, who underlined the historic opportunity of the Paris agreement to recognize the interconnectivity of human rights and climate change.

Below is a more detailed summary of the presentations:

Juliane Voigt, policy researcher at Carbon Market Watch, gave a short overview of the range of human rights impacts caused by climate change. She thereby underlined that not only man-made climate change has severe impacts on the full enjoyment of human rights, but that also climate actions implemented under the UNFCCC can cause direct harm to the environment and people. Reflecting on the experiences with the CDM, she presented several projects that have had negative impacts on the ground, such as the Bajo Aguan Biogas CDM project in Honduras which led to forced displacements

of local communities and the Sasan coal power plant CDM project in India which caused severe health impacts of the local population. Building on the lessons that need to be learnt from the CDM, she highlighted that the current mechanisms established under the UNFCCC to address climate change apply very different standards and safeguards. This fragmented system can lead to human rights violations, despite the fact that countries have international obligations when implementing climate actions. As a suggested way forward, she emphasized the need for explicit references to human rights obligations in the Paris agreement as well as establishment of an overarching accountability system applicable to all mechanisms under the UNFCCC.

Mahesh Pandya, director at Paryavaran Mitra, reflected on the implementation of CDM projects in India. Using case studies, he showed how numerous CDM projects led to negative impacts on the social as well as environmental level, for example causing forced displacements and water contamination. Pointing out existing shortcomings and needed improvements of the CDM, he highlighted the need for a mandatory environmental impact assessment for all project types including renewable energy projects as well as the urgent necessity to strengthen local stakeholder participation. Furthermore, he proposed to focus on the CDM's sustainable development objectives and to reflect on them in the light of the recently adopted sustainable development goals (SDGs).

Maria-Jose Veramendi, senior attorney at AIDA, focused her presentation on a case study in Brazil: the mega hydro dam of Belo Monte. She highlighted the numerous negative impacts that this dam will cause, such as the drying of the Xingu river, that will impact 40,000 people including 12 communities, fishermen, farmers, for which the river is the main source of life. As one major shortcoming of the project, she pointed out the lack of consultation of the indigenous communities. In the second part of her intervention, she discussed the actions taken by her organization to support local affected communities such as, for example, providing legal advice and making their voices heard at the international level, for instance at the InterAmerican Commission on Human Rights.

Katharina Rall, research fellow at Human Rights Watch, presented a short movie, "[there is no time left](#)", which reflects on the severe impacts climate change already has and will cause in the future on the vulnerable communities in Kenya.

Reflecting on the facts showed in the movie, she highlighted that every response to climate change, either through mitigation or adaptation actions, always needs to respect human rights obligations. She furthermore stressed that Parties to the UNFCCC have now well understood the link between climate change and human rights and expressed the need to include robust human rights references in the Paris agreement.