

1st Prize Winner

How Would Addressing Inequality Help To Combat The Climate Crisis?

By Esther Ibukun Oyinboade, aged 8 (Nigeria)

Climate change and inequality are inter-related. Within my lifetime, the lake Chad basin, a natural reservoir of water for a population of about 30 million and the economic driver for ethnic groups across eight nations in Africa, have dried up. Unfortunately, the large population, heavy dependence on the basin was not sustainable. This led to its depletion affecting the livelihood of millions.

Desert encroachment, due to regular high temperature and indiscriminate felling of trees, has led to less arable lands. Cattle are finding lesser land space to graze hence, moving into farmlands causing regular clashes with the farmers in the savannah. Reports show that clashes between farmers and herders have led to Nineteen thousand deaths and hundreds of thousands of internally displaced people in Nigeria alone.

In the Niger Delta, oil spillages and gas flaring increase ambient temperatures, affect biodiversity, and destabilize the ecosystem impacting the livelihood of farmers and fishermen. These have caused poverty, youth dropping out of school to take up criminal vocations like oil bunkering, militancy, illegal refinery etc., causing further environmental degradation, insecurity, and poverty.

Inequality is further aggravated with the feminine gender. Women and girls must travel miles to source for water and livelihood, in this process they are deprived of education and subjected to harsh conditions.

I am proposing the following solutions to tackle inequality:

Afforestation Projects: Government can empower disadvantaged communities through education and planting of trees. These trees, in few years, will serve as wind breaks for the desert wind, protect crops, improve moisture, save water holes and basins, reduce carbon dioxide, and slow down global warming. Hence by tackling inequality, the climate problem is resolved.

Deployment of Technology: Government can partner with western companies to empower local populace through provision of Artificial Intelligence (computers with the ability to act intelligently like humans) that can predict weather patterns using historic weather data and other parameters. Artificial rain can also be simulated to create water in these arid areas. This can revamp agriculture and the local economy.

Minority Groups of the oil rich Niger Delta: Our Government has assented to reducing carbon emission at COP 26. Therefore, they should enforce local environmental laws to stop gas flaring and assist in providing alternative means of livelihood for affected farmers and fishermen through empowerment programs. This will combat youth restiveness, illegal bunkering, and its attendant environmental consequences.

Address Gender Inequality: Educating the girl child and promoting gender equality will reduce the numbers of women making their living from subsistence and unsustainable agricultural practices that are detrimental to the environment. It will also help slow down uncontrolled population growth (a major cause of inequality and poverty) as there will be less underage mothers.

Thank you.

2nd Prize

Reducing Inequalities To Combat Climate Change

By Duc Tri Bui Nguyen, aged 9 (Vietnam)

I live in a developing country which is suffering from the worst air pollution ever recorded. We are also suffering from many natural disasters like floods and storms every year due to climate change. Many children here are living in extreme poverty and cannot go to school. Reducing inequality can help to fight climate change. In my opinion, people need their basic needs met before concentrating on climate change, they need education to help them be more sustainable and they need to collaborate with each other to take actions to protect this beautiful world.

Firstly, people are more likely to help the world fight against climate change when they are healthy. Many people in Africa have to walk hours just to get water that may be polluted. They do not have the time or energy to care about climate change. The government should create better conditions to ensure greater social equality, such as offering jobs and shelters for poor people and investing in sewage treatment to provide clean water to all. People will be better positioned to help reduce climate change when their basic needs are met.

Secondly, education plays a vital role in combating climate change and is the key to understanding how the human-made climate crisis is affecting the planet. Educating children, youth, and adults on issues related to the climate crisis will raise their awareness and help to change their attitudes and behaviours towards it. Educated people have the knowledge to hold their leaders accountable and may put pressure on their governments to take actions against the climate crisis. Additionally, education can help find solutions for the future, for example, scientists can research and develop more recyclable materials, increase the re-use of precious resources, and improve devices to produce cleaner energy.

Lastly, reducing climate change is a team effort. All countries should collaborate and commit to taking actions that fight against climate change. Governments and businesses around the world should co-operate and share new sustainable technologies, especially with others in poor and developing countries in order to help build and promote green energy and reduce pollutants. Co-operation is an important strategy to address inequalities and cope with climate change on a global scale.

In conclusion, climate change is the result of human activities. People having their basic needs met and being educated is one-way inequalities can be addressed that will help to combat the climate crisis. As individuals, our small actions can also help to reduce inequalities and emissions. Please save energy, recycle more, make better consumption choices, and learn to co-operate with others to help protect our environment and live a more equal and better life.

3rd Prize

How Would Addressing Inequality Help To Combat The Climate Crisis?

By Annika Baberwal, aged 9 (UAE)

“Hey there! Who are you?” shouted Rabia at a frail, old, hunched back figure wandering aimlessly in her garden. The trespasser was extremely weak and was struggling to breathe. The figure laboriously turned without uttering a word and her face left Rabia horror-struck.

“I am Fabia”, replied the disfigured individual, and continued in a trembling voice. “I come from the year 2300! Africa!”, what year is it?” Rabia still shellshocked muttered “2022!”. “Well, have finally reached.” She then pulled out a packet of seeds and started sowing them.

Rabia, kept staring at this intruder who was planting with lots of efforts despite her physical self not supporting her. “The future is not very bright, help me plant these, I am hoping to time travel and plant trees across the globe to save this world for future. If your generation does not address the pressing issues like global warming, climate change, growing inequality etc. the world as you know it, will very rapidly become extinct.

Rabia bravely interjected, “What has inequality got to do with climate change!” Fabia, smiled and continued “Inequality simply put, reflects imbalance, which in turn reverberates disharmony and that in general is the cause for most suffering in the world! As an orchestra relies on the synergy of the ensemble, balance at the world stage across cultures, religions, and countries, is the key for coexistence and survival of humanity and our planet.

Climate change disproportionately impacts the less endowed and will push 68 to 135 million people into poverty in the next decade as confirmed by the world bank. As per IMF, China and US account for 50% of the world’s emission, however, the carbon pricing burdens the poorest. Large areas of the Africa and Middle East will experience extreme draught and will become inhabitable for humans by 2100. It is now that countries causing much of this problem have to be made to bear their fair share of associated costs. The richer countries should support the poorer neighbours by providing them natural disaster insurance cover and calamity tax based on the level of their carbon emissions. This will safeguard the interest of the poor while forcing the rich countries to reduce their carbon footprint.

“Enough talking, now help me plant these seeds!” Rabia took the seeds and started to sow them. Once done, she looked around only to find Fabia gone!

Rabia realized that Fabia had indeed done her job, not only did she succeed in planting the seeds in the soil, she had also very carefully planted a seed of thought into Rabia’s young mind.

4th Prize

Alleviating Inequality For A Better World

By Emma YuRuo Wong, aged 11 (Malaysia)

Inequality means differences in gender, age, origin and others between people. These have been causing unequal opportunities between people throughout our civilization. Unbalances like these benefit some while the less fortunate will experience worsening way of lives with the more visible examples in poorer countries whereby people are deprived of basic necessities. Hence, it is common that they need to walk far distances to get water and food. With climate change, they will face more difficulties in doing so. This shows that climate change worsens inequality. Given the inter-relation between the two, the question is whether can addressing inequality help in combating global warming?

One thing for sure is that in unequal situations, status competition drives consumption. This leads to spikes in greenhouse gas emissions and hence, global warming. The heightened demand of meat by the rich leads to greater methane in the atmosphere. Another example, this time between countries, is how Malaysia keeps building taller skyscrapers, in attempts to 'best' its neighbour down south. While such buildings boost the country's reputation, it causes an increase of carbon gases as the energy required to build and maintain buildings is a major factor of the climate crisis.

While the preceding paragraph seems to be a 'hit' on the rich, being wealthy is not wrong. Instead, wealth is a key weapon to battle climate change. Ideally, developed and wealthy countries should give overseas aid to developing countries facing climate crises. This helps to balance out the unfairness of developed countries contributing more greenhouse gases than say, the Philippines at its less than 1% amount, without bearing the brunt faced by its poorer cousin of numerous typhoons and sea levels rising four times faster than the world. By equalizing the wealth gap between rich and poor nations, communities globally have the best possible chances to survive global warming!

Financial strength aside, knowing how to deal with global warming is required especially by farmers. Insufficient knowledge about modern-day agricultural practices leads to declining crop yield in drought-hit Africa. 90% of farmers there are women and they are most likely never given the chance to go to school due to gender inequality across tribes. Without proper education, can we expect them to navigate successfully through an expected worsening of climate change in the coming decades?

More efforts should be undertaken by governments of all countries to alleviate all forms of inequality out there. There should also be more collaborative partnerships among all parts of society so that no one is left behind in the social, political, and economical spheres. I believe that there cannot be any environmental solution against global warming without getting rid of inequality from the world.

5th Prize

How Would Addressing Inequality Help To Combat The Climate Crisis?

By Hiranga Bandara Suraweera, aged 10 (Sri Lanka)

On the 1st of January 2022, I helped my mother cook milk rice topped with fried onions. We portioned the food into seven boxes and distributed among beggars in my hometown of Kandy, Sri Lanka. They were out in the streets at a temperature which had risen 1.5 degrees Celsius than last year. There were more women begging on the streets huddling 2-3 children, who inhaled toxic fumes emitted from vehicles and factories. Last year seven packets of food were enough to cater to all the beggars. Looks like we miscalculated this year!

After seeing the beggars, it dawned upon me that inequality and climate change are a vicious cycle. What I believed all along was that climate change causes inequality. However, for the first time, I understood that the reverse is true as well. Inequality exposes disadvantaged groups to the adverse effects of climate change, making them more helpless against its threats and decreasing their ability to recover from the damage. This is not something unique to my hometown – it is something global. There is a Pali word I learned from my mother which is ‘nekhamma’. It means freedom from craving. I realized that climate change is a result of inequality driving humankind away from ‘nekhamma’.

I wondered how a 10-year old like myself, can make a change under these conditions. I realized there is a lot we already do at home and in our community to help reduce inequality.

As a family, we make significant contributions to educate children, especially girls, in rural agricultural areas, so that they would lead empowered lives. I have personally given away my books, school material and stationery items to them. Although I live in a privileged neighbourhood, we have supported refugees who lost their means of living due to natural disasters and loss of farming lands, help rebuild their homes and aided them in receiving suitable employment. All this was done without any discrimination.

Last but not least, I wish women like my mother would be able to make decisions about climate change! At home, I have seen her having a wide knowledge of things to be done in this regard, and coming up with practical solutions. I think this mostly comes from her ability to multitask, being a wife, a mother and a professional. Maybe climate change will be seen and addressed differently, if women were given more changes to be leaders.