

1st Prize / Grand Prize Winner

My World

By Dhruv Bhatt, aged 16 (India)

Don't let your eyes wander,

This letter is an invitation to my bleak world, to my streets choked with refuse and my leaden sky. As I write to you, through eyes filled with smoke, I struggle to voice my pain in words. So, I paint them in my infinite darkness, hoping to cast a mark however faint: My cramped world stirs in the underbelly of the city. Far from schools and grounds. Far from forests and lakes. Far from the rallies of politicians that make promises they do not keep. In my world, children are born just as unique as those born in large city hospitals. But as we mature, ready to bloom and spread our ideas, we realize that we are bound by concrete.

We are eliminated like weeds and equated with thieves. When people see us on the streets begging, selling flowers, or doing odd jobs, they ridicule us and judge us by the colour of our clothes. And the politicians that call us their own, forget our existence once we cast our votes.

But we do exist. Like a fluff of cotton on thorns, we are blown whichever way the authorities choose. Our homes are torn apart. We are exiled to the filthiest corners of the city. We are forced to rebuild our lives from the rubble of our fathers. And even then, we are chained in the fetters of caste and class.

Indeed, my world is as dark as a coal mine but it is studded with diamonds.

In the light that seeps through the canopy of makeshift tin roofs, I often watch my sister inventing all sorts of toys from the 'treasure' we find in the trash. In the quick-witted boy who mastered several languages from tourists that visit our city, I see a profound scholar of language. And every morning on my way to the community well, I cannot help but notice the industrious sisters that were orphaned in the pandemic but refused to give in to fate. Even in those that gamble, I see sparks of accounting and mindfulness. Surely, amongst the countless other unnamed children in countless unnamed slums, live the Thunbergs and Maathais of the future.

So, how can addressing social inequality address the climate crisis? Reader, I question you back: how do you plan to solve a global challenge that affects us all without addressing the needs of nearly 1 billion children that lack necessities? Is it even possible?

2022 is the International Year of Basic Sciences for Sustainable Development (IYBSSD).

It is the year for developing programs that promote the basic sciences that form the core of our modern society. It is our year! Basic Sciences are crucial in empowering children in vulnerable societies. Indeed, it is only education that can change our perpetual state of helplessness.

My world is this slum I live in. Reader, I do not know of your world. But I do know that we share the same skies. We share the same sun. We are equal in every way and yet you will not find us debating in parliaments, in environmental conferences, or even schools. Our ideas matter and our voices matter. That is why we need to address social inequalities. That is why we need to be given equal access to education so that when people in power blame us and look down at us, we can reply confidently. So that we can say:

“Don't let your eyes wander. Don't look past us. We are not the problem; we are part of the solution.”

2nd Prize (Joint)

How Would Addressing Inequality Help To Combat The Climate Crisis?

By Arianne Davies, aged 14 (UK)

Indigenous peoples make up around 5% of the world's population and yet they are almost three times as likely as non-indigenous people to be living in extreme poverty. The biggest cause of inequality is having no recognition of land rights and ownership for indigenous peoples. This causes many people to migrate to urban areas in search of employment, where they are forced to face further discrimination. This includes being exposed to abuse, child labour and exploitation. Inequality affects indigenous women especially so because of their gender and race. Unfortunately, these inequalities are still a major issue, despite the fact that many laws have been put in place aiming to give indigenous peoples equal human rights and fairer opportunities.

The climate crisis is currently a major worldwide issue and affects the human population and animals alike. Some of the main effects of climate change are droughts, storms, heat waves, rising sea levels and melting glaciers. This destroys habitats and wreaks havoc on ecosystems, affecting everything from polar bears in the Arctic to clownfish in the Pacific. Climate change is a massive problem and it can only be solved if inequalities are pushed to the side and all of the world works together to end the climate crisis as one.

Indigenous peoples are some of the first to be directly affected by climate change, living so closely with the natural environment. Climate change causes loss of land and resources, unemployment and even more discrimination for the indigenous peoples. In the Amazon, deforestation and forest fragmentation increases carbon emissions into the atmosphere, causing droughts which lead to fires. This gravely affects the indigenous people living there and their livelihoods. In addition, indigenous people from the arctic region depend upon hunting for walrus, seals, polar bears and caribou, herding reindeer, fishing and gathering food. However, as the species change and food sources become less available because of changes in weather and ice, it causes serious challenges for indigenous people living there.

Indigenous peoples contribute the least amount of greenhouse gas emissions and yet they are some of the most affected by the damage it causes. However, they are fighting back by using their knowledge of the environment in a sustainable way. In Bangladesh, the villagers are using floating vegetable gardens to protect their livelihood from flooding and in Vietnam, the people living near the sea are helping to plant dense mangroves by the coast to diffuse tropical storm waves.

It is time that we talk less and listen more. By reducing inequalities and breaking down barriers we can improve the world for the better and hope to see a better future for everyone. The first key aspect is education. If indigenous peoples can get equal education then they can learn more about the world and can share their deep understanding of their local environment. In addition, being properly educated can help to create a safer space for indigenous peoples where they can feel more confident.

Another important factor is giving indigenous peoples ownership of the land they live on. They already know how to look after the land in a sustainable way, ensuring that it is looked after properly. This can help to reduce deforestation, which helps to reduce carbon dioxide emissions, produces more food sustainably without harmful chemicals and it gives the indigenous people living there fairer opportunities.

Decreasing inequalities of indigenous peoples can have a positive effect on the environment. This is because with more education and rights they can have a chance to impact the world by sharing their knowledge and technology. We still have time to change the future but first we must improve ourselves. We cannot move forward any further if we are leaving behind a crucial part of our society. We must all work together, and we must do it now if we want to change.

2nd Prize (Joint)

How Would Addressing Inequality Help To Combat The Climate Crisis?

By Lana Greenslade, aged 15 (UK)

Their origins date back to over 50,000 years ago, they account for 5,000 of the world's 6,000 languages and have paved the way for human kind to flourish in a modern day setting. Indigenous peoples are responsible for the enrichment and protection of our planet's most essential and sought out natural territories, inhabiting up to 80% of the earth's biodiverse regions despite possessing merely 18% of it themselves. Exploited for their ecological lifestyle and sustainable practises, why are we ignoring our most valuable population?

With fundamental cultural and spiritual ties to wildlife, biodiversity and the elements, the protection of our natural world is prominent in Indigenous communities. Throughout the millennia, indigenous people have developed a range of cost-effective yet environmentally friendly practises to sustain themselves, these include rotational farming, shifting cultivation, pastoralism, fishing, agroforestry, and hunting and gathering. All processes that increase the yield, soil quality and fertility, whilst only producing the necessary amounts as to not upset the balance of nature - a problem many supposedly developed and advanced countries seem to struggle with, leading to 900 million tonnes of food being thrown away yearly. Through resilience and years of hard work, Indigenous peoples have been able to support themselves, ensuring food security, all the while conserving the diversity of the native vegetation.

Despite many living in the world's most vulnerable ecosystems, Indigenous people are able to survive and maintain harmony amongst their often harsh and delicate surroundings. Given the name carbon sinks, these ecosystems are vital outlets for the absorption of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, making them necessities for the prevention of climate change and the greenhouse effect. More than ⅓ of the most effective carbon sinks, lie within the lands claimed by Indigenous peoples. Through the carbon-negative lifestyle and traditional mechanisms created by the indigenous cultures, the eco systems they occupy are time-tested to thrive. Healthy ecosystems are proven to clean our water, purify our air, maintain our soil and regulate the climate, all together storing and consuming as much as 45% of carbon stored on land - confirming just how basic and unavoidable our need for the security of indigenous ecosystems are.

We recognise the significance of Indigenous people's roles in combating the climate crisis, so why aren't we doing anything about it? Their land tells a long story, far before European colonialism and is still present in today's society. Indigenous communities are frequently violated and exploited; by being stripped of their land rights, denied control of their land use and resource management, we risk the alienation and extinction of our most valuable population. How can we allow this to continue? How can we help?

In the western world, property is privatised and is divided up and dominated by who is willing to pay the most. However in indigenous communities where they hold a historical and sacred connection to the land, this just isn't possible, this contributes to the overwhelming exclusion and marginalisation of indigenous peoples across the world.

Increasing the Indigenous representation in global governments would encourage the pro-Indigenous policies. For example, by allowing the more than 370 million population access to human rights and the liberation of the stolen land - amounting to an area larger than 1.5 billion acres in just North America - the Indigenous communities would be able to have authority over themselves and their land. Resulting in a multitude of benefits, this could have a similar effect as devolved powers, where the community are able to decide what is best for their land and shield themselves from the powerful corporations, currently destroying our vital carbon sinks through deforestation. This would help immensely as just in the Amazon rainforest alone, a hotspot for Indigenous settlements, it could ensure a billion tonnes of CO₂ is absorbed each year.

It is clear that justice for our Indigenous population is crucial to combating the climate crisis. Are you ready to help?

3rd Prize

How Would Addressing Inequality Help To Combat The Climate Crisis?

By Venuki Senandi, aged 16 (Sri Lanka)

“I’ll be dead soon anyway. Why should I care about climate change?” ~ Majority of the global population.

For far too long has mankind lived in denial of man-made phenomena like climate change and inequality. I too, used to be a product of a developing country’s society, where a lack of awareness of the climate crisis blinded me to the reality of my future on the planet that we call home. In the wake of modern technology, we assumed that something would be done by a saviour from a developed country to help humans race to “Planet B” before the destruction of the earth due to the insufficiency of action by mankind.

Growing up, I was fascinated by clouds. Yet I stood consciously at the side-lines as I watched the “silver lining” of the white clouds morph into the pitch-dark outline of thunderclouds that envelope the grim atmosphere in which plastic bags tumble in the smog-filled breeze. Now, 9 years away from climate change becoming an irrepressible predicament, I wonder which monumental atrocity should be given priority: the climate crisis or inequality. Ultimately, time, for no one, stands still.

Inequality is a shapeshifting monster that inhabits multiple catastrophic forms: financial, gender, racial, and political inequality. They ultimately boil down to one focal obstacle that influences one’s perspective on climate change: the inadequacy of awareness and lack of resources. Thus, a clear connection is seen between the climate crisis and inequality. Inherently, working on resolving inequality will give a notable proportion of the population insight into how individuals can act against the climate emergency.

Poverty: the menacing seed of inequality. It thrives in LEDCs, SIDs, and LDCs more than others. As countries become increasingly choked with smoke and fumes, the race for clean energy continues. Yet when multinationals from developed countries exploit LEDCs for their natural resources to achieve sustainable development goals, the latter is devoid of the resources to hardly attempt the achievement of these goals.

Attaining green energy is extremely capital-intensive. Consequently, those in developing countries must opt for the cheapest option: fossil fuels. These are countries that face both, the brunt of inequality, and are most impacted by the ramifications of climate change. It is ironic how developing countries face the consequences of the ignorant actions of developed ones. This is a type of inequality on its own.

Social inequality gives rise to disparate complications such as the digital divide. From displaced and poverty-ridden people to those who face gender and racial discrimination, a significant proportion of people do not have the privilege of accessing global news and information in one click. Accordingly follows the shortfall of self-education on worldwide issues such as the climate crisis.

Imagine what life in 2030 would look like if we worked together to ensure that inequality, in all its gruesome forms is eradicated. Imagine a world where every child is entitled to a scholastic education where awareness of the climate crisis is a part of every school curriculum. Imagine a future where we no longer see humans as separate from nature. An empowered society, where race, gender, and ethnicity do not make one’s entire identity. Imagine regaining a world we are on the brink of losing!

We must not get to the point where only the privileged in an unequal world can act against the climate crisis. We either survive together through solidarity, cooperation, and enlightened self-interest, or we fail as a species.

Oh well...if only the human desire for the existence of social hierarchy was a myth.

4th Prize

How Would Addressing Inequality Help To Combat The Climate Crisis?

By Ananya Verma, aged 13 (India)

Imagine you are served a ticket for over-speeding, though you do not know how to drive, you do not own a vehicle and you are not even someone in the passengers' seat – you are just an innocent bystander. Moreover, this is no ordinary penalty or fine. It's one you pay all your life or possibly with your life. How would it make you feel...anxious, befuddled, angry?

This, and many more, are the kinds of climate injustices faced by people around the world. Communities living in some of the least developed parts of the world are also the most vulnerable to Climate Change. Being poor, their contribution to Green House Gas emissions is miniscule, just as is their share in unprecedented growth in incomes and wealth that the world has experienced in recent decades. Yet, they are worst affected by modern economic growth that has plundered the planet and the natural ecosystem.

Worst of all, they are also most powerless in influencing the global policies.

For instance, in Bangladesh, which is also called the Ground Zero for Climate Change, millions of people are suffering the consequences of the climate related disaster. Each day they are losing their homes, their livelihoods and their families. Education of their children takes a backseat as they struggle to stay afloat and their health services too are adversely impacted. Severe floods, cyclonic storms, eroding river banks and disappearing villages are continuously pushing these communities into deeper and more cruel poverty and inequality. Yet, they remain powerless and hopeless to change any of the factors that bring them misery and deprivation owing to climate disaster.

This Must Change.

The communities suffering from these disasters cannot keep waiting till 2050 for tall commitments that are in real time basis nothing but empty, hollow promises. The world needs to act now! The inequality suffered by millions in our communities in coastal areas suffering the rising sea levels in the world must be addressed and help must reach them for mitigation and management of the awaiting disaster.

I urge the world leaders to pay heed to the signs today and go beyond the symbolic promises and assurances. I offer a 3C approach.

Co-create- Top industrial and scientific corporations of the world must invest in the future by hand holding and providing grants, financial and technical assistance to the communities that are under constant threat. Their monetary help will go a long way in helping build sustainable alternatives for the world. They must also incentivize their teams of engineers and scientists to find alternate solutions that are viable in these areas that are sinking each day.

Collaborate- Come together to help in every way possible, begin by collaboration with the local communities. Local knowledge and traditional practices handed down over generations like the floating farms of Bangladesh have helped mitigate the climate disaster successfully in some places and needs to be replicated. Involving local people in designing a sustainable solution has other benefits of raising awareness and participation of the youth of these areas who can then come up with innovative solutions to manage the crisis. Inequality has left many such people from participating in an affair that impacts them directly.

Compassion- Inequality of resources, wealth and income generating processes in the world in the past century has fuelled the climate crisis further. Everybody talks of making a change and yet we do not see anyone invested truly and thoroughly in this noble cause. The future generations need you to take charge now and make that sacrifice for those who are likely to vanish in the climate black hole if global actions are delayed or denied. Let us pull them back into the world. If we come together, we can.

5th Prize

How Would Addressing Inequality Help To Combat The Climate Crisis?

By Valentina Valeryevna, aged 18 (Russian Federation)

Some students are gathered in a library for their usual reading session. They pick a book, which sounds interesting to them and start reading.

Once upon a time, long ago, there was a planet. This planet was a place which millions, upon millions of species, both plant and animal, called home. It was green, it was blue and it was full of life. This planet was called the Earth. Though it may share the same name, the planet we know today is quite different, thanks to everything that happened over a course of five hundred million years. Tectonic plate movements, sea-level falls, asteroid collision, global cooling. These and many more were the cause of five mass extinctions, and the loss of over 90 per cent of flora and fauna. Today, the ecosystem has an even bigger and meaner enemy than Mother Nature modern man. Over the relatively few years of his existence, man managed to, single handedly, do more damage to the environment than natural disasters could in the hundreds of millions of years before him. He created a home for himself, he created cities and country, and in doing so destroyed many habitats, cut-down many forests, killed many species. As it stands, man and the pollution he brought upon the environment will most certainly be the cause of the 6th mass extinction.

Students finish reading the story, but it seems that its motives sparked a conversation. Why does it have to be that way? We live in the 21st century, the age of technology, with so many people willing to act, especially our generation. There must be something we could do to protect the life around us. Let's take a look at the Ocean. It needs to be cleaned and restrictions must be put on large scale fishing sites and areas with endangered species. Both problems could be solved with the introduction of an Ocean police! This police force would consist of members from all over the world and would use satellites and sonars to detect where the waste is and where there's illegal fishing in progress.

That's a great idea. We have so many satellites in space nowadays that an execution of such operation should not be even a slightest problem. But what about Global Warming? Reducing carbon emission is not enough and most solutions involve chemicals that would have a devastating effect on our climate and ecosystem.

I think the key to solving that problem also lies in space! I've been thinking about this for quite a while and I've come up with a concept I call Space-based Sunshade. It involves creating silicon discs, each studded with holes close to the size of visible lights wavelengths. These discs would produce a slight but imperceptible dimming of sunlight and be sent to space using electromagnetic rail guns which, have been used already to send water and fuel to astronauts. Not only is this method cheaper than most, but once the discs are launched and they arrived to the place between Earth and Sun, where the gravitational fields cancel out, they can stay there for at least 50 years!

Mark, you're a genius! Thank you, thank you. However, this still leaves us with one problem, trees being cut down.

Do you remember last year when Mr Beast planted 20 million trees? What if more creators and influencers do the same? There are so many good people with a great audience, if even half of them did something similar we would increase the number of trees in the world by at least 20 per cent! All these ideas are brilliant! Let's get straight to work!