

# **People's Manifesto**

## **on**

### **securing Climate Justice and moving towards a Just Transition**

*Building a framework based on the rights of the communities and democratic governance of resources.*

#### **Note**

This declaration comes in the context of the rising climate crisis and the inefficient, unjust and undemocratic manner in which the Indian government has responded to the crisis so far, putting the communities most affected by the climate crisis at a further risk of marginalization and dispossession. We have experienced governmental indifference in systematically responding to the climate crisis and failure in informing the country's people about the very real and grave dangers that they face.

The climate crisis has intensified alarmingly in recent years. Last year, 2023, was a staggering 1.45°C above the pre-industrial average. Every single month in the last ten months has broken the record for monthly average temperature. The climate crisis is unfolding with two kinds of weather events - on one side, we are witnessing the rise in extreme weather events such as erratic-torrential rainfall, cloudbursts, intense cyclones, devastating floods, heat waves, etc. On the other hand, the impacts of slow onset events such as sea level rise, expansion of droughts in regions that never witnessed it before, to glacial melting, drying of springs, desertification, slow rise in temperatures etc have become alarmingly evident in many parts of the country.

Climate crisis is affecting us all but the scale and severity of it is the worst for the communities who are dependent on the ecology and other climate sensitive sectors for sustenance and livelihoods. Alongside, the communities who are socio-economically marginalized and disadvantaged are at direct risk of facing the brunt of adverse impacts of the ongoing climate crisis.

This in the Indian context includes the majority of the Adivasi and other forest dependent communities, pastoralist communities, small and marginal farmers, agricultural laborers, coastal and fishing communities, economically disadvantaged groups working as workers in both the urban and rural spaces, migrant laborers, Dalits and other oppressed caste communities and religious minorities, women, youth and children, etc.

These people and communities, who are the least responsible for the climate crisis, are subjected to multiple risks of marginalization: one is due to the adverse impacts of the climate crisis; other due to the socio-economic structural forces of historical injustice and oppression; third is the increased risk of dispossession and marginalization due to the policies and actions taken by Indian government to respond to the Climate Crisis so far. The poor are also facing the brunt of food inflation partly caused by reduced supply of essential food items due to heat, droughts, and floods.

We know that fossil fuels emissions and extractivism are key causes of the climate crisis but the root of this crisis is the established economic system of capitalism. Capitalism with its inherent tendencies of extraction, accumulation, and profit maximization, seeking to commodify everything and maximize growth, and using and dumping on natural ecosystems has resulted in the climate crisis.

The historical responsibility for this crisis, undoubtedly, lies on the shoulders of the governments, corporations, extractive industries and financial institutions of the Global North. The Indian government has

been advocating for 'climate justice' in the climate negotiations as an issue of global north-south divide in relation to historical emissions and has been arguing for common but differentiated responsibilities and demanding finance and technological support for the developing nations and others. While following a climate policy at the country level that allows large scale emissions and extractions to continue and internally offsetting such actions through increased use of land, forest and resource based actions-plantations, renewals etc that doubly impact the communities.

India's climate action policies have been formulated without holding any due process of consultation and involving communities who are the key stakeholders and the worst affected by this crisis. These interventions do not incorporate principles of justice, equity, constitutional democratic governance framework, and at the same time, put forward false climate solutions that continue to favor the privatization of economy, destruction of ecosystems, extractive development, extraction of resources, violation of human rights, green washing, illegal grabbing of land, economic instability, health and food insecurity. India's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), domestic climate policies and actions have been framed ignoring and undermining the structures of democratic governance of natural resources enforced through the constitutional provisions of 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Schedule, governance legislations like the PESA and FRA and other such laws that enforce the land and resource rights of the forest/resource dependent and worker communities.

While the Indian government has been talking about becoming "net zero" by 2070, there is no clear framework as to how the Indian government envisions achieving this transition, especially when millions of Indians are dependent on the fossil fuel industry for economic sustenance.

In the last decade, we have seen that climate policies have become instruments for the government and bureaucracy to maintain and intensify its control over forests, ecosystems, natural resources and land. We see the existing climate action discourse in India as favoring the centralization of finance, decision making, and corporatization of power, privatization of economy and continued commodification of nature through green washing.

In the name of tackling the climate crisis, the government has been promoting a "green growth" discourse to incentivize sanction and flow of huge finance, which benefits the same State-Corporate nexus that alongside, also actively pursues extractive development trajectory. At the same time, the unchecked extractive projects sanctioned by the government in many ecologically sensitive areas have resulted in massive disasters and gravely impacted the social and environmental fabric of these landscapes such as the Himalayas, islands and the coastal areas of India.

We also see how using climate change as the context, the government has pushed many legal and policy changes to promote market based climate solutions such as carbon markets, green credits, private plantations and other projects such as the expansion of large renewable. On the other side of this , we find the government watering down the laws and policies that safeguard the environment and forests of India (such as the Forest Conservation Act of 1980 ) and abstaining from the implementing laws that safeguard the tenure rights of forest dependent communities and establish democratic governance of resources.

Lastly, the governmental interventions in the policy landscape seem to be reorienting the State-citizen relationship by placing the onus of climate action on individual behavior and lifestyle change. The individual lifestyle centered climate action discourse may be sweet sounding but needs to be analyzed in the larger context of caste hierarchies and socio-economic inequities that prevail in the country. Recent wealth and income inequality analysis also highlights that India is going in the opposite direction of becoming more

unequal. Climate Crisis is a systemic crisis, requiring a multifaceted structural and systemic response and action. The Governmental failure in coming up with an adequate, democratic, just and equitable climate action and just transition articulation has become evident to the people. In this context, we put forward our key demands.

## **Key Demands**

### ***A. Reforming and Restructuring India's Climate Action Policy Framework***

1. Review and reframe India's Climate Action Framework at both International and National levels on the principles of Justice, Equity, Democratic Governance, Constitutional Rights by involving the communities and keeping their rights and concerns at the core of formulating climate actions.
2. All matters on climate action for adaptation and mitigation should be mandatorily be, by constitutional provisions, by law, by the institutions of democracy such as Gram Sabhas in the CFR areas under FRA and Fifth Schedule areas; the Panchayati Raj Institutions where they exist; and the traditional or customary local bodies in the Sixth Schedule areas in Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura, the states of Nagaland and Mizoram, the Darjeeling Hill Council areas in W. Bengal, the Andaman & Nicobar Islands , hill areas of Manipur.
3. All planning, decision making, and execution on climate actions should be location, ecology and community specific and entrusted with the above institutions of democracy and
4. The administration, departments and other expert bodies and civil society groups are to assist and execute the plan squarely under the control of the aforementioned institutions of democracy.
5. At national level, the government must facilitate the process of reformulating and reframing both the National Action Plan on Climate Change and the state level climate action plans by ensuring:
  - a. communities on the ground who are likely to be the most affected are involved through and through into the process and decision making.
  - b. participation from all other key stakeholders such as civil society organizations, independent experts, trade unions, climate sensitive-sector wise representation and others and
  - c. Uptake of a decentralized bottoms-up approach instead of the previous top-down approach and one- fit solution to all.
  - d. Collectively agreed on specific targets for emission reductions, framework to make way for just transition based on each region's context and situation and the needs of each sector.
  - e. Prioritized actions and safeguards for communities exposed to the adverse impacts of climate change be it extreme weather events or slow onset events.
  - f. Ensure strict compliance to FRA and PESA.
6. Reframe the climate actions in terms of mitigation and adaptation as the current mitigation efforts are insufficient and ineffective and need a thorough and critical analysis to respond to the causes of the problem. Need to recalibrate our approaches and resources on strengthening climate adaptation actions and systems.
7. Reworking and decentralizing climate finance, its allocation and distribution so as to ensure equal resources for both mitigation and adaptation actions.

8. Prioritize setting up safety net mechanisms as well as accessible and essential infrastructure and services in response to the climate change impacts such as heat waves, scorching heat and summer temperatures whose impact is going to put millions of workers, vendors, agricultural laborers and other communities at grave risk of vulnerabilities especially their health and livelihoods.

### ***B. Reforming Laws and Policies in relevance to Climate Action***

1. Review and roll back the notification and subsequently published new rules and policy interventions of the Carbon Credit and Green Credit Program and Accredited Compensatory Afforestation Rules, as these allow privatization of forests, and resources, deploy a carbon reductionist paradigm and allow private entities to continue emission as usual by using these programs to offset their emissions and have major implications on the legal rights of the STs and OTFDs as well as on the forest biodiversity.

2. All climate change mitigation and adaptation policies and programmes should comply with FRA and PESA and should be implemented only with the prior informed consent of the Gram Sabhas constituted under laws as part of local government (FRA, PESA) and also the recognized traditional bodies as local government bodies elsewhere.

3. Just and Effective Implementation of the Right to Fair Compensation and Rehabilitation Act 2013, Forest Rights Act 2006, and PESA, Plastics/Solid/Liquid Waste Management Rules .

4. The government must establish a robust and effective disaster response mechanism through creation of a dedicated fund supported by the Union government as well as strengthening time bound rescue and recovery operations. The Disaster Management Act of 2005 must be reviewed and strengthened for priority action, relief and rehabilitation during the post-disaster period.

5. Increase the purview and financial budget on the NREGA to strengthen Climate Adaptation Actions at regional and local level. Six states have NREGA being implemented in their urban areas and it should be expanded to all states in all towns.

5. A joint independent committee be made consisting of members from Ministry of Tribal Affairs, NCST civil society groups, independent experts, forest rights researchers, community representatives and legal experts who must undertake the process of reviewing amendments made in the Wildlife Protection Act, Biological Diversity Act, MMDR Act, Forest Conservation Amendment Act and others to evaluate and ensure their compliance with FRA and PESA.

6. Review the recent amendments made in the Forest Conservation Act of 1980 by forming a multi stakeholder committee to assess how the recent amendments can aggravate the climate crisis by allowing destruction of India's forests. Reinforce the legal mechanism to ensure compliance of FRA in the implementation of the Forest Conservation Act and Rules through amendments requiring the government to ensure complete recognition and vesting of rights in all respects. Make the free prior informed consent of Gram Sabhas' as the mandatory requirement for any proposal for forest diversion. Further, in any case where forests are proposed to be diverted for non forestry purposes and afforestation, and where FRA implementation has not been completed, forest diversion must be kept in abeyance until FRA implementation is completed and Gram Sabha consent is obtained. The recent amendments made in the

Forest Conservation Act and Rules in 2023 undermine and dilute the FRA and will lead to destruction and degradation of India's forest ecosystems.

7. Notification of all habitations or groups of habitations outside Scheduled Areas in all States and Union Territories where STs are the largest social group as Scheduled Areas such as Ladakh and recognize the local governance and notification as schedule area demands coming from any such areas. Despite persistent demands by Adivasi organizations, villages have been left out in the 10 States with Scheduled Areas and in other States with ST populations. As a result, 59% of India's STs remain outside the purview of Article 244 as well as the other laws applicable to Scheduled Areas, including the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act 2013 (LARR 2013).

8. The Environment Impact amendments of 2020 and 2006 must be scrapped (as they both do not include solar, wind and any other RE projects). Also, the government must re-strengthen the Environment Assessment Notification of 1994 which establishes democratic decision making through the process of public consultation on large infrastructure projects and brings all kinds of Renewable energy interventions under its purview too.

### **C. Checks and Balances on Big Projects**

1. All mega infrastructure projects like river interlinking projects, hydropower projects, industrial corridors, railway projects, coastal road projects and many others, especially projects located in sensitive terrain and geographies such as coastal areas, islands, Himalayas, forested river valleys etc., should undergo a multi-disciplinary review whereby the impacts of these existing projects must be mapped by a multi-stakeholder committee.

2. Free Prior Informed consent of Gram Sabhas to be mandatory for all developmental projects and informed public consultation process must be made mandatory for all large projects.

3. Apart from individual projects, sector specific strategic impact assessment studies that look and analyze the entire sector as a whole need to be promoted and mandated in the country. These studies must look at the sector in terms of both backward linkages (mining and forward linkages (disposal of panels) as well as in relevance to its inter linkages with the other sectors.

### **D. Land Use – Land use Change and Forestry Sector and Plantations**

1. The Indian Government must immediately abstain from deploying Land Use Land Use Change and Forestry sector (LULUCF) as the internal offset mechanism and stop promoting large scale plantations and afforestation as the all-in-all solution to the climate crisis. Enough scientific studies and evidence have already questioned the approach of using plantations for carbon dioxide sequestration and have publicly stated that the figures projected by the Indian State are gross over-estimates and misleading.

2. Implementation of Compensatory Afforestation Fund Act, 2016 must be in compliance with FRA, PESA and LARR 2013 and it must be ensured that the Compensatory Afforestation Funds are democratically managed by routing them to Gram Sabha formed under Forest rights Act.

3. All schemes and programs launched by the union and state governments in relevance to plantations and afforestation must ensure compliance with FRA and PESA and the funds for the same should be divulged to the Gram Sabha.
4. The Community Forest Resource Rights Governance framework under FRA 2006 which empowers Gram Sabha for the governance, management and conservation of forest and biodiversity must be strengthened and implemented in its full effect.
5. The State must stop the categorization of land into categories like wastelands, degraded lands, deemed forests etc and stop using these categorizations as excuses for allowing diversion of forests for projects or plantations.
6. No rights of the forest dependent communities should be violated, nor the communities be criminalized for exercising their forest rights on their customary or individual forest lands because of the plantation projects and forestry/conservation related actions by the government.
7. No new Protected Areas or Tiger Reserves should be notified in the country without complying with the provisions of Forest Rights Act. The National Biodiversity Action Plan and the Wildlife Action Plans at both National and State Levels must be restructured to ensure compliance by the FRA and PESA.

#### **E. Agriculture**

1. Creating and enabling a democratized policy and governance system that focuses on both adaptation and mitigation so as to provide co-benefits of mitigation from low-cost locally suitable adaptation especially for the resource-poor smallholders.
2. Support farming practices like intercropping, mulching, crop rotation and diversification, agro-forestry and establish decentralized banks for local seed varieties, feed and food and promote the adoption of locale-context-specific resource management and conserving practices.
3. Ensure the development of climate forecasts with high predictability and dissemination of information and setting up effective insurance and safety net mechanisms against climate risks and adverse impacts caused due to the climate crisis.
4. Building institutional capabilities for transitioning to low carbon growth, and insuring against climate risks are a few strategies that have proven benefits on the ground.
5. Expand the agricultural extension services and provide farmers with seeds that are drought-resistant, heat-resistant, and can withstand flooding and support the decentralization of seed banking practices.
6. Compensation for crop and farm losses due to all climate change events should also extend to all sharecroppers and tenants, not just landowners.

#### **F. Just Transition**

1. Ensure fossil fuel sector is not being privatized by the Indian government in the name of just transition by allowing auction and transfer of coal mines to the private groups and putting restrictions and onus of climate crisis on the public sector.

2. Government must create an independent process of consultation with public sector undertakings in coal and fossil economy, trade unions, worker groups, civil society groups, independent experts, government representatives to formulate in a participatory and democratic manner a comprehensive and long term plan for making a shift from a fossil based economy to a greater reliance on renewable. The framework for just transition must:

i. Ensure support for public sector undertakings so as to be able to make a smooth economically stable transition out of fossil fuels.

ii. Ensure a socio-financial support and livelihoods security program for the millions of workers (and their families) who are dependent on the fossil fuel industry for livelihoods and sustenance. The government must recognize that people dependent on the coal/ fossil economy do not just include mine workers but many other kinds of workers such as truck drivers, repair shops, vendors, informal and unorganized workers. The government must engage in setting up a thorough plan and support mechanism for the entire region around a coal mine area and the rural/ township economy.

iii. Establish a decentralized and democratic roadmap for both just transition and redesigning the regional economy because though coal production in India has a state specific distribution but within each state, there are district specific geographical variations and so the just transition plan needs to be re-municipalized.

iv. Provide people security against the ongoing decommissioning and unplanned closure of mines in different districts in different states of India. Uninformed and in secure form of closure of coal mines should be stopped and a more informed public approach be adopted in consultation with unions.

v. Workers and Unions are key stakeholders and must be included in all levels of decision-making and implementation in the discussions and framing on Just transition in regard to the Energy Sector specifically. No government policy on Just transition, no commitments and targets, and no just transition task force that fails to involve workers and unions at all steps will be accepted.

vi. The just transition framework must also incorporate street vendors communities and ensure that such a framework allows transitions from single-use plastics to reuse systems and an enabling regulatory system for the same must be set up.

### **G. Renewable Energy**

1. Need to establish and frame strong regulatory structures and safeguard measures to prevent the environmental and social damage that large-scale renewable projects cause and to ensure that these projects also undergo thorough review, monitoring, and regulation both pre and post approval. A comprehensive socio-environmental study must be taken before sanctioning any large scale renewable energy projects and the local people and affected communities should be consulted and their views registered and considered.

2. Make mandatory for wind, solar and other Renewable Energy projects to obtain the environmental clearance under the legally binding Environment Impact Assessment Notification 2006 and ensure a

clearance under the Forest Conservation Act, 1980 is also undertaken and strict compliance to FRA is ensured, if the forest land is to be used.

4. A comprehensive study must be undertaken by the government of the existing renewable energy projects in different states and the socio-environmental impacts and concerns of these projects.

5. A commission must be set up to investigate and document the land acquisition related violations that have taken place in the large RE projects so far and ensure the affected people are duly compensated for their loss and suffering. Due action must also be taken against the project proponents where rights of communities are found to be violated in any way.

6. Form a multi stakeholder committee to review the land-leasing model of land acquisition that has been adopted especially in case of Solar Power Projects, especially from farmers, so as to ensure that people are not being coerced or deceived into accepting either smaller lease payments or being mis-informed or not informed about the implications of such lease process. The discussion on revenue sharing in case of such land leasing models with the people whose land is taken must be put forward and follow the norm and mandate of FPIC.

7. EIA and SIA must be made mandatory for all Renewable and clean/green energy projects and no exemption be provided from environmental clearances and public consultations. The government must also identify and demarcate certain areas as no-go zones based on decentralized climate risk assessment studies of the fragile geographies.

## **Signatories**

### **Organizations/Groups**

1. Adivasi MahaPanchayat Madhya Pradesh
2. Affected Citizens of Teesta
3. Basaniya Bhooudeshiya Pariyojna Kisaan Sangharsh Samiti Mandla, Madhya Pradesh
4. Bundelkhand Majdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan, Madhya Pradesh
5. Centre for Financial Accountability
6. Chattisgarh Van Adhikaar Sangathan, Chattisgarh
7. Climate Front India
8. COLLECTIVE
9. Human Rights Forum
10. Jal Jangal Jeevan Bhaao Saajha Manch Madhya Pradesh



11. Jharkhand Jangal Bachao Andolan, Jharkhand
12. Khoj, Maharashtra
13. Live Foundation, Ranchi, Jharkhand
14. Lokmanch, Raigad, Maharashtra
15. Maharashtra Rajya Gramsabha Naisargik Sansadhan Hakkdharak Sangathan, Maharashtra
16. Mahila Kisan Adhikaar Manch (MAKAAM)
17. Maldhari Vikas Sangathan, Gujarat
18. Manthan Adhyayan Kendra
19. Manthan Yuva Sansthan, Ranchi
20. National Alliance for People's Movements (NAPM)
21. One Future Collective
22. Prakriti Bachao o Adivasi Bachao Manch, WB
23. Raaghavpur Bhooudeshiya Kisaan Sangharsh Samiti, Dindori, Madhya Pradesh.
24. Rajasthan Gramin Adivasi Ekta Sangathan, Rajasthan
25. Roodhipratha Paaramparik Aadivaasi Graam Sabha Madhya Pradesh
26. Samagra Vikas
27. Shramjiivi Sangathan Satna, Madhya Pradesh.
28. Sikkim Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association.
29. Teachers Against the Climate Crisis
30. Upper Narmada Kisaan Sangharsh Morcha, Dindori Madhya Pradesh.
31. Uttar Bangal Ban Jan Shramjivi Manch, West Bengal
32. Van Gujjar Tribal Yuva Sangathan , Uttarakhand
33. Wullar Bachav Front, Kashmir
34. Youth for Climate India
35. Youth for Himalaya
36. Yugma Collective

37. Zilla Budakattu Girijana Abhivrudhi Sangha, B.R.Hills, Karanataka

**Individuals**

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40. Ashim Roy

41. Deepak Bara

42. Dr P A Azeez

43. Dr Satish Gogulwar

44. Dr. Madegowda C

45. Kavita

46. Mamata Dash

47. Manjula Bara

48. Nagaraj Adave

49. P.Madhavi

50. Priyapillai

51. Raghav Srivastava

52. Rituja Mitra

53. Rohit Jain

54. Roop Chand Makhnotra

55. Sharmeen Couto

56. Shuchi Vora

57. Souparno Lahiri

58. Subrat Kumar Sahu, Independent Filmmaker

59. Sumer Singh Batti

60. Vandita Morarka