

GLOBAL PROSPERITY



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INTRODUCTION

Let's end poverty: The future of our world should be one where no one lives in poverty and all people are able to enjoy prosperity and well-being. In order for humans to thrive, we need a planet with vibrant ecosystems, abundant nature, and a stable climate. We must reconcile these objectives.



THE CHALLENGE

While the world has made great strides towards improving living standards, the uncomfortable fact is that most people alive in the world today still live in poverty. According to Our World in Data, 85% of the world live on less than \$30 per day, two-thirds live on less than \$10 per day, and every tenth person lives on less than \$1.90 per day. While some in the rich North romanticise it, the reality is that living in poverty is miserable. As Hannah Ritchie and Max Roser write: “The poorest in the world are often hungry, have much less access to education, regularly have no light at night, and suffer from much poorer health.” Despite the much-vaunted Sustainable Development Goals, half a billion people are still expected to live in poverty in 2030¹.

Even so, it is important to keep the historical context in mind. In the past, everyone lived in poverty, except a small elite of aristocrats and monarchs. This was a world of grief-stricken parents, where nearly half of children born would die before reaching adulthood. Following the advent of the Industrial Revolution, the share of people living in extreme poverty has declined continuously for two centuries, and ordinary people – at least in the Global North – now enjoy livelihoods that would have been inaccessible to all but kings in even the recent historical past. Social indicators like childhood mortality have dropped precipitously, and the global average is now about 4%.

It is true that this massive jump in living standards has been almost entirely based on fossil fuels, which has given us the legacy of the climate crisis. It is also true that the massive increases in consumption of the world’s resources due to economic growth – in numerous areas, from forests to phosphorus – are manifestly unsustainable. Does that mean that ending poverty via economic growth in the Global South will destroy the environment? The key dilemma facing the modern world therefore is how to reconcile ending poverty with long-term ecological sustainability.

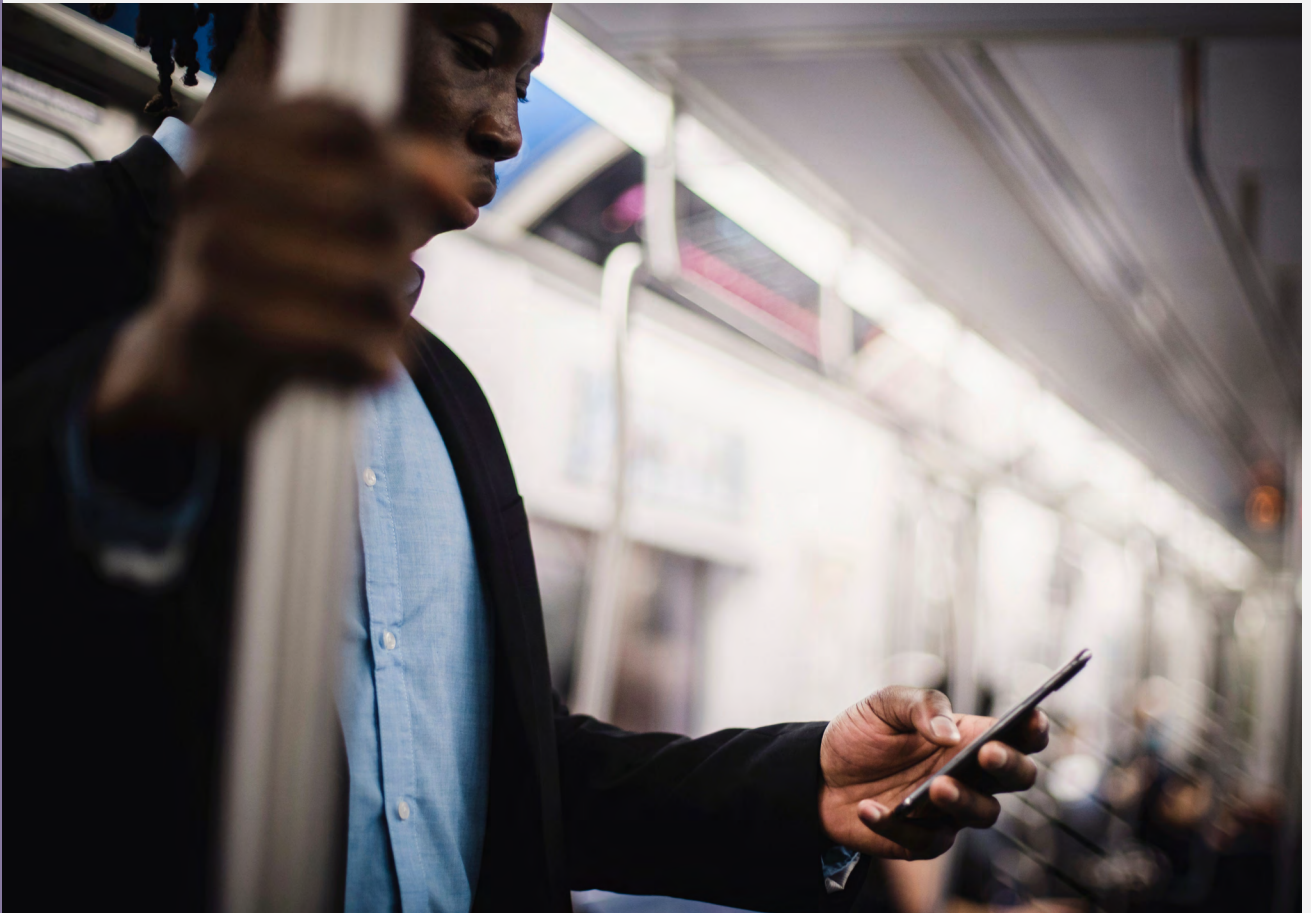


ADVANCE GLOBAL WELL-BEING

We want all humans to be able to enjoy prosperity and well-being. At the bare minimum, this includes the availability of affordable and nutritious food, reliable access to modern energy services, a decent home, good health care, and education. It encompasses the possibility to do meaningful work and support one's family and having a voice and participating in political and decision-making processes. Living in poverty severely limits people's freedoms. It robs people of their dignity and prevents them from playing a meaningful role in society.

The future of our planet is a future where no one lives in poverty. In order for humans to thrive, we need a planet with vibrant ecosystems, abundant nature, and a stable climate. The objectives of eradicating poverty, ensuring human welfare, and caring for the planet are intimately intertwined, and they are all on the top of the list of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Now, we should put words into action.

Our commitment for the well-being of humanity and the planet go hand in hand. Any transition we propose cannot come at the cost of the suffering of the poorest, nor should it keep people in poverty.



OUR SOLUTIONS

- **1. Provide abundant and affordable energy supplies to the poor.** Increased access, low costs, and reliability should be the top priorities in the poorest parts of the world. In some cases, even fossil fuels like LPG may be better than energy sources like biomass that involve the destruction of local forests for charcoal for cooking.
- **2. Make zero-carbon energy feasible and affordable.** The rich world should promote carbon-free energy in developing countries by improving the affordability and accessibility of zero-carbon energy options and supporting the 'Climate Prosperity' agenda of the Climate Vulnerable Forum.
- **3. Support sustainable intensification of agriculture.** Modernisation of agriculture and food systems contributes to food security and eradication of poverty, promotes economic development and reduces environmental impact, allowing us to preserve nature.
- **4. Strengthen resilience against extreme weather.** People in poverty are especially vulnerable to climate change not as an accident of geography but because they lack the resources to protect themselves against extreme weather events and other climate impacts. Increasing wealth is linked with increasing resilience to extreme weather, helping to save lives, protect property and increase human well-being.
- **5. Focus international development cooperation on ending poverty.** Continued extreme poverty anywhere in the world is a moral outrage and an injustice that cannot be tolerated.



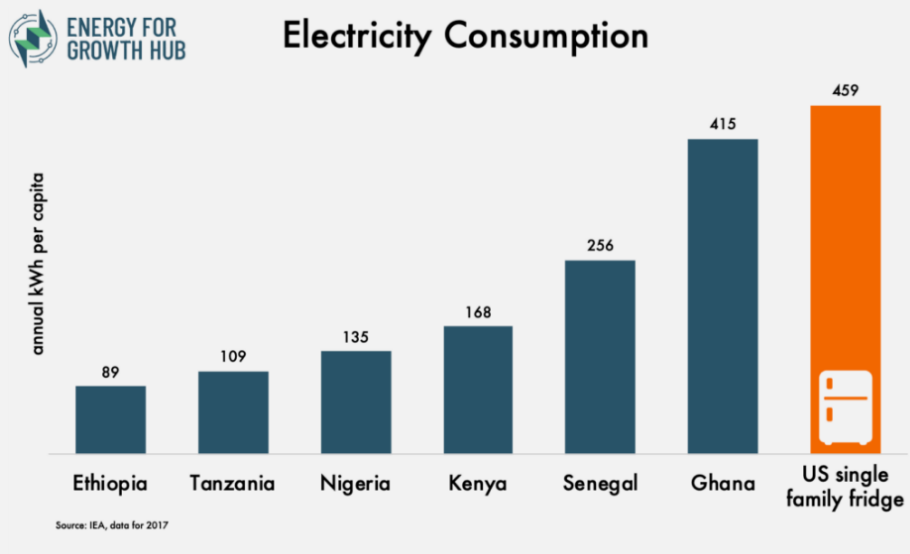
RePlanet Position on Global Development

ENDING POVERTY IS BEST FOR THE PLANET

Three billion people in low-income countries rely on traditional biomass² for cooking: wood, dung, or charcoal. This contributes to deforestation, soil erosion and loss of biodiversity. In poorly ventilated houses, indoor cooking and heating leads to lung disease and respiratory infections. Lower respiratory tract infections are the second most important cause of death in low income countries³. Poverty is bad for people and nature.

ENERGY IS KEY TO DEVELOPMENT

Many countries in Africa and Asia still suffer from a shortage of energy. The deficit is huge. An average African uses less energy than an average American refrigerator⁴(figure 1). In Congo and Niger, fewer than one in five people have access to electricity; in South Sudan and Chad this is fewer than one in ten.



There is a dire need for energy for construction, heating or cooling houses, powering industries, and improving health care. Affordable, abundant and portable energy is vital for the modernisation and sustainable intensification of the agricultural sector and the improvement of food security⁵.

Our goal is to end energy poverty. Everyone must have access to affordable and reliable energy. Without abundant energy services, societies cannot prosper.



PROMOTE ENERGY GROWTH IN THE POOREST COUNTRIES

Considering the imperative to end poverty, substantial and continued energy growth is required in the poorest parts of the world. Low-income countries face the novel challenge of escaping poverty without the recourse to burning vast quantities of fossil fuels, as high-income countries did.

Fortunately, no low-income nation envisions a long-term future dominated by fossil fuels. Countries like Kenya, Zambia and Ethiopia already generate more than 50 percent of their power from low carbon sources. Even countries with abundant natural gas resources, such as Senegal and Mozambique, plan to scale up renewables.

The pathway towards net-zero development will look different for different countries. It is not up to rich countries and institutions to tell poor nations what to do. Instead, they should support countries' own plans to develop while avoiding carbon emissions with technology transfer, aid and concessional financing.

The Climate Vulnerable Forum, a coalition of 55 countries most affected by climate change, plays a pioneering role. They coined the concept of 'climate prosperity', which envisages clean energy paths as the way to end poverty and advance economic growth.

RePlanet supports initiatives of low-income countries, such as those of the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF), to achieve middle income status with clean energy paths.

Bangladesh, chair of the CVF, has produced a Climate Prosperity Plan which has enabled the cancellation of 10 proposed coal-fired power plants. These are being replaced by a combination of offshore wind, nuclear, gas and other technologies. Other developing countries have recognised the need to increase energy provision without increasing coal. At COP26, India pledged to have 500 GW of non-fossil electricity generating capacity installed by 2030, and 50% of electricity from low carbon sources.



RENEWABLES ARE NOT ENOUGH

Low-income countries not only need more energy, they also need energy that is reliable, affordable and suitable for various purposes, such as cooking, transport, and the production of fertilizer. In addition to electricity, liquid and gaseous fuels are important energy sources.

Meeting this energy demand is not feasible with a small-scale intermittent renewables-only infrastructure. The insistence on a 100% renewables agenda thus risks being a form of green colonialism if it prevents countries from developing reliable, cheap energy systems. At the moment, the only viable option to produce net-zero liquid and gaseous fuels is by a buildout of nuclear and renewable energy to produce synthetic fuels⁶. The interest for nuclear energy in developing nations is growing, meanwhile, due to its reliable and zero carbon nature. Nearly 30 low- and middle-income countries⁷ have developed plans for nuclear power programmes, 11 of them in Africa.

Large, efficient and forward-thinking investment in clean energy systems in low-income countries now will provide global benefits for generations to come. However, avoiding fossil fuels and building a clean energy system in those countries comes at a high initial investment cost. High-income countries and financial institutions such as the World Bank and the European Investment Bank should provide financial support for long-term investment in zero-carbon energy infrastructure. In absence of such support, struggling countries will resort to cheaper and more straightforward fossil fuelled development, following the same path rich nations built their societies and welfare on. Currently the World Bank refuses to fund nuclear projects, which risks locking developing countries into high-carbon or unreliable energy indefinitely.

RePlanet strongly endorses the call from the Climate Vulnerable Forum and other groups from the Global South for \$500 billion of financing to be provided for mitigation and adaptation purposes from rich countries and China. The developed world must help finance reliable and robust low-carbon energy options in low-income countries, including nuclear power.

This is not 'aid' money given as charity; it is a small part of the recognition of the imperative of climate justice, that the vast majority of the climate crisis has inadvertently been caused in the Global North.

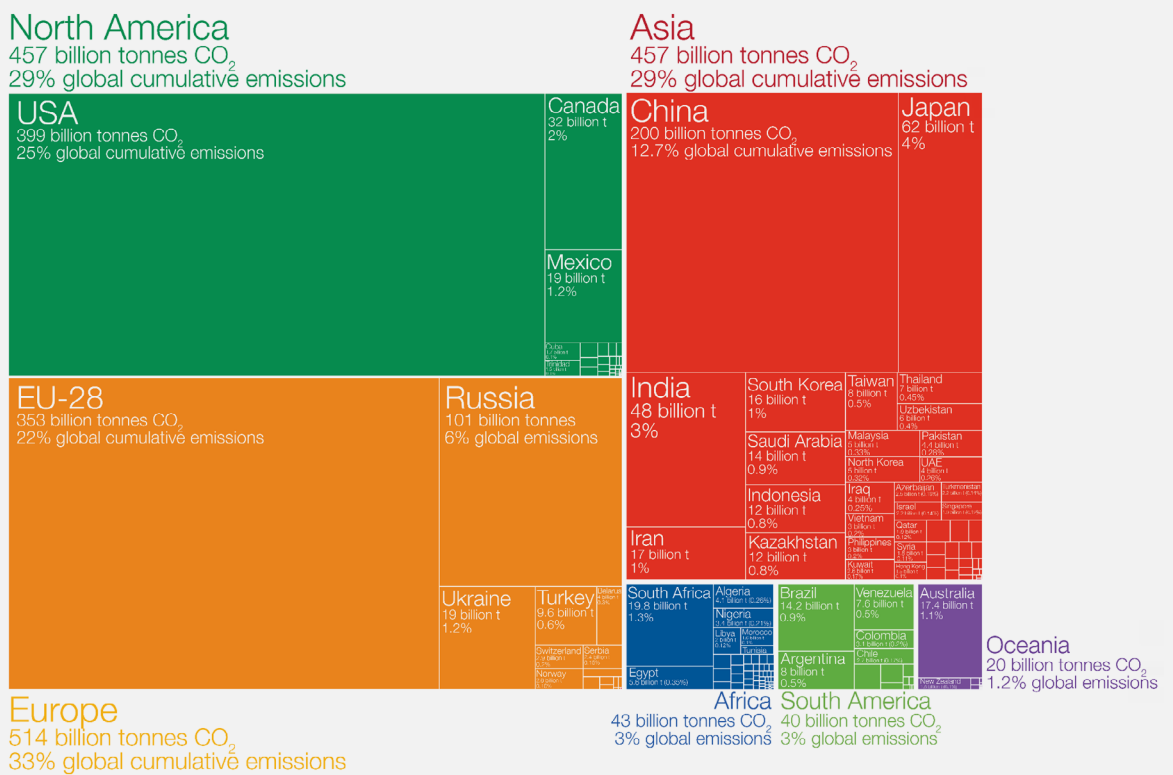


The contours of this injustice can be clearly seen in figure 2 below. Climate change is caused by cumulative emissions, and the historical responsibility for causing current climate impacts lies in the Global North. The United States alone has contributed a quarter to cumulative emissions, while a third has come from Europe. Africa has contributed just 3%. Developing countries cannot be expected to make sacrifices to help solve global problems caused mostly and inadvertently by developed countries. It is therefore an essential part of climate justice that financing for clean energy systems should be generously supported by those countries most responsible for causing the climate crisis on highly concessional terms.

Who has contributed most to global CO₂ emissions?

Our World in Data

Cumulative carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions over the period from 1751 to 2017. Figures are based on production-based emissions which measure CO₂ produced domestically from fossil fuel combustion and cement, and do not correct for emissions embedded in trade (i.e. consumption-based). Emissions from international travel are not included.



Figures for the 28 countries in the European Union have been grouped as the 'EU-28' since international targets and negotiations are typically set as a collaborative target between EU countries. Values may not sum to 100% due to rounding.
 Data source: Calculated by Our World in Data based on data from the Global Carbon Project (GCP) and Carbon Dioxide Analysis Center (CDIAC). This is a visualization from OurWorldInData.org, where you find data and research on how the world is changing. Licensed under CC-BY by the author Hannah Ritchie.

Unfortunately, the most climate vulnerable countries are not only suffering from the most extreme impacts of climate change, but they are also facing a debt crisis - not all of their own making - which is aggravated by climate damages. The Climate Vulnerable Forum's V-20 group has issued a debt manifesto outlining how unpayable debts can be written down in exchange for more focused climate action in vulnerable countries⁸.

RePlanet supports this call for a debt write-down for the most climate vulnerable developing countries. We express our solidarity with those most affected by climate change and join them in their call for climate justice.



TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE INTENSIFICATION OF AGRICULTURE

Improvements in agricultural practices play a significant role in lifting people from poverty. No country in the world – except city states like Singapore – has made a transition to prosperity without modernising agriculture. When families are no longer fully occupied in efforts of subsistence farming, labour is available for other purposes and children can be spared from fields and sent to school.

From the 1950s to the 1980s, most of the agricultural sector in the world experienced a green revolution – with the notable exception of Sub-Saharan Africa. This revolution was made possible by the introduction of high yield varieties, better irrigation techniques, mechanisation, education, road infrastructure, fertilisers, and pesticides. It resulted in massive increases in yields and reduction in transport and storage losses.

Despite this progress, the decline of hunger and undernourishment has stagnated in recent years⁹. Globally, nearly one in ten people are undernourished; in the least developed countries this is more than one in five. Two billion people worldwide cannot afford one healthy meal a day and another billion are just able to do so. Hunger has many causes, notably conflict and instability, but particularly Sub-Saharan Africa still suffers from lack of inputs and poor yields. Modernisation is dearly needed to close the African yield gap, and it should be one of the spearheads of international development cooperation.

RePlanet therefore supports the aims and ambitions of the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa, which aims to improve incomes and food security for millions of smallholder farmers in sub-Saharan¹⁰ Africa . We condemn the activities of NGOs that oppose farming modernisation in Africa under the guise of ‘agro-ecology’ and ‘food sovereignty’, thereby worsening food security and keeping millions in poverty. We support the right of all farmers to employ modern technologies including irrigation, mechanisation, fertilisation, weeding, pest-control and genetically improved crops if they so choose.

Modernisation of agriculture also preserves nature and wildlife. Thanks to modernisation, we globally use less than a third of the land that would have been needed to produce the same amount of food with the pre-1950s methods. Modernisation is an ongoing process: new ecological insights and modern technologies such as no-till, genomic techniques, and precision farming allow us to continue improving agricultural yields while reducing impacts on biodiversity and the environment.

Further modernisation and sustainable intensification of agriculture ensures that we provide plentiful food for a growing world population on as little land as possible. In Africa alone, 4.4 million hectares of forest disappear every year¹¹, mainly due to the expansion of agricultural areas. If nothing changes, the world will need a quarter



more farmland by 2050¹² – especially in Africa. North America achieves on average 11.8 tonnes per hectare of average corn yield, while Malawi achieves just 1.6 tonnes and Tanzania 1.5 tonnes, according to Our World in Data . This not only keeps people food insecure; it represents a massive waste of land. Rapid modernisation of agriculture can close these gaps and free up land for nature.

RePlanet supports the modernisation and sustainable intensification of agriculture. This is necessary to spare land by closing ‘yield gaps’ and improving the productivity of existing cultivated land in the Global South.

ESCAPING POVERTY HELPS COMMUNITIES TO BECOME RESILIENT

Reports from international agencies make gloomy predictions for a planet with 2 to 3 degrees of warming: people in poverty will suffer severely, with widespread hunger, disease, forced migrations and deaths as a result. Climate change undeniably has the greatest impact on the world’s poor, but the way in which the conversation about climate change and poverty is conducted is one-sided. The poor are not merely victims of climate change; they are also people who move forward to increase their resilience to the impacts of extreme weather events. This is reflected in the data: globally, mortality from the effects of extreme weather (drought, heat, storms and floods) has fallen dramatically in the past century¹⁴. A case in point are the cyclone deaths in Bangladesh. In 1970, cyclone Bhola claimed 500,000 lives, while the comparable cyclone Amphan in 2020 had a death toll of ‘only’ 128. Over the past decades, the country has mitigated the impact of cyclones with early warning systems, dikes, storm shelters and evacuation teams. Examples such as these demonstrate that the mortality and morbidity impacts of extreme weather are much more a reflection of resilience than windspeeds and flood heights.

The rich world should help poorer nations to protect themselves against the impacts of a changing climate. With greater prosperity, people and countries can improve their climate resilience, for example by building better seawalls, protecting natural assets like mangroves and coral reefs, and using better seeds in agriculture. These measures will save lives in the short term, while mitigation in the longer-term will save lives by reducing the extent of additional climate damages. The Global North should support the ‘loss and damage’ agenda of the vulnerable countries at COP27.



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