Talanoa dialogue
Submission by the International Labour Office

How do we get there?

*Decent work and a just transition for all to enable ambitious climate action*

If climate change is a consequence of human activity, then that activity is, for the most part, work or work-related. It is therefore no coincidence that climate change tends to be benchmarked against pre-industrial levels. And if work is the predominant cause of climate change, then inevitably it must be central to strategies to mitigate and adapt to it.

For the fight against climate change to mean something to the vast majority of people, the fight for global social justice has to be an integral part of it. It is the poorest and most vulnerable in the world of work, including those in rural and informal activities, youth, women and indigenous and tribal peoples, who are the most affected by climate change. At the same time, they play a fundamental role as agents of change in promoting strong climate action. Ensuring access to decent work for indigenous women, for instance, has the potential of furthering gender equality and promoting sustainable natural resources management grounded in traditional knowledge.

People in the world of work know that when sea water remains in the ocean, instead of conquering land, fishing communities can thrive, tourism can prosper and jobs can be preserved, with prospects of a future for people in the Pacific and Caribbean islands.

They understand that when forests and mangroves are standing rather than shrinking, countries like Haiti and the Philippines are better prepared to face hurricanes and landslides.

And they realise that working to rebuild natural ecosystems in the Sahel will power productive economies with jobs, offering hope for youth in Africa to believe in a demographic dividend, rather than venturing in hazardous and unwanted labour migration.

Greater climate ambition translates into more economic restructuring, more transformations of production and consumption patterns, and more pronounced and widespread employment impacts. This requires the full, active and informed engagement of employers’ and workers’ organizations in the formulation and implementation of climate change commitments within national contexts.

When policies and programmes are underpinned by a consensus of all stakeholders, they are better informed and coordinated, and more likely to reach their objectives. Many national experiences illustrate the potential of social dialogue to lead to effective solutions.

Businesses, in particular small enterprises, need to be supported so that they can unlock the potential to provide green goods and services, enabling more sustainable production and consumption patterns and generating new green jobs reinforcing a circular economy. Key elements for such support include a predictable and enabling regulatory environment that
makes it easy for businesses to start and grow, coherence across public policies, increased public and private investment and the promotion of green innovation.

Climate change adaptation can be achieved by offering those communities which are being impacted the most with employment-intensive job opportunities and extending social protection through existing public investments to manage natural resources and rehabilitate degraded lands, ensuring food and water security. Through better flood protection, irrigation and water and soil conservation schemes, not only is it possible to offer jobs and income security and strengthen climate resilience for disaster risk reduction, it is also possible of building the local capacity of workers, institutions and at the same time increase the understanding of environmental degradation by the local populations.

But the fight against climate change, also needs to incorporate two further ingredients: national skills certification and strengthen or build social protection schemes. The process of greening existing jobs implies that education systems will have to anticipate and adapt to new requirements in the world of work and that lifelong learning becomes a reality for all workers - women and men, young people and older workers. With new green technologies, there is a further need to strengthen national skills certification schemes.

There are some specific characteristics of skills development in a low-carbon economy as a significant share of green innovation is technology driven (high demand for skills in science, technology, engineering and mathematics STEM) and requires knowledge in sustainable materials or on environmental impact.

Social protection is well recognized as a key lubricant of structural change at work, making it possible for people to move between activities without incurring the risk of hardship or even destitution and adapting to the impacts of climate change. They go hand in hand with employment policies.

The ILO-UNFCCC secretariat Just Transition Initiative works to defeat the fear for jobs and unleash the energy of governments, enterprises, workers and communities to realise the goals of the Paris agreement.

Key transformational solutions in line with the long-term temperature goal of the Paris Agreement can only be achieved when decent work and just transition imperatives are recognized as truly foundational elements for ambitious climate action.

We will only get there by ensuring climate action with decent work and a just transition for all, leaving no one behind.

Key resources:

- Work in a changing climate: The Green Initiative, Report by the Director-General, 106th Session of the International Labour Conference
- Guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all
- Global Forum on Just Transition: Climate change, decent work and sustainable development