JUST & EQUITABLE FOSSIL FUEL PHASE-OUT

EXPLAINER & FACILITATORS RESOURCE

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

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Photo: Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chiefs Na Moks, Mobilization against the Coastal Gaslink Pipeline Project Amnesty International was present on May 12, 2022 in front of the RBC offices in Montreal, Quebec, Canada to challenge the pipeline project that violates the rights of the Wet'suwet'en Nation. (© Translated with AmnestyTranslates), © Amnesty International/Éric Carrière

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PURPOSE OF THIS RESOURCE

This learning resource aims to provide an overview of the interconnectedness between human rights, risks and harms of fossil fuel industry, and climate change. It intends to build knowledge and understanding that support action. It aspires to encourage readers/learners to critically assess, via real-world case studies, the human rights impacts of the fossil fuel industry's practices, and to reflect on accountability and the needed change. This resource is primarily intended to support facilitators and can be used as a standalone tool for in-person, hybrid or online workshops and trainings.The total workshop duration is approximately 5 hours. It can also be adapted for self-guided learning or used alongside the online course "Fossil Fuels, Climate Change and Human Rights" available at Amnesty International's Human Rights Academy Together, they form a flexible, blended learning journey that supports both independent learning and facilitated group discussion.

We hope that you can use this resource to inform and inspire your own climate justice actions.

Urban environmental pollution © Unsplash

INTRODUCTION

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

Fossil fuels - coal, oil and gas - touch nearly every part of our daily lives, but not without consequences. Their production and use are driving a global climate crisis and one of the greatest human rights emergencies of our time. The climate crisis makes existing inequalities worse and puts many human rights at risk – including civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.

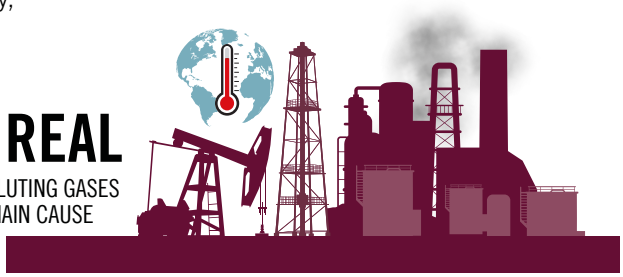
Across the world, we witness and experience the impacts of climate change, which manifest in increasingly frequent and ever more intense weather events, such as heatwaves, prolonged droughts, wildfires, extreme rainfall and violent storms. These climate-driven disasters cause disproportionate harm to marginalized groups already facing systemic injustice and exclusion, including individuals and groups living near fossil fuel infrastructure (fenceline communities).[1] In addition to their exposure to climate-driven disasters, fenceline communities are also exposed to harmful pollution from nearby fossil fuel infrastructure. More broadly, people who have historically contributed least to climate change are disproportionately impacted, including people living in lower income countries and in low-lying island states.

To protect human rights and our shared future, we need to end the fossil fuel era. That means a full, fast, fair and funded phase-out of coal, oil and gas – and an end to the billions of dollars in fossil fuel subsidies that keep this deadly industry alive. Only then can we limit the worst impacts of climate change and ensure that everyone's human rights are protected.

CLIMATE CHANGE IS REAL

AND HUMAN ACTIVITIES, LARGELY THE RELEASE OF POLLUTING GASES FROM BURNING FOSSIL FUEL (COAL, OIL, GAS), IS THE MAIN CAUSE

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)



ACTIVITY 1: REFLECTION

APPROXIMATELY 15 MINUTES

Based on the problem, reflect as a group on the following questions to begin brainstorming the topic of climate change and fossil fuel phase-out:

- Have you personally experienced the effects of global heating — like heatwaves, droughts, flooding, or poor air quality?
- Who in your community might be most affected if an extreme weather event happened tomorrow?

HUMAN RIGHTS, FOSSIL FUELS, AND CLIMATE CHANGE

UNDERSTANDING THE CONNECTION

Everyone has the right to live in a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.[2] As the climate crisis intensifies, this right, and others, are under growing threat. Over the last decade, international, regional, and national human rights bodies have documented a significant increase in human rights abuses linked to human induced climate change, across a wide range of human rights, including civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights.[3]

It is often already marginalized individuals and groups, such as Indigenous Peoples and traditional communities, subsistence farmers, racialized groups, children, older persons, women, people living with disabilities, refugees and migrants, people living under occupation, and those living in low-lying island states, who bear the brunt of climate change and whose human rights are most often compromised. However, climate change is already hurting many people worldwide, and it will eventually hurt all but the highest income individuals.

Typhoon Haiyan, known in the Philippines as Super Typhoon Yolanda, was one of the most powerful tropical cyclones ever recorded. On making landfall, Haiyan devastated portions of Southeast Asia, particularly the Philippines. © DFID (CC)

ACTIVITY 2: HUMAN RIGHTS & FOSSIL FUELS – MATCH AND DISCUSS

APPROXIMATELY 45-60 MINUTES

Introduction to activity:

FACILITATOR SETUP - IN PERSON WORKSHOP

Climate change is directly affecting people's lives – for instance, where we live, what we eat, whether we have clean air and water, our health and our livelihoods. That's why human rights are at the center of the conversation about moving away from fossil fuels ,which are the main drivers of climate change.

Burning fossil fuels is the main cause of climate change, but the entire life cycle of fossil fuels (from extraction, processing, transport and burning) also causes harm on the ground. In this activity, learners will explore how one specific human right can be impacted by fossil fuel production, fossil fuel use or the impacts of climate change.

STEP 1 **Match the Rights and Definitions**

Cut out the two sets of cards: **Human Rights** and **Definitions** (Pg 9)

Working in pairs or small groups match each right with its correct definition

STEP 2 **Add the Climate Connection**

Once your group has matched the cards, **choose just one human right** and focus on making one clear connection to fossil fuels or climate change.

You might focus on:

- Fossil fuel **extraction** (for example, drilling, mining, flaring)
- Fossil fuel **transport and processing** (for example, pipelines, refineries)
- **Air and water pollution**
- **Climate impacts** like drought, floods, wildfires, or heat

Example:
Right to Health ➜ "Air pollution from burning fossil fuels causes asthma and other respiratory diseases, especially in fenceline communities."

STEP 3 **Share and Discuss**

Each group should be encouraged to share one right and its climate connection with the larger group

As a larger group reflect on:

1. Which rights are most obviously affected by fossil fuels?
2. Which rights were harder to connect?
3. Does this change the way you think about fossil fuel phase-out?

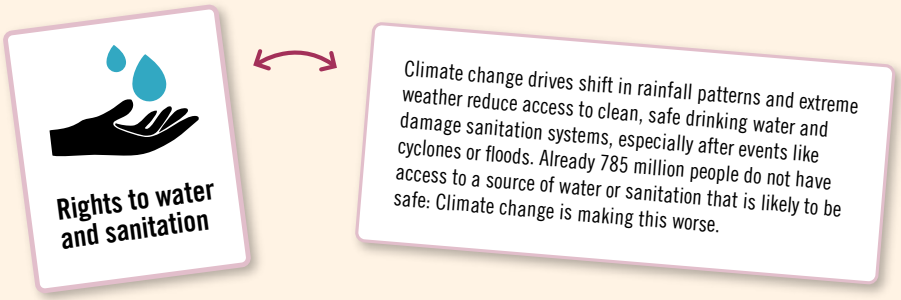
Facilitator Tip for Online Workshops on Pg 8

ACTIVITY 2: HUMAN RIGHTS & FOSSIL FUELS – MATCH AND DISCUSS (*CONTINUED*)

FACILITATOR TIP FOR ONLINE WORKSHOPS

If you're running this activity online, use breakout rooms for Steps 1 and 2. Before your session create a collaborative online whiteboard (like Whiteboard, Miro or a shared Google Slide) with the human rights and definitions on separate cards.

During Step 1 invite learners to drag and match cards virtually. If learners do not agree on the matches during Step 1, encourage them to discuss their reasoning and come to a consensus. If they're still unsure, they can mark those cards with a question mark and revisit them after Step. 2.



! The goal is not to be perfect, but to spark curiosity and critical thinking. During the session, you can pop into breakout rooms to listen and support groups that are stuck or encourage peer-to-peer explanation. Consider doing a quick review of all matches together in the main room before moving to Step 2.

During Step 2, invite learners to add the additional climate connection to the pairs in a text box.

For **Step 3**, bring everyone back to the main room and invite each group to present using their shared board. As facilitator, keep a master slide to capture final reflections or common themes that come up during sharing. Encourage learners to unmute and speak or use the chat if they're more comfortable typing. You can also use polling tools or emojis to get a quick read on reactions during the discussion.

Examples of rights and definitions for the card activity on Pg 9.

Below are examples of rights and definitions for the card activity

Right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment

The UN General Assembly recognized this right in 2022.[4] Over 160 countries also have this right enshrined in their domestic law.[5] Yet despite this recognition and commitment, pollution, deforestation, and global warming are degrading the ecosystems we depend on for clean air, water, and food, undermining this fundamental right.

Right to life

Climate change poses direct and indirect threats to this right –through extreme weather events such as heatwaves, storms and floods, as well as wildfires, rising sea levels, food insecurity, forced displacement, and conflict over increasingly scarce resources. There are also many other less visible ways that climate change threatens lives. The World Health Organization predicts that climate change will cause 250,000 deaths per year between 2030 and 2050.[6]

Right to health

Climate change threatens the enjoyment of this right, increasing the spread of disease, undernutrition and heat-related illnesses, especially for already marginalized groups, and weakening already under-resourced health systems. In addition, the burning of fossil fuels is one of the main causes of air pollution. Air pollution has been linked to heart disease, strokes, lung cancer, asthma and other chronic diseases. A 2023 study from the British Medical Journal estimated that are 8.34 million excess deaths du e to fossil fuel derived air pollution.[7]

Right to adequate housing

Extreme weather events such as violent storms and droughts that can lead to severe floods and wildfires destroying people's homes and making it harder to access safe, affordable housing. Drought can also lead to other significant adverse changes in the environment, while sea-level rise threatens to displace communities in low-lying territories[8] and wipe out the homes of millions of people around the world.[9]

Cut these out, mix them up and **match the Rights to the correct definitions**

Right to food

Changes in temperature and rainfall, along with extreme weather, are decreasing crop yields and harming fisheries, contributing to food insecurity and hunger, while floods often devastate crop harvests and farmland.

Right to water and sanitation

Climate change drives shift in rainfall patterns and extreme weather reduce access to clean, safe drinking water and damage sanitation systems, especially after events like cyclones or floods. Already 785 million people do not have access to a source of water or sanitation that is likely to be safe. Climate change is making this worse.

Right to education

This right is often disrupted by climate change-related disasters that damage schools, displace communities, and force children out of the classroom.

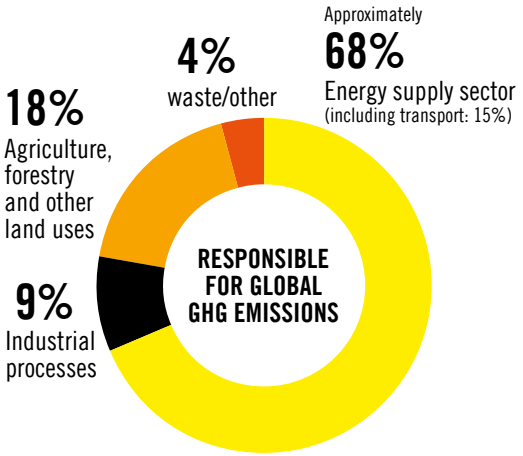
Right to culture and traditional knowledge

Extreme weather events driven by climate change can damage or destroy cultural heritage and traditional knowledge and ways of life, harming Indigenous Peoples in particular.[10]

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

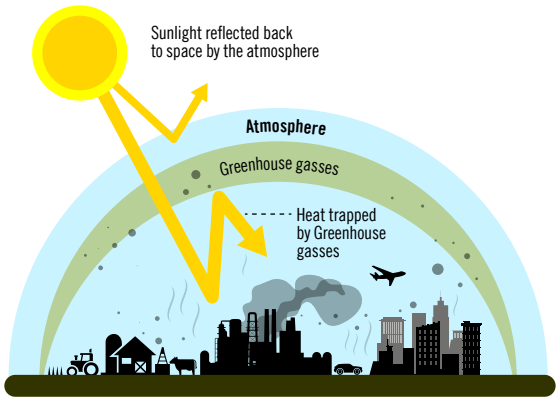
Climate change refers to the significant and sustained alterations in the climate patterns. It is primarily driven by the escalating concentrations of greenhouse gases (GHGs) released into the atmosphere. These gases trap the sun's heat , leading to a long-term rise in the planet's average temperature, which is causing shifts in weather patterns, known as climate change.

The principal source of these GHGs is human activity, particularly the burning of fossil fuels for energy production, transportation, industrial processes and agricultural practices, as well as deforestation, changes in land use, and methane emissions associated with agriculture. [11]



Amounts are rounded to the nearest decimal place.

Almost all industries engage in the burning of fossil fuels, but some contribute to GHG emissions more than others. Unsurprisingly, the industry producing the most fossil fuel emissions is the energy sector, which sells a product that harms the climate. According to the United Nations Environmental Programme, based on global emissions data from 2023, approximately 68% of global GHG emissions come from the energy supply sector[12].



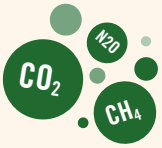
Concentrations of GHGs are already at record levels,[13] including CO_2 and methane, which are heating the atmosphere. 2024 was the first year in which global average temperature exceeded 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.[14]

Not all countries are equally responsible for GHG emissions. From 1850 to 2019, the United States and the European Union together have produced more than 40% of all CO_2 emissions from fossil fuels and industry (USA 25%, EU 17%). By comparison, China contributed 13%, Russia 7%, India 3%, and other countries like Indonesia and Brazil just 1% each. The world's lowest-income countries – many of which are already facing the worst impacts of climate change – have contributed only 0.5%.[15]

Governments are legally obligated to mitigate the climate crisis by rapidly phasing out fossil-fuel emissions – failure to do so is a violation of some of our most fundamental human rights.[16] Governments in countries that have contributed the most to climate change must act first and make the biggest reductions.

Despite commitments made under international climate agreements and repeated calls by United Nations officials to urgently phase-out fossil fuels, governments action to limit the use, production and subsidies to the fossil fuel industry have been wholly inadequate. Meanwhile, the industry has been intensifying efforts to lock in profits, disinform and exert undue influence in climate policy forums.[17]

Fossil fuels: non-renewable energy sources including coal, crude oil (also known as petroleum) and fossil gas (or so-called "natural" gas). Fossil fuels take millions of years to form from the fossilized, buried remains of plants and animals.[18] Their combustion and oxidation produce large quantities of carbon dioxide (CO_2).[19]



Greenhouse gases (GHGs): group of compounds that trap heat in the atmosphere. The emission of GHGs resulting from human activity is the fundamental cause of the "greenhouse effect" leading to global heating. CO_2 accounts for two-thirds of GHG and is largely the product of burning fossil fuels.[20] Methane (CH_4) is the primary component of fossil gas and accounts for 25% of the heating we are experiencing today.[21]

ACTIVITY 3: WHO IS MOST RESPONSIBLE?

APPROXIMATELY 20 MINUTES

This is a short, focused activity designed to unearth assumptions about historical responsibility and spark quick reflection and discussion before moving into a more focused discussion in the next section.

FACILITATOR SETUP - IN PERSON WORKSHOP

Using a board, write the following list and corresponding number (but scrambled, not in order):

USA	25%	Russia	7%	Indonesia	1%
EU	17%	India	3%	Lowest-income countries	0.5%
China	13%	Brazil	1%		

ACTIVITY 3: WHO IS MOST RESPONSIBLE? (*CONTINUED*)

LEARNER TASK

1. **In pairs or small groups, ask learners to rank the countries/regions from highest to lowest share of GHG emissions since the beginning of the industrial revolution and match the percentage according to their selection.**
2. **Invite volunteers to come and reorder the list if they do not agree.**
3. **Once the correct order is revealed on the board, ask learners to reflect on the following questions:**
   a. Did anything surprise you about these numbers?
   b. What do these numbers mean to you in terms of which governments should act first and fastest to phase-out fossil fuels?
   c. Do you see these patterns of GHG emissions changing in the future? What would that mean for climate justice?

FACILITATOR TIP FOR ONLINE WORKSHOPS

To adapt this activity for an online session, use a collaborative digital whiteboard or shared document (e.g Miro, Mentimeter, Kahoot!, Mural, Google Slides, or a Google Doc/Table) where learners can drag and drop the country/region names into the order they believe is correct.

1 BREAKOUT GROUPS

Put learners into small breakout rooms (2–4 people per group) and share the scrambled list with them. Prepare several slides in advance based on the number of participants attending the workshop so each group has their own to work with. Give them 5–7 minutes to discuss and create their ranked list. If you are unable to create multiple breakout groups, ask the participants to take a moment alone to reflect and use the chat function to share feedback and then discuss in plenary.

2 GROUP SHARING

Bring everyone back to the main session and ask one representative per group to explain their ranking. Then, reveal the correct order using a slide or by arranging the list in the main collaboration space.

3 REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Use the chat or a poll to collect responses to the three reflection questions or go around and hear from each person using the "raise hand" feature or by simply taking turns sharing aloud.

FOSSIL FUELS' IMPACTS ON NEARBY COMMUNITIES AND ECOSYSTEMS

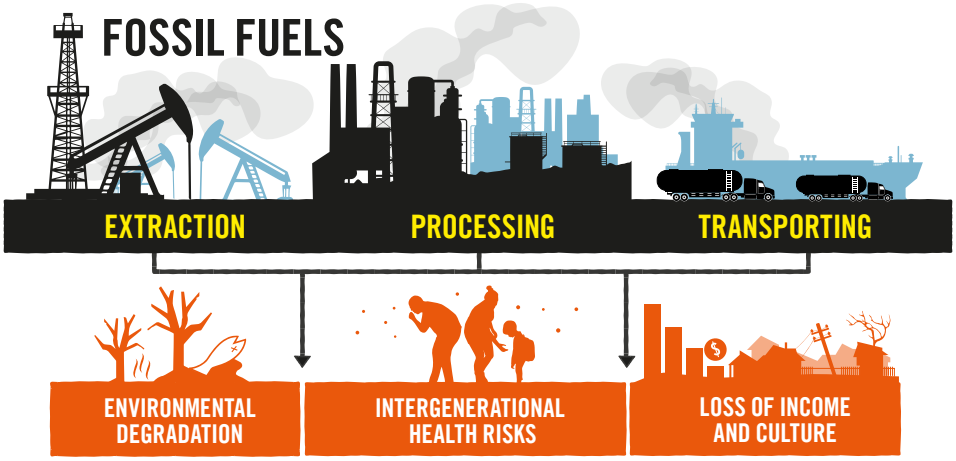
From extraction , to processing and transportation, the full life cycle of fossil fuels irreversibly alters the world's climate through the emission of heat trapping gases, undermines the health and human rights of fenceline communities, and leads to environmental degradation destroying irreplaceable natural ecosystems.[22]

Extracting, processing and transporting fossil fuels entails environmental degradation, severe health risks (particularly acute for children, pregnant and older people and potentially impacting the health trajectories of future generations), loss of income and culture for communities living on the surface area or in the vicinity of industrial projects extracting or processing fossil fuels. At times, the fossil fuel industry resorts to forced evictions to make way for infrastructure such as wells, pipelines, roads and facilities for processing and waste management.[23] These projects create toxic waste, known to contaminate water. Oil extraction and transportation cause spills, damaging nearby ecosystems, destroying biodiversity, and wiping out the livelihoods of fenceline communities. Flaring and other processing activities release toxic air pollutants that harm the health of workers and neighbouring communities.[24] These widespread and interconnected impacts can be seen in many "fenceline" and "frontline" communities around the world living in sacrifice zones.

"Fenceline" communities: communities of people who live near industrial infrastructure, including where fossil fuels are produced or transformed. Fenceline communities directly experience the adverse impacts of pollution and environmental degradation emanating from extractive projects and fossil fuel processing. They tend to live in so-called **"sacrifice zones"**.

"Frontline" communities: people who bear the brunt of direct and indirect impacts of the climate crisis (for example, communities who are most affected by climate-change related severe weather events and slow onset impacts like sea-level rise), many of whom are marginalized and experience intersecting forms of cultural, economic, social and racial discrimination.

Sacrifice zones: heavily contaminated areas inhabited by low-income and marginalized groups who bear the disproportionate burden of the human rights consequences of exposure to pollution and toxic substances.[25]



Pastor Christian Lekoya Kpandei showing the damage done to his fish farm in Bodo, Nigeria, May 2011. The farm flourished before the August 2008 oil spill, but the pollution destroyed his fish farm, leaving him and his workers without a regular income. © Amnesty International

SACRIFICE ZONES: COMMUNITIES IN THE NIGER DELTA, NIGERIA

One such example of sacrifice zones are the communities in the Niger Delta, in **Nigeria**. Since Shell first discovered oil near the village of Oloibiri in 1956, the Niger Delta has become Africa's most valuable oil-producing region.[26] For more than five decades, Shell, along with other international oil giants operating in the region, has earned billions of US dollars from their operations in the Delta, while local communities,[27] such as the people of Ogoniland, have struggled against oil pollution and the destruction of their ecosystem.[28]

Every year, hundreds of oil spills irreversibly devastate the Niger Delta, caused by old and poorly maintained pipelines or criminal activity such as oil theft.[29] These spills, which mining operators have failed to adequately clean up over the years, have a devastating impact on the fields, forests and fisheries that most of the people in the region depend on for their food and livelihoods.[30] Oil spills also contaminate drinking water and expose people to serious health risks.[31]

Amnesty International's research has revealed that oil exploitation in the Niger Delta, particularly Shell's operations, continues to undermine fenceline communities' human rights, including right to clean, healthy and sustainable environment, adequate standard of living, water and health.[32] Despite repeated international calls for Shell to clean up spills,[33] compensate communities and improve its operations, complaints have continued to the present day.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

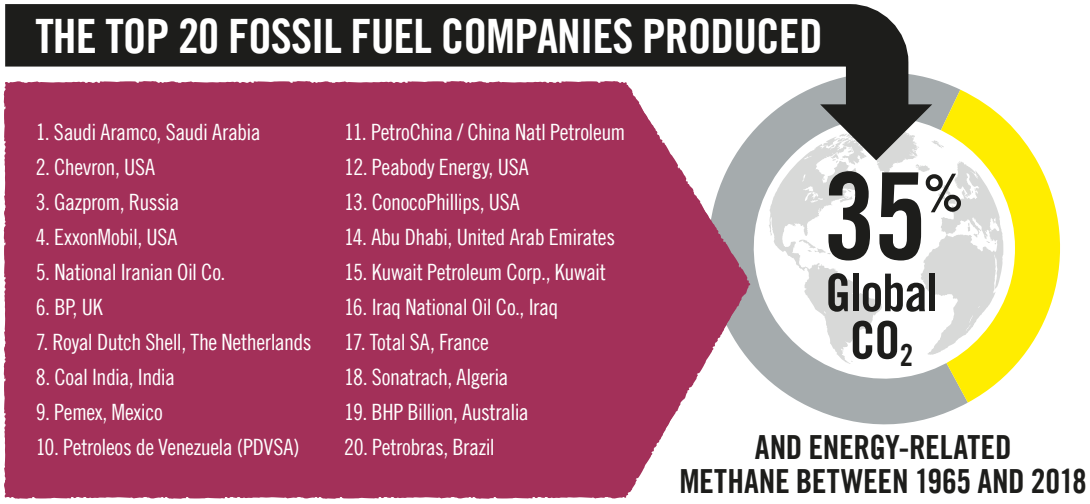
When you are engaging learners on the topic of the human rights impacts of fossil fuels, it may be helpful to consider the following questions:

- Why do you think companies like Shell continue to profit from oil production in places like the Niger Delta, even when it causes such harm to local communities?
- Whose rights are being sacrificed when oil spills contaminate land, water, and food sources?
- Why do you think fenceline and frontline communities are often the ones most affected by fossil fuel projects and pollution?
- How does the idea of a "sacrifice zone" make you feel? Do you think any community should be treated this way? Why/Why not?
- Can you think of examples in your own country or community where people live close to polluting industries or face similar risks?

Amnesty International UK, the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), AFRICA: Seen & Heard and Justice 4 Nigeria marked the start of the trial with the stunt 'Ecocide Babe' by British-Nigerian artist-activist The Crude Madonna outside the Royal Courts of Justice, London, 13 February 2025 © M-A Ventoura / Amnesty International UK

FOSSIL FUEL COMPANIES AND THEIR PROBLEMATIC PRACTICES

Fossil fuel companies operate in ways that can harm a wide range of human rights – from the right to a healthy environment and water, to the rights to access to information, public participation, self-determination, and protection from discrimination. Fossil fuel companies may fail to share accessible information with communities who may be impacted by their operations, ignore their consent, or leave behind toxic legacies without accountability.



Oil Refinery © Pexels

They may use disinformation, discrimination, and threats to human rights defenders to maintain business as usual, even when it causes harm. As the primary duty bearer under human rights law, states are obligated to protect the rights of their populations from the harms of industry. Too often, industry tramples on rights, and, they try to limit state action on climate change and on harmful pollution.

ACTIVITY 4: WHO ARE THE CARBON MAJORS?

APPROXIMATELY 20 MINUTES

This is a short, focused activity—perfect for sparking quick reflection or discussion before moving into the next topic.

FACILITATOR TIP

You may wish to introduce this section by asking participants how often they think about where the energy they use comes from — or whether they've heard of "carbon majors" before. The goal is to connect the systemic with the personal: even if we do not know all the companies by name, we interact with their influence regularly. You can ask participants to reflect aloud or in pairs before reviewing the text together.

FACILITATOR INTRO

Research from InfluenceMap has shown that from 1854 to 2022, 70% of global CO_2 emissions can historically be attributed to 78 fossil fuel producers (both private and state owned), also known as the "carbon majors."[34]

Some of these may be household names. We often see their logos at gas stations or in advertisements. Others may be less visible to the public, even though they play a major role in worsening the climate crisis. These companies do not just shape the global climate – they shape the systems we live in every day: the legal framework regulating energy, the type of energy we use, the ads we see, and the products we consume.

REFLECT

- Do you recognize any of the companies that appear in the graphic above (Pg 17)? Where have you seen their names before?
- Why do you think some of these companies are more visible than others?

FACILITATOR TIP

These questions are meant to surface participants' existing knowledge and highlight how some companies maintain a public image while others operate more discretely. You can use this to lead into the next section about accountability and the systems of power that allow human rights harms to continue. In the next section, we'll start to unpack some of these problematic practices.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION, CONSULTATION AND PARTICIPATION

Before fossil fuel projects begin, companies and governments have a responsibility to inform and consult the people who will be affected. They must do this before a project starts, in a way that is respectful, transparent, and allows for affected individuals and groups to have real decision-making power. The specific rights and contexts of Indigenous Peoples and fenceline communities need to be considered, particularly the structural discrimination they face. The state must consult Indigenous Peoples and obtain their free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) for projects that will impact their rights, particularly the rights to land and to cultural heritage.[35]

Too often, this does not happen.

Marginalized groups are often excluded from decision-making processes and face additional barriers when trying to defend their rights.

In many cases, people from these groups are punished or threatened for speaking out. Their lands may be taken without consent, their water and air polluted, and their cultural ties to land ignored. These aren't isolated incidents – they reflect structural discrimination that makes it easier for companies and governments to disregard the rights of some people over others.

WET'SUWET'EN LAND DEFENDERS AGAINST PIPELINE INFRASTRUCTURE

Removed from our land for defending it": Criminalization, Intimidation and Harassment of Wet'suwet'en Land Defenders. © Tercer Piso/Amnesty International

In **Canada**, members of the Wet'suwet'en Nation have opposed the construction of a gas pipeline crossing their land Despite their opposition to the project, the construction of the 670-kilometre pipeline began in 2019, without their FPIC.[36] Committed to protecting their ancestral lands and everyone's right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, the Wet'suwet'en land defenders took action to defend their land against the pipeline, and preserve their culture and way of life. Their peaceful actions have been met with surveillance, intimidation, harassment and criminalization.[37]

The second phase of the pipeline project includes the construction of compressor stations - infrastructure increasing gas pressure for faster transportation. By October 2025, there was one operating compressor station, with plans to build six additional stations to double the capacity of the pipeline.[38] Noise, light pollution and the release of harmful gases from pipeline compressor stations threaten sacred sites, wildlife and cultural practices. The construction of new infrastructure on Wet'suwet'en territory also cause harms to their health, for instance mental health, with many members of the Nation feeling powerlessness, anger, sadness, disappointment, fear and worry.[39]

When communities are excluded from decisions that affect their land, health, and future, their human rights are violated.

Rights of Indigenous Peoples to land, territory and natural resources

For many Indigenous Peoples and rural communities, land is not only a source of livelihood but central to identity, culture, and survival.[40] Much of the planet's remaining fossil fuels are situated on Indigenous Peoples' ancestral lands.[41] The destruction or expropriation of land through mining, fossil fuel extraction, deforestation or agribusiness displaces communities and erodes Indigenous Peoples' ability to sustain themselves. Rights to land and resources are protected under ILO Convention 169, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), and regional human rights standards.

RISKS TO PEOPLE'S HEALTH

Fossil fuel production – digging, drilling, transporting, and processing oil, gas, and coal – does not just affect the climate. It harms real people and communities, often in lasting and devastating ways.

Many of these harms happen to fenceline communities in areas located near fossil fuel infrastructure like pipelines, refineries, or petrochemical plants. People living in those areas often face toxic pollution, contaminated water, poor air quality, and serious health risks.[42] These may be low-income or racialized communities, or Indigenous Peoples, and are rarely given a say in what happens on their land. Companies continue to pollute "sacrifice zones" because the people living there are seen as less likely to be protected or heard. Even after companies leave, the damage often stays. Oil spills are left uncleaned, land goes unrepaired, and communities are left without resources.

GROUPS ENDURING ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM

The adverse effects of climate change and fossil fuel pollution are unevenly distributed, reflecting patterns of environmental racism where policies, practices and systemic omissions disproportionately expose racialized groups to risk and harm. For example, in North America, racialized groups, particularly those living in poverty, are often located in "sacrifice zones" leading to higher rates of respiratory illnesses and cancers. African Americans are three times more likely to die from airborne pollution than the overall US population.[43]

Environmental racism refers to any environmental policy, practice, law or regulation that differentially affects or disadvantages (whether intended or unintended) individuals, groups or communities based on race, skin colour, descent, national or ethnic origin.[44]

In Houston, Texas, the so-called "Houston Ship Channel" hosts the largest petrochemical complex in the **United States of America**, emitting millions of pounds of pollutants every year. Some of the world's largest fossil fuel and chemical companies operate the petrochemical plants

in this region. They produce chemical products derived from crude oil and fossil gas that are used to manufacture plastics, fertilizers and an array of other industrial and consumer products for both domestic and international markets. Amnesty International's research report, The Cost of Doing Business? The Petrochemical Industry's Toxic Pollution in the USA, has revealed that the high concentration of petrochemical facilities and the frequency of toxic chemical releases in the region threatens the enjoyment of several human rights of fenceline communities, plant workers and first responders, including their rights to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, health, equality and non-discrimination and even their right to life.[45]

Petrochemical plants along the Houston Ship Channel are shown in the aftermath of Tropical Storm Harvey on Tuesday, Aug. 29, 2017, in Houston. (Brett Coomer / Houston Chronicle) (Photo by Brett Comer/Houston Chronicle via Getty Images)

CLIMATE CHANGE DISINFORMATION AND DENIAL

Fossil fuel industry does not just extract oil and gas – they also shape the story we are told about climate change. In this context, disinformation refers to fossil fuel industry deliberate efforts to create and share false information. There is growing evidence showing that major fossil fuel companies have known for decades about the harmful effects of fossil fuel combustion and have attempted to suppress that information and block efforts to tackle climate change.[46] Across government meetings, the news, their advertising and social media, fossil fuel industry have been working to undermine people's right to access to information, public participation and science. Let's explore how.

DISINFORMATION IN MULTILATERAL SPACES

Fossil fuel companies and their allies use both formal and informal processes to influence the debate at intergovernmental forums, pushing disinformation campaigns advancing false or misleading climate solutions.[47] They spread disinformation in multilateral spaces

Members of the group of 15 Amazonian girls and adolescent activists called "Guerreras por la Amazonía" (GxA) in Ecuador, 2024. © UDAPT

like the UN climate conferences by knowingly promoting false or exaggerated claims about technologies like carbon capture.[48] Fossil fuel companies often promote misleading narratives or present unproven or risky technologies as climate "solutions" to delay meaningful action and justify continued fossil fuel use. They exploit their status as Business and Industry NGOs (BINGOs), hosting lavish side events and lobbying decision-makers behind closed doors, to steer negotiations in ways that delay or weaken climate action – a form of influence that undermines effective, rights-based solutions.[49]

DISINFORMATION IN THE MEDIA

Fossil fuel companies spend billions crafting a public image implying that they are part of the solution, tailoring their advertising messages to present themselves as sustainable and environmentally friendly. In reality, these PR campaigns are "greenwashing " – protecting their business methods and profits over people's human rights by promoting the myth of "clean fossil fuels", downplaying their role in causing climate change, and overstating the fossil fuel industry's investments in renewable energy.[50]

DISINFORMATION ON SOCIAL MEDIA

On social media, fossil fuel companies and allies spread doubt and delay through hashtag campaigns downplaying climate urgency, influencer partnerships promoting fossil gas as "clean", and bot networks – devices used to perform coordinated digital activities, such as spamming - repeating climate denial talking points.

Activists stage a protest on day thirteen of the UNFCCC COP28 Climate Conference on December 13, 2023 in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.© Fadel Dawod/Getty Images

ACTIVITY 5: SPOT THE SPIN

APPROXIMATELY 60 MINUTES

This activity is designed to take about an hour, including time for group discussion and reflection. Feel free to adjust based on your group's pace and interest! It can be facilitated in person or online. Below you will find some tips to aid in any online facilitation you may do.

FACILITATOR INTRO

Fossil fuel companies do not just drill for oil and gas — they also shape how we think about climate change. A big part of that is done through media and social media: advertising campaigns, hashtags, influencer partnerships, even bots. Disinformation (false content spread deliberately) is one of the key strategies used to delay action on climate change.

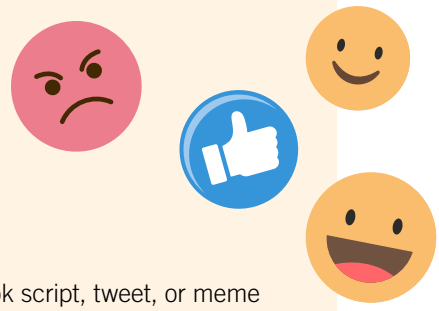
FACILITATOR TIP FOR ONLINE WORKSHOPS

This activity works well online using screenshare and chat tools. Have learners drop links or screenshots of posts into the chat or a shared document during Step 1. Then, invite them to take turns presenting their counter-posts during Step 2 either by reading them aloud, screen sharing, or posting them in the chat. If your platform allows, breakout rooms can be used for small-group collaboration on counter-posts before returning to share with the full group.

Encourage a few quick reactions (emojis, affirmations in the chat) to make the sharing feel interactive and supportive.

STEP 1 Analyse

- Have learners explore social media or advertising campaigns that feature disinformation about fossil fuel companies' impact on the climate crisis.
- Ask learners to answer the following questions:
  - What message is this post trying to send?
  - Does it frame fossil fuels as "clean" or "part of the solution"?
  - What's missing from the story?



STEP 2 Get Creative!

- Ask learners to draft their own counter-post (Instagram story, TikTok script, tweet, or meme idea) that calls out disinformation or highlights the real climate impacts of fossil fuels.
- Encourage creativity: slogans, emojis, visuals.

STEP 3 Share and Reflect

- Encourage learners to share their posts with the larger group
  - Why do you think fossil fuel companies spend so much money on advertising and PR campaigns?
  - How can you tell the difference between real climate solutions and greenwashing?
  - How does disinformation affect your own community's understanding of the climate crisis? How do you think it affects decision-makers?

THREATS TO HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

In the face of insufficient government action and a lack of corporate accountability around climate change, individuals and groups across the globe – especially those living on the frontlines and fencelines of fossil fuel infrastructure – are resisting, organizing, and demanding justice. These environmental human rights defenders (EHRDs) – often Indigenous leaders, women, and young people – play a critical role.[51] But instead of being protected, many are threatened, attacked, or silenced.

According to Global Witness, in 2024, 146 EHRDs were murdered or disappeared, and due to under-reporting, this figure is likely to be much higher.[52] Global Witness observed that 82% of total cases of murder and disappearance documented in 2024 took place in Latin America. Global Witness also found that between 2012 and 2024, 2,253 EHRDs were murdered or disappeared.

Despite the real threats EHRDs face, they keep tirelessly pursuing justice, defending our planet, our rights and our shared future. For more information on the connections between civic space, EHRD and climate justice, please read the explainer and facilitators manual "Civic Space and Environmental Human Rights Defenders: Essential for Achieving Climate Justice".

PAUSE AND REFLECT

- Do you know any individuals, groups or movements in your country who are speaking out to protect the environment and human rights? What are the current risks that they face?

- Why do you think so many EHRDs continue their work despite the threats they may experience?

A Native American protestor is threatened by private security guards at a work site for the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) oil pipeline, North Dakota, 3 September 2016 © AFP via Getty Images

TARGET OF PROTESTERS IN GUANABARA BAY, IN RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL.

Alexandre Anderson de Souza, along with another member of AHOMAR (Associação Homens e Mulheres do Mar, a local fishing association) in Guanabara bay in front of a gas pipeline installation, 2010. © Amnesty International

Located in the state of Rio de Janeiro, Guanabara Bay is the second largest bay in **Brazil**. It hosts two ports, multiple shipyards, storage tanks, several refineries, dozens of pipelines, and terminals for fuelling and other fuel processing and vessel maintenance services.[53] This infrastructure has turned the bay into a *"pivotal region in the national oil and gas industry"*, [54] servicing the oil and gas fields based more than 200km offshore. Over the years, both Brazilian and multi-national oil and gas companies have operated in the bay, shaping Guanabara Bay's waterways and onshore industrial landscape.

Pollution in Guanabara Bay is widespread and stems from multiple sources, including the oil and gas industry, solid waste from other industrial activities, and untreated sewage.[55] Fenceline communities who rely on the bay's watershed or live near industrial infrastructure onshore are therefore confronted by the cumulative impact of industrial and non-industrial pollution. Among these fenceline communities are artisanal fishers, some of whom have lost their livelihoods and who face risks for speaking out.

For nearly two decades, the *Associação Homens e Mulheres do Mar (Association of Men and Women of the Sea – AHOMAR)* has been protesting fossil fuel infrastructure in the Guanabara Bay. In 2009, for instance, AHOMAR members anchored their boats along a pipeline site, halting the work of an oil company for 38 days.[56] Their activism has come at a high cost: members of the association have received frequent death threats, and four were killed between 2009 and 2012.[57]

The situation remains dire. In February 2025, several EHRDs interviewed by Amnesty International reported fearing for their safety, some experiencing both in-person and online intimidation and harassment.[58]

> ***"Guanabara Bay is truly a sacrifice zone... fishermen are always sacrificed for the benefit of the industry and never get a reward."***
>
> *Wander Guerra*

WE NEED AN URGENT AND EQUITABLE TRANSITION

FOSSIL FUEL PHASE-OUT

The harmful effects of GHG emissions are deepening at an alarming rate. Despite the urgency to respond to the climate crisis and the commitments made by states, governments' action to limit fossil fuels has been wholly inadequate.

Governments continue to provide huge subsidies to fossil fuel companies, enabling the expansion of the fossil fuel industry.[59] Governments are also failing to transition their economies away from a dependence on fossil fuels in an urgent and equitable manner. Governments – especially those in higher-income, high emitting countries – need to focus on transitioning away from fossil fuels production, use and subsidies, towards more sustainable, just energy solutions and on supporting lower-income countries to do so too.

International climate agreements[60] and human rights law makes it clear: governments have a duty to mitigate the climate crisis and stop environmental harm, including when caused by corporate actors, that threatens people's rights.[61] This includes the obligation to take all feasible steps to the full extent of their abilities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, to slow the degradation of our climate and prevent further damage to our ecosystems.

Rapidly phasing out fossil fuel production and use, including by ending fossil fuel subsidies, is an urgent imperative if we are to reduce GHG emissions and mitigate the worst impacts of the climate crisis on the enjoyment of human rights. A truly energy transition to a zero-carbon economy must also be equitable, sustainable and human rights-consistent. A shift to a zero-carbon economy must not come at the expense of individuals and groups who are already marginalized or disadvantaged.[62]

FAIR	FAST	FULL	FUNDED
Higher income countries should act first	In line with the 1.5° Celsius goal	No reliance on unproven "solutions" (carbon capture storage and removal...)	Higher income countries should support the transition of lower income countries

JUST AND EQUITABLE ENERGY TRANSITION TO PROTECT THE INDIGENOUS SÁMI PEOPLE

In the report *Just Transition or 'Green Colonialism'?*,[63] Amnesty International, in collaboration with the Saami Council (a NGO with Sámi member organizations in Finland, Norway, Sweden and Russia),64 analyzed how mineral extraction and new energy projects conducted without FPIC are threatening Indigenous Sámi's livelihoods and culture in the Nordic countries.

In Sápmi (the cultural region traditionally inhabited by the Sámi People), climate change already threatens the culture and existence of the Sámi through direct environmental impacts. However, Sámi culture and livelihoods are also threatened by the increased number of energy projects and resource extraction in the name of sustainable development and renewable energy transition.

Greenhouse gas emissions warming the climate must be rapidly reduced, but this cannot happen at the expense of those who are already most harmed by climate change. To be truly just, the transition to renewable energy must be consistent with human rights.

A just energy transition means protecting human rights as we move away from fossil fuels. For example, climate change mitigation – reduction of GHGs emissions - projects must respect and strengthen the rights of nearby communities and Indigenous Peoples, including by ensuring security of tenure on their ancestral lands and legal protection against forced eviction. Governments must ensure that those who work in the fossil fuel and related industries do not fall through the cracks. They should have access to job retraining and an adequate social safety net. Human rights must be at the centre of climate action, not an afterthought.

It's essential that governments drive the shift to renewable energy sources and proven technologies with genuine solutions that do not sacrifice the planet or people. And they must legally require companies to respect human rights as many shift their investment portfolio to renewable energy sources. They must not make it the problem of future generations. They must act now.

Activists call for the rights of the Sami people to be recognized
© Amnesty International Finland

Thousands of climate campaigners in the Place de la République to protest the inaction on climate change by the French government on 16 March, 2019 in Paris, France. @ John van Hasselt/Corbis via Getty Images

MOBILIZE FOR A BETTER FUTURE

It is important that we critically assess the human rights impacts of human induced-climate change, not only to understand the scale of the problem, but to push for real change.

There is so much we can each do to advocate for climate justice, despite how overwhelming the climate change problem feels!

REFLECT

- How do you or your household use fossil fuels in daily life? (for example, gas stoves, gasoline or diesel cars, heating systems, generators). What – if any – alternatives are available to you? (electric transportation, solar heating systems, electric stoves or ovens).

- What action will you take towards ending our global dependence on harmful fossil fuels? Your journey matters – and it can start right here. Where are you going to start today?

ACTION IDEAS

- Start in your community: Look around you. What conversations can you start? What local campaigns or initiatives can you support? What do you want your local and national government to do?

- Bring it home: Talk to your family and friends, continue to learn (see the resources below) and ask yourself questions .

RESOURCES

Amnesty International's work to advance climate justice and advocate for an urgent and equitable fossil fuel phase-out draws upon an extensive network of expertise, partnerships, and research. This section provides key resources for those who wish to deepen their knowledge, access support, and take action.

AMNESTY ACADEMY FREE ONLINE COURSES RELATED TO CLIMATE JUSTICE AND FOSSIL FUELS

- **Fossil Fuels, Climate Change and Human Rights:** This course on fossil fuels, climate change, and human rights will help you explain the interconnectedness between these issues, critically assess the human rights impacts of fossil fuel industry practices, and analyze real-world case studies to understand how fossil fuel production and burning drive climate and human rights impacts.
- **Energy Transition: Powering Change or Business as Usual?**: This course introduces some of the human rights abuses linked to the energy transition.
- **Climate Change and Human Rights**: This course teaches why climate change is a human rights issue, and how human rights can be used as a tool to combat the climate crisis.
- **Indigenous Peoples' Land Rights**: This course will explain and promote a crucial right of Indigenous Peoples – the right to free, prior and informed consent.
- **Human Rights Defenders: A Short Guide**: This course equips and enables you to talk to your family and friends about human rights defenders and the issues faced by them.
- **The Right to Protest**: This course teaches why peaceful protest is protected by human rights, and how it is under threat throughout the world.
- **Freedom of Expression: A Fundamental Right**: This course will equip you with the knowledge to understand and claim your right to freedom of expression, and the skills and confidence to take action to defend it.

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL'S RESEARCH REPORTS AND OTHER KEY DOCUMENTS

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