



Akademikerförbundet SSR



Building Trade Union Capacities and Quality Public Services for a Just Transition to Climate Change

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Hotel Four Seasons, Jamaica

Concept Note

On October 8, the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released a [Special Report on global warming](#). In reacting ¹ to the report, PSI general secretary, Rosa Pavanelli, said,

“The current commitments made by governments under the Paris climate accord will see the world heat to 3°C, which is untenable. The latest report from the IPCC shows the need to act decisively and urgently. The labour movement must be part of the solution, and this will require some deep soul-searching on the part of union leaders and activists.”

The report shows that:

- Climate chaos is already here, sooner than expected and more intense, as seen with the more frequent and intense cyclones and hurricanes; extremes of heat and cold; wildfires from the Arctic down through the equator; ocean temperature rise and acidification; melting of polar ice, and more.
- We cannot accept a 2°C rise, we must limit ourselves to a 1.5°C rise - the consequences of the .5°C difference are much worse than originally estimated.
- Major changes are needed, now, to avert uncontrollable climate chaos.
- Governments must use a range of tools to force/provoke unprecedented action.

She continued,

“We need an honest discussion about our current model of capitalism. Our addictions to fossil fuels, to consumption and to never-ending growth need to be examined. Labour needs a real ‘just transition’ for those affected by the shift away from fossil fuels. But I suggest that we need much more. We need a new model for society, one that gives priority to people and planet over profit.”

PSI’s project with Swedish affiliates 2018 to 2022 (Union to Union)

The 5-year project is designed to build upon the intervention points made in the 2017 workshops held in Jamaica with the participation of affiliate leaders in Dominica and Antigua & Barbuda. In addition, it will enhance public sector trade unions’ understanding of the challenges posed by climate change for the world of work and sustainable development. The project is expected to contribute towards public sector trade unions’ technical and organisational capacities for effective social dialogue for policy development on climate change mitigation and adaptation.

¹ Read the full reaction at <http://www.world-psi.org/en/climate-ipcc-report-2018-psi-reaction>

Key (sub)sectors

The governments in Jamaica, Dominica and Antigua & Barbuda have identified the following priority sectors; Health, Tourism, Agriculture and Fisheries. At the same time, they have recognised the important role of the renewable energy sector, utilities and their impact on the priority sectors.

Starting point is the NDCs

With the coming into force of the [Paris Agreement](#) countries have turned their attention to implementing the agreement. For individual countries, this means translating the climate change targets outlined in [NDCs](#) into concrete actions to be implemented at the national or sectoral level. The period 2017 to 2020 is a window of opportunity to refine the NDCs to ensure that they achieve the dual objective of controlling global warming, while safeguarding pathways to sustainable development.

A strong public sector is critical

PSI's position is that a strong public sector and enhanced investment in quality public services are essential elements of the strategy for addressing climate change.

Evidence shows that the public sector remains central to developing Renewable Energy (RE). In developing countries, there are big opportunities to use renewables to extend systems that can provide universal access. However, the transition from fossil to RE sources might leave some people behind. The green transition will create a lot of job opportunities and it is important that those who might lose their current job in the process can have access to these opportunities and not become the casualties of the green transition.

The [debate on just transition](#) has developed over the years and involves much more than originally conceived. It suggests a transformation of societies and the socio-economic models on which many of the Caribbean SIDS depend for their current development agendas. Especially after the devastating hurricanes in late 2017 as well as the severe weather conditions that SIDS continue to experience, it is clear that SIDS must go beyond the obvious in the quest to become climate resilient. National and local government structures must be reviewed, local government workers must be involved at every stage of the process and inhabitants must also be involved in designing local adaptation measures.

The climate chaos has created more cases of migration: examples are evident in the case of Antigua & Barbuda and Dominica. With more emergencies and disasters, the workers in this sector are dealing with increasing levels of stress as they are called on more frequently to deal with more intense weather events. In some cases without the much needed training and resources.

With the coming into force of the [Paris Agreement](#) countries have turned their attention to implementing the agreement. For individual countries, this means translating the climate change targets outlined in [NDCs](#) into concrete actions to be implemented at the national or sectoral level. Until 2020, there is a window of opportunity to refine the NDCs to ensure that they achieve the dual objective of controlling global warming while safeguarding pathways to sustainable development.

Impact on Caribbean SIDS

In commenting on the meaning of the report for Small Island Developing States in the Caribbean, the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre noted, ²

“The report clearly outlines the risks of exceeding 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels; this is the upper limit of warming that small islands states have advocated for many years.”

“This report is a wake-up call for governments and the world, that we no longer have time for playing-around. It is time for hard-work to avert climate change and the small islands states need significant financial help to make it happen” said Dr Ulric Trotz, science advisor and deputy executive director at the CCCCC,.

Where are we now?

The trade union movement and especially public services trade unions must increase their visibility and voices in the debates and policy formulation process. There are many actors involved in the discussions: UN agencies, international and regional financial institutions, the private sector, governments, Civil Society Organisations, environment NGOs, the University of the West Indies and academic institutions with which it is in partnership, all with their varying interests. The challenge is to ensure that the proposals, policies and actions are truly people-centred and are gender responsive.

The regional financial institutions, in addition to pushing the concept of the “green economy” are now talking about the growth potential of the “[Blue economy](#)”³.

Key concepts and issues

- Gender equality and gender equity
- Gender indicators and climate change
- [Public health for all](#) and the role of the health workforce
- [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs)
- Decent work
- Social dialogue
- Public Emergency Services
- Just transition

Building the capacities of public sector trade unions

With the multiplicity of actors, the varying interests and real threat of private sector take over, it is crucial that trade unions build their knowledge, not necessarily or only of the science behind climate change, but also be able to critically analyse the policies and road maps being proposed and the actions being contemplated. Trade unions must be able to use social dialogue and collective bargaining to propose alternatives and more practical and sustainable strategies to protect workers, societies and the planet.

This meeting continues the work of developing a practical toolkit that will build the capacities of activists in public services unions, with a clear emphasis on the unique situations of Caribbean SIDS.

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² <https://www.caribbeanclimate.bz/ipcc-releases-1-5-report-with-dire-warning-for-the-caribbean-and-the-world/>

³ <http://jamaica-gleaner.com/article/news/20180604/blue-economy-economic-driver-cdb-study>