

The 2023 U.S. People’s Report on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Compiled by Commission on Voluntary Service & Action

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Commission on Voluntary Service & Action, Inc. (CVSA) is a consultative and coordinating body of nongovernmental, voluntary service organizations based primarily in North America as well as around the world. CVSA’s mission is to promote, interpret, coordinate and extend the field of independent voluntary service and action programs serving people and communities in need of systemic solutions to economic, social and environmental problems. By exercising its Special NGO Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the UN, CVSA provides a voice for independent, nongovernmental voluntary service and action organizations and the constituencies they serve, bringing local needs into global context and global context to local efforts. CVSA affirms the tenets of the UN Charter and is committed to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the U.S. and around the world.

CVSA mobilizes involvement of U.S.-based volunteer organizations and their allies for the achievement of the universal, transformative and indivisible Sustainable Development Goals in the U.S., in order to end all poverty in all its forms everywhere.

We thank all the CVSA volunteers who assisted with the communications, recording, filing, writing, editing and designing of this report. We thank the dozens of organizations whose work gave inspiration to this report and who contributed information and perspectives contained within it.

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Foreword

The United States was among 193 nations that voted unanimously on September 25, 2015 for the adoption of “Transforming Our World – The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 Targets. All 193 nations committed to “work tirelessly” to achieve these 17 Goals domestically and through cooperative actions to tangibly assist other countries in achieving them, to “leave no one behind.”

The section entitled “Means of implementation and the Global Partnership” under “Follow-up and review” states, in part:

“Follow-up and review processes at all levels will be guided by the following principles: They will be open, inclusive, participatory and transparent for all people and will support the reporting by all relevant stakeholders...”

“National level: We encourage all Member States to develop as soon as practicable ambitious national responses to the overall implementation of this Agenda. These can support the transition to the Sustainable Development Goals and build on existing planning instruments, such as national development and sustainable development strategies, as appropriate.

“We also encourage Member States to conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and subnational levels which are country-led and country-driven. Such reviews should draw on contributions from indigenous peoples, civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders, in line with national circumstances, policies and priorities. National parliaments as well as other institutions can also support these processes.”

In the United States, however, month after month has turned into years of no public service announcements, banners, billboards, commercials, talk show discussions or any other form of publicity about the promises and responsibilities of realizing the 2030 SDGs at home or abroad. Eight years later we are at the half-way point for achieving all 17 Goals. The U.S. mainstream media is silent in regard to the U.S.’s pledge to implement this plan for people, planet and prosperity. It is absent from political campaign speeches. It is not mentioned in our presidents’ state of the union addresses. No coordinating councils have been established. It is no wonder most people in the U.S. have still not even heard of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, much less become involved as stakeholders in official plans to carry them out.

Members of Commission on Voluntary Service & Action (CVSA) find it unacceptable that the U.S. government has yet to submit a single Voluntary National Review (VNR) to the United Nations

High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. In fact, only four other countries have not submitted a VNR to date, namely, Haiti, Myanmar, Yemen and South Sudan. All are war-torn, impoverished countries. The U.S. with its vast resources demonstrates no leadership toward implementation of this Agenda.

CVSA set out to change that. As an entirely volunteer organization, CVSA has been dedicated for over 75 years to the promotion, interpretation, coordination and extension of the field of independent voluntary service and action programs serving people and communities in need of systemic solutions. These constituencies confront economic, social and environmental problems with their unique programs and action plans.

CVSA has run a grassroots, nationwide community education campaign for the implementation of the 2030 SDGs since 2016. We promote the SDGs through our newsletter, speaking engagements and information booths; in meetings with educators; through talks delivered to college classrooms, churches, temples, professional and business associations and all manner of leaders within community-based, volunteer-driven organizations. A cross-section of these voices is represented in this report.

U.S. representatives in the conference halls of the UN speak each year about their commitment to the SDGs but only in reference to U.S. foreign aid programs. Statements made in G-7 and G-20 meetings about the U.S.'s "full commitment to the 2030 SDGs" are, unfortunately, never stated to the U.S. public. No actual plans and avenues for involvement of all stakeholders in addressing urgent domestic needs of the U.S. population have been materialized.

The threefold purpose of this CVSA People's Report on the 2030 SDGs in the U.S. is:

1. To serve as an organizing tool for promotion of the 2030 SDGs in the hands of committed community leaders, organizers, teachers, students, business people, professionals, clergy and all who want to make a difference. It is our intention for it to be useful for mobilizing more people, institutions and organizations into action to accomplish all 17 Goals.
2. To bring to the attention of those in the U.S. government, at any level, that the 2030 SDGs are being embraced by the people themselves who are proceeding to demand implementation and many seek government participation to further their independent efforts.
3. To make available to the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development a report on the SDGs in the U.S. from the perspective of a cross section of people involved in pursuit of the Goals for and by the U.S. people.

A November 2022 State Department "Report to Congress on How the United States is Contributing to the Achievement of the Seventeen Sustainable Development Goals by 2030" contained one or two paragraphs on each goal. It claimed the Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Labor, Department of Agriculture and Department of Health and Human Services are working in partnership with USAID and the State Department to advance the SDGs. We found no mention of any part of the U.S. government addressing pursuit of the Goals in the U.S.

This absence of positive reporting reflects the U.S. government's position that the 2030 Goals do

not apply to the U.S., or that they are not needed here. We submit this report as evidence to the contrary. We wish also to point out that if the Goals are ignored here, we will continue to be the most unequal of all developed countries in terms of wealth and income gaps between the very rich and the rest of the people. At present the U.S. government continues to spend over half the national budget on military spending. Meanwhile, our infrastructure is falling apart, the health of the population is deteriorating and we continue to be the world's largest emitters of greenhouse gasses, responsible for destroying the natural balance of our planet's atmosphere, which is required to sustain life. If the U.S does not change course and set a positive example within our own borders, why should other countries look to us as a source of leadership in the world?

We look forward to the day our government begins to take the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals seriously and puts the honest work into concrete plans to achieve them as quickly as all the resources at their disposal certainly can make possible, with the full involvement of those who are currently very much "left behind."

INTRODUCTION

The CVSA U.S. People's Report on the SDGs is the product of communications by CVSA volunteers and organizers with leaders of several dozen nongovernmental community-based organizations across the country actively engaged in serving communities in need.

This report reflects the voices of grassroots organizations nationwide that were already striving for one or more of the 17 Goals before they ever heard of the 2030 SDGs. Most, in fact, heard about them for the first time from CVSA! This report is meant to be an educational working tool and an inspiration to action.

We hope this report will be useful to everyone in the U.S. taking positive steps to realize a world in which all people can live in dignity, free of poverty and in a healthy sustainable environment. We hope it will be respected and utilized by those in government who will join us and align their priorities with the urgent need to achieve these Goals here in the U.S and in cooperation and solidarity with all other nations.

We invite all nongovernmental grassroots organizations, nonprofits serving people and communities in need, student groups, professional and business associations, environmental and social justice organizations to join us in bringing the 2030 SDGs to the people of the U.S.

Commission on Voluntary Service & Action calls on the U.S. government to carry out its pledge to implement the 2030 SDGs at home. The federal government must form a national SDG Coordinating Council. State and local councils should also be set up, as should local municipal and county governments to oversee data collection, draw up implementation plans, coordinate policies and monitor the progress in their state, county or city. Their data would then be submitted to the still to be created national SDGs coordinating body.

Make the process public and open. Members on the councils at all levels should include representatives from nongovernment volunteer organizations, faith-based service organizations, social service administrators, educators, labor leaders, scientists, low-income people's representatives, students, family farm leaders, health advocates, legal justice specialists, environmental experts,

religious leaders, credit unions and community banks, small business representatives and other stakeholders.

CVSA calls on member organizations and all stakeholders to take ownership of the SDGs in your work and seek partnerships with others on the local level for implementation of the Goals. CVSA can provide consultation, coordination and tools to:

- Promote the SDGs in your community through the work your organization is already doing, and bring more stakeholders into this discussion by building alliances.
- Bring the Goals to the attention of your local government and demand the requisite involvement of all stakeholders and a process for accountability.
- Contribute information to CVSA on your organization's direct experience with installing the SDGs in the U.S.
- Join CVSA in building this movement to increase our collective strength and transform our world, while insuring no one is left behind!

Thank you,
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Goal 1 End poverty in all its forms everywhere

Targets:

1.1 By 2030, eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere, currently measured as people living on less than \$1.25 a day

1.2 By 2030, reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions

1.3 Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable

1.4 By 2030, ensure that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology and financial services, including microfinance

1.5 By 2030, build the resilience of the poor and those in vulnerable situations and reduce their exposure and vulnerability to climate-related extreme events and other economic, social and environmental shocks and disasters

Problems

Despite the United States being the country with the highest number of billionaires and millionaires, and ranking as the richest nation in the world, it is failing on all the above points. The U.S. not only has no plan for achieving the 17 Goals, current government measures through fiscal policy, legislation and budgetary cuts are increasing the absolute number and the percentage of the population falling into poverty, per U.S. standards.

The current U.S. federal poverty line is \$14,891 or less in annual income for a single person and \$29,960 for a family of four. This measurement has remained virtually unchanged since the mid-1960s and does not reflect the reality of cost of living increases. Even according to this skewed criterion, as of the January 2021 Census report, 37.9 million or 11.6% of the total American population lived in poverty. Another 5.3% of the population, or 17.3 million people, live in deep poverty, meaning their incomes fall below 50% of that official federal poverty threshold.

The actual number of households and people living in poverty in the U.S. is much higher than any of these statistics. A combination of low wages and inflation has contributed to the growing number of people living in poverty.

The U.S. pays some of the lowest wages to its workers in the industrialized world. The federal minimum wage is \$7.5 per hour and hasn't been updated since 2009.

From 2000 to 2022, in the average American city, the cost of fuel and utilities increased by 115%. In June 2022, inflation hit a 40-year high throughout the nation, with soaring gasoline and food prices hitting the household budgets of low-paid and retired or disabled workers the hardest.

Businesses that prey on the poor, such as payday lenders, proliferate in these neighborhoods. Essential services, nutritious food and childcare, however, flourish in wealthy neighborhoods but are virtually absent in poor communities.

Rent has more than doubled over the past two decades, rising much faster than renters' incomes. Median rent nationally rose from \$483 in 2000 to \$1,216 in 2021. When wages began to rise in 2021 due to pandemic-induced worker shortages, living expenses rose as well. Soon more were forced to work two and three jobs to be able to cover only basic needs.

Most state governments and now the federal government have cut aid to the poor, while deeply cutting taxes for the rich. The Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia found that even when states raised minimum wages, landlords quickly responded to the wage bumps by increasing rents. This diluted the effect of the policy and did nothing to decrease poverty.

According to 2018 U.S. Census Data, the highest poverty rate by race is found among Native Americans (25.4%), with Blacks (20.8%) having the second highest poverty rate and Hispanics (of any race) having the third highest poverty rate (17.6%). Whites had a poverty rate of 10.1%, as did Asians. 16.2% of all children (11.9 million children) and 14.1% of senior citizens lived in poverty. These figures were greatly exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic and have yet to bounce back.

Faith in Action Alabama, a statewide multi-faith, multi-racial network of people of faith working for

universal community safety, equal access to justice and liberty and inclusive democracy is based in Birmingham, Alabama. They conducted listening sessions with over 400 people in predominantly underrepresented communities across the state. They found this shared sentiment: “We are so consumed with survival mentality that we can’t think about education, the environment, economic development, community development, voting, restoration, and/or redistributing.”

Faith in Action Alabama’s survey recipients said the problem of poverty was caused by: wages in underrepresented communities not being a living wage; women and people of color making less than men and white people for the same work; lack of generational wealth disadvantages the next generation; lack of job opportunities, especially jobs for formerly incarcerated individuals, leads to time and effort invested in the illegitimate economy (crime); skyrocketing housing prices drive low-income families from their homes and divide communities; lack of financial literacy makes achieving personal gains difficult and healthcare costs lead to financial instability. Further, planning decisions are made by a powerful few lawmakers and financiers, with little representation from the community. Small businesses struggle to stay afloat with a multitude of fines, fees, sales tax and other regressive revenue sources intensifying economic disadvantages.

Part of the Solution (POTS) has been serving the poor communities of Bronx, New York City since 1982. They report that the median annual income for a typical POTS family of three is \$12,000, well below the poverty threshold. In addition to the high cost of living in NYC and the rising inflation, the Bronx communities are currently facing challenging obstacles to overcoming social and economic shocks.

Since 2014, poverty rates in New York have surpassed the national average in the United States. Having declined in the years prior to the pandemic, they remain higher now than in 2019. The Bronx remains the county with the highest poverty rate in the state at nearly 24%. The multidimensional nature of poverty is reflected in data showing how the community still struggles with unemployment (related to SDG 8) and food insecurity (related to SDG 2). These obstacles increased very significantly during the pandemic from already high levels in comparison to other NYC boroughs.

By the second quarter of 2020, Bronx unemployment was peaking at nearly 25%, the highest rate of all the boroughs. This rate was likely topped only once in the preceding century, during the Great Depression. While some financial recovery may be underway, the Bronx remains poor with precarious incomes, people living paycheck to paycheck and with limited resources for emergencies. Bronx residents had the largest number and highest rate of overdose deaths in New York City.

With the end of a pandemic eviction moratorium, eviction frequency is rapidly rising and impacting people who may require a longer time to recover. Similar stories can be told by community-based organizations in most cities across the U.S.

Solutions

- Insure living wages and full-time jobs for all who can work; raise incomes to at least match what is needed to cover the actual costs of supporting a family of four within the area where one lives and works.
- Provide social protection systems to eliminate all extreme poverty and to substantially

reduce all levels of poverty by 2030.

- Direct payments to low-income people, like federal COVID-19 stimulus payments and increased SNAP payments, while proved to be effective in reducing some of the poverty during the pandemic to keep families afloat temporarily, are not the solution, as this does not address the cause of chronic poverty.
- Mandate that federal and all state minimum wage rates are at least 47½% of the output dollar.
- Install free-of-charge financial literacy programs in schools, prisons and neighborhoods.
- Medicaid expansions to create health care-related jobs, decrease the number and percentage of medically uninsured residents, and alleviate the burden of medical expenses on the poor and vulnerable.
- Universal access to free community college. Restructure municipal and state taxes to favor more progressive methods and generalize funds for more equitable distribution.
- Investment in minority entrepreneurs.
- Investment in reliable, free or reduced cost of public transportation.
- Urban planning with community input and providing incentives for beneficial local businesses that provide needed local services.
- Statewide regulation in all states of the notorious “payday loan” industry to shut them down or greatly limit interest terms they are allowed to charge.
- Strengthen policies, social and educational programs and resources to prevent and treat substance abuse, including narcotic drug abuse and harmful use of alcohol.

Goal 2 End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

Targets:

2.1 By 2030, end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round

2.2 By 2030, end all forms of malnutrition, including achieving, by 2025, the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under 5 years of age, and address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women and older persons

2.3 By 2030, double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, in particular women, indigenous peoples, family farmers, pastoralists and fishers, including through

secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment

2.4 By 2030, ensure sustainable food production systems and implement resilient agricultural practices that increase productivity and production, that help maintain ecosystems, that strengthen capacity for adaptation to climate change, extreme weather, drought, flooding and other disasters and that progressively improve land and soil quality

2.5 By 2020, maintain the genetic diversity of seeds, cultivated plants and farmed and domesticated animals and their related wild species, including through soundly managed and diversified seed and plant banks at the national, regional and international levels, and promote access to and fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge, as internationally agreed.

Problems

The U.S. is engaged in policies that are not aimed at achieving any of the above targets, ever. Deep systemic changes in food production and distributions systems are required to turn the trend in the direction of actually achieving Goal 2, and people currently involved in feeding the hungry and organizing for sustainable agricultural practices must have a voice in making and monitoring those plans.

In 2022, almost 25% of American adults were food insecure, up by 4% from the prior year (Urban Institute). Because of recent price increases, 62% of adults whose grocery costs increased significantly reported either reducing the amount of food they bought or not buying the kinds of foods they wanted; 43.3% withdrew money from savings, and 36.3% increased credit card debt. About 16.5% received charitable food. Wage levels are not keeping up with inflation, thereby chipping away at household purchasing power.

Hunger

The term “food insecurity” is commonly used by U.S. government agencies instead of the true word: hunger. Their term means that someone isn’t able to secure enough food for a nutritious diet, which can lead to skipping meals or cutting back on food. Overt hunger and poor nutrition are again a growing problem in the U.S. Hunger in the U.S. is not caused by lack of available food supplies, and is completely preventable.

Each year 119 billion pounds of food – nearly 40% – is wasted in the United States (Feeding America). This equates to 130 billion meals and more than \$408 billion in discarded food annually. Waste occurs at every stage of food production and distribution and handling by farmers, packers, shippers, manufacturers, retailers and residents. Commercial food waste makes up 61% or 66 billion pounds of food waste overall.

Part of the Solution (POTS) in the Bronx, New York, reports that since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, their Food Security Program saw a dramatic increase: in 2021, POTS served more than 2.8 million meals and in 2022 POTS served more than 3.2 million meals across their various programs. This was the experience of tens of thousands of community-based food and meal distribution programs across the U.S. run by nonprofit and community organizations relying on volunteers. According to the USDA, about one in four Americans take advantage of at least one of

the government food supplement programs at some point in any given year. Food stamp enrollment was 42.6 million people in December 2022, 15% higher than prior to the pandemic. In March 2023, more than 30 states cut their food stamp benefits with the expiration of a pandemic program under which they had expanded eligibility. This is expected to push millions more into poverty. As many as 750,000 adults may lose SNAP (food stamp) benefits in 2023, which will reduce resources to beneficiaries by \$3 billion per month nationally.

More than nine million children in the U.S. faced hunger in 2021 (Feeding America) or one in eight children. Black and Latino children are more likely to face hunger than white children because of systemic racial injustice. According to the USDA, in 2021, 22% of Black children were food insecure and 18.5% of Latino children were food insecure. Single-parent families are more likely to face hunger because they need to stretch their income further. In 2021, 24% of households headed by single mothers were food insecure.

Around 22 million school age children rely on the free or reduced lunch programs from school for food. Many schools offer the School Breakfast Program to help offset the cost of these meals for these hungry students. Many children eat less during the summer or other breaks from school. It's estimated that six out of seven, or 86%, hungry children will eat less during the summer because they aren't getting school lunches.

In Brooklyn, New York, Community Help in Park Slope (CHiPS) has been feeding the hungry and providing shelter for the homeless through their soup kitchen, food pantry and Frances Residence for new and expectant single mothers since 1971. Currently, their soup kitchen serves 425 hot meals, prepared fresh in-house, six days a week to homeless individuals, seniors living on fixed incomes, working individuals and families in need of a meal and/or groceries, those who have lost their jobs and South American asylum seekers who have been transported to and left in New York City. CHiPS does not have adequate resources to meet the rapidly increasing need, and yet many of their guests are sent to them by the offices of local elected officials.

Sustainable Agriculture

For the past ten years, Huerta de Valle, based in Ontario, California, has been pursuing its mission to cultivate an organization of community members to grow their own organic crops. The poor communities of Ontario are in what has become known as "food deserts," which are geographic areas where residents have few to no convenient options for securing affordable and healthy foods, while surrounded by a proliferation of fast food chain stores. Huerta del Valle points out that industrial corporate agriculture as a practice limits accessibility to fresh foods, and by taking food production out of communities and creating vast distances between where we live and where our food comes from, we limit access to fresh foods to those living in poverty.

The long distance required for transport adds to climate pollution, and the high price of fresh food leads to overconsumption of cheap modified and processed food, which is contributing to high rates of malnutrition, diabetes and obesity in children and whole families.

The relationship between growing food and caring for the land and its ecosystems is broken under a system of profit-driven industrial monoculture agriculture. Conventional farming practices do not create meaningful work that compensates farm workers equitably. As a result, those who work the hardest to make sure we have food on our tables are not receiving a livable wage.

The National Family Farm Coalition reports that agriculture is one of the most concentrated sectors of the U.S. economy. Tens of thousands of independent family farmers have gone out of business in the last few decades; their land and operations have been bought up by ever-larger farms. Today there are 70% fewer hog farmers than in the mid-1990s; just four companies control two-thirds of hog slaughter.

Nearly 17,000 cattle ranchers have gone out of business each year since 1980. 85% of the beef market is now controlled by the top four meatpackers. Trends are similar across agriculture: the top four companies in each industry control 85% of the corn seed market, 90% of grain trading and 63% of food retail. Only 20% of farms control nearly 70% of U.S. farmland.

Consolidation has reduced competition in farm markets and lowered prices paid to farmers, ranchers and fishers. Farmers used to have multiple buyers to market their goods, allowing them to negotiate the best possible price. In many regions today, farmers have only one or two buyers, making it impossible to negotiate and forcing them to accept whatever the buyer offers.

Making matters worse, seed, chemical, machinery and other farm input companies have also consolidated. Farmers used to likewise be able to shop around for the best price for farming supplies, but now there is often just one seller, which might be an hour's drive away.

Squeezed on both sides by the dictates of massive corporations, farmers today have increasingly little control over their own businesses. And these companies take such a cut that farmers get on average 15 cents of the consumer dollar, if they make anything at all after paying off loans and taxes.

The disappearance of small family farms across the country, able to provide fresh produce to the communities locally, plus competition with lower-priced food sold by large corporate agriculture companies is one of the causes of hunger and poor nutrition in the U.S.

Solutions

Decades of pro-agribusiness farm policy have given us a corporate-run food and farm system. To return control to all of us – farmers, ranchers, fishers, workers, and consumers – we must both work to rebuild the alternative farm and food system that we want to see in our own communities, and organize for changes in federal and state policy.

- Install national controls on food prices and roll back inflationary increases driven by private profiteering.
- Deprioritize conventional corporate industrial farming, and shift support to local, sustainable and indigenous methods of farming.
- Localize our food system and increase investment in urban agriculture, with the goal of having one garden per community or per mile, and provide support to organizations already on the ground doing the work in providing access to healthy, sustainable and fresh food.
- Provide funding for agricultural education, especially sustainable and traditional methods that support, rather than negatively impact the environment.

- Stop state-level tax breaks and other policy and regulatory giveaways for factory farms and big agricultural corporations.
- Increase available resources and funding to address food insecurity, which includes a prioritization on increasing the capacity of food programs, particularly at the community level.
- Increase direct cash assistance to low-income households through mechanisms like guaranteed basic income, earned income tax credits and increased SNAP (food stamp) payments, as a short-term solution until the root causes of poverty and high prices are solved. Finance these expenditures from the exorbitant profits of the large agricultural corporations.
- Form state and national councils to plan measures for eliminating food waste and include grassroots consumer groups, small farmers, restaurant owners and other stakeholders in the decision making.

Goal 3 Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

Targets:

3.1 By 2030, reduce the global maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per 100,000 live births

3.2 By 2030, end preventable deaths of newborns and children under five years of age, with all countries aiming to reduce neonatal mortality to at least as low as 12 per 1,000 live births and under-five mortality to at least as low as 25 per 1,000 live births

3.3 By 2030, end the epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and neglected tropical diseases and combat hepatitis, water-borne diseases and other communicable diseases

3.4 By 2030, reduce by one third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment and promote mental health and well-being

3.5 Strengthen the prevention and treatment of substance abuse, including narcotic drug abuse and harmful use of alcohol

3.6 By 2020, halve the number of global deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents

3.7 By 2030, ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programmes

3.8 Achieve universal health coverage, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health-care services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and

vaccines for all

3.9 By 2030, substantially reduce the number of deaths and illnesses from hazardous chemicals and air, water and soil pollution and contamination

Problems

The U.S. is the only OECD country that does not have universal health coverage. The U.S. spends nearly 18% of GDP on health care: \$4.3 trillion a year in 2023. Yet Americans die younger and are less healthy than residents of other high-income countries. Americans see physicians less often than people in peer countries and have among the lowest rate of practicing physicians and hospital beds per 1,000 people. The U.S. has the lowest life expectancy at birth, the highest death rates for avoidable or treatable conditions, the highest maternal and infant mortality, and the highest suicide rates among its peer countries.

The Affordable Care Act (ACA) opened up avenues to medical insurance coverage for millions of previously uninsured U.S. citizens, but “coverage” neither equates with actual or affordable medical care! Low-income worker families plagued with debt cannot afford to pay annual insurance deductibles, rendering them de facto without health services, exacerbating economic and racial health inequities nationwide.

Black Women for Wellness is a Los Angeles, California nonprofit organization founded to aid women and girls with nutrition education, chronic disease prevention, sexual health education and protection from toxic chemical exposure from personal and hair care products. They have found it necessary to aid members in navigating the confusing U.S. patchwork of medical insurance programs and a myriad of regulatory hurdles.

Small business owners and their workers often cannot obtain routine, preventive medical care. Required by the ACA to provide health benefits to employees, even when a small business owner pays a monthly insurance premium of \$600 for each worker, the insurance carrier requires about \$1,500 annual deductibles out-of-pocket from the worker before the insurance company will pay any medical bills. Each patient is also required to pay a co-pay of 15% for each appointment. As a result, low-income workers avoid going to a doctor, only seeing a doctor for emergencies.

Over a million COVID-19 deaths

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed systemic problems with the ability of the U.S. to deliver health care to its people. Over one million people have died in the U.S. from COVID-19 since the start of the pandemic, the highest number in per capita percentage than any other developed nation. The U.S. has 4% of the world’s population but recorded 16% of COVID-19 deaths. The state of Mississippi, one of the poorest per capita states in the country, has the worst COVID-19 death rate.

People in the poorer, low-income urban communities, where residents live in dense, multigenerational housing, work “essential” jobs and suffer from secondary health conditions due to a lack of access to quality primary care and healthy foods. They were disproportionately impacted during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Residents of low-income communities in South Los Angeles are already significantly prone to chronic health conditions, such as diabetes, cancer, cardiovascular disease, stroke, asthma and high blood pressure due to proximity to polluted air, poor diets and the cost of fresh food.

The deaths of over a million people in close to three years have not only been a source of personal tragedy and social disruption, but also unprecedented economic losses. Longstanding socioeconomic inequities were exposed through COVID-19 hospitalizations and deaths. In South Los Angeles, a low-income Black and Latino area, the COVID-19 pandemic piggybacked on an existing catastrophe of rampant, poorly treated chronic illnesses: heart disease, high blood pressure, lung cancer, kidney disease, asthma, COPD, arthritis, depression and diabetes. These conditions made South L.A. a hotspot of COVID-19 deaths during the 2021 winter surge.

Further, when the wave of COVID-19 deaths receded, the local hospital this area relies on, Martin Luther King Jr. Community Hospital, found itself having to perform more diabetic amputations than any other surgical procedure. The increase in amputations was due in part to the lack of access to primary care and personal care during the COVID epidemic when medical facilities were overwhelmed with critical care COVID patients. The loss of limbs due to diabetic wounds is preventable with timely and comprehensive treatment. A survey conducted by Martin Luther King Jr. Community Hospital in 2020 found that its service area of more than 1.3 million people had only a third of the full-time physicians required to adequately treat that population — a shortage of 1,300 doctors.

Severe socioeconomic conditions result in inadequate treatment, preventable amputations and premature deaths. Residents face entrenched poverty, a dearth of markets with affordable fresh food, an absence of parks to promote exercise, a deeply deficient primary healthcare system reliant on low payouts from the Medicaid (Medi-Cal in California) system on top of the inadequate number of qualified doctors.

While Medicaid and public health program budgets are being cut by states and the U.S. federal government, the medical industry is making huge profits. During 2021 and 2022 alone, pharmaceutical giant Pfizer generated \$35 billion in net profits from sales of its COVID-19-related products and BioNTech and Moderna each made \$20 billion.

Maternal mortality

Black Women for Wellness (BWW) reports that maternal mortality is not just a problem in developing nations. The U.S. has seen a steady increase in the rate of pregnancy-related maternal deaths that far exceed those of other high-income countries. A woman giving birth in this country today is nearly twice more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes than her mother a generation ago. In 2021, 1,205 women died of pregnancy-related causes in the U.S. compared to 861 in 2020 and 754 in 2019 – a 38.2% increase from 2020 to 2021 alone. 84.2% of pregnancy-related deaths have been found to be preventable. Data disaggregated by race reveals the impacts of inequities that result in devastating maternal health outcomes for Black women.

Access to quality essential healthcare services

In New Orleans, the Common Ground Health Clinic opened on September 9, 2005 just days after Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast. The unfolding humanitarian disaster and absence of governmental response spurred two community activists to put out a call for healthcare workers to come to New Orleans to help meet the overwhelming need. The clinic started as a volunteer first aid station with the arrival of “street medics.” Nurses, physicians, herbalists, acupuncturists, EMTs, social workers and community activists came from around the world to volunteer at Common Ground Health Clinic. Now a government-funded nonprofit community clinic, it continues to serve

the community, providing care to more than 60,000 patients since it opened at no charge to their patients. They go beyond the walls of the center into communities to educate people about how and where to access care.

Remote Area Medical-USA, based in Rockford, Tennessee, runs free clinic events throughout the U.S. that provide a day of free dental, vision and medical services to the underserved and uninsured, operating from equipped mobile vans staffed by volunteer medical professionals. Since RAM was founded in 1985, over 196,000 volunteers – comprised of professional practitioners, as well as general support staff – have treated more than 900,000 individuals. They have delivered more than \$189.5 million worth of free healthcare services. Invariably, there are more people lining up to apply for their free medical and dental care than they can accommodate.

Volunteer-dependent programs like these are saving the lives of a small fraction of those who cannot access medical care due to cost or legal status, while the private corporate-owned medical industry increases profits by hiking up costs and denying care. These volunteer programs are a demonstration of how health care could be provided when the private profit motive is eliminated; but these programs cannot solve U.S. healthcare problems.

Air and water pollution

According to the American Chemical Society, after decades of federal environmental policy such as the Clean Air Act passed in late 1970, air quality in the United States improved compared to historical levels and to the air breathed by the vast majority of people in the world. Yet, there are still 100,000-200,000 early deaths annually associated with exposure to air pollution; substantially more deaths than from murders and car crashes combined. The American Lung Association reported that one in four people in the U.S. live with air pollution that can hurt their health and shorten their lives. About one of every 25 deaths in the U.S. occurs prematurely because of exposure to air pollution. Commercial air pollution is caused by power plants, oil refineries, industrial facilities and factories. Agricultural areas generate pollution from fertilizer and animal waste lagoons that undergo chemical changes and create gaseous pollutants, contributing to atmospheric warming. Increasingly frequent uncontrolled wildfires drive the air quality index into unhealthy and hazardous status, including dense and pervasive smoke from the massive Canadian wildfires of 2023 that led to New York being ranked for a day as the city with the worst air quality in the entire world.

There are 1,329 Superfund sites on the National Priorities List for cleanup that have not been detoxified. SuperFund sites are hazardous waste sites such as landfills and mines where toxic waste has been dumped. The Silver Valley Resource Center in Kellogg, Idaho, an all-volunteer grassroots organization, has been fighting with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to do the job that it became responsible for in 1980, to clean up what is now the 1,500 square mile Bunker Hill Mining and Metallurgical Complex Superfund. Kellogg, Idaho was once known as the silver capital of world with one of the largest smelting operations releasing lead, arsenic, cadmium, antimony and mercury into the rivers, air, homes and schools of the Silver Valley and surrounding areas for six generations.

In 1980, Congress passed the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act, informally known as the Superfund Act that gave the EPA the authority – and responsibility – to clean up toxic waste dumps and contaminated sites. Even though Bunker Hill had been on the National Priorities List (NPL) list since 1983, when the EPA announced in December 2021 that \$1

billion would be issued to clean up over 40 Superfund sites on the NPL, Bunker Hill was not included on that short list. Cleanup has still not taken place despite the size and continual impacts of the Superfund site and the generations of people affected.

Solutions

- Government needs to prioritize the health of the people over the profits of the insurance and pharmaceutical corporations. Per Target 3.8, provide free universal health care for all.
- Properly fund and monitor the EPA to commence immediately with clean-up of all Superfund sites, creating living wage jobs and restoring safe environments.
- Train more primary care physicians; make medical school less expensive and open community clinics that provide comprehensive and preventive care in all communities.
- Provide cultural competence training for all medical professionals.
- Integrate social determinants of health into health files and care plans, including facilitating access to affordable sanitary housing, clean water, residential utilities, legal services, social workers at hospitals and clinics working jointly to overcome poor housing, water, nutrition and inadequate patient education.
- Include wrap-around services for positive STI/HIV/AIDS diagnoses including – treatment, free check-ups, offering of preventive medications (i.e., pre-exposure prophylaxis and post-exposure prophylaxis).
- End subsidies to pharmaceutical corporations except to provide urgently needed free medicine including but not limited to public health emergencies.
- Carry out Goals 1, 2, 6, 8, 9, and 13 to ensure all people can live in a healthy environment, have decent affordable housing, and gain access to affordable fresh food and living wage jobs.

Goal 4 Ensure inclusive and equitable quality/education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

Targets: 4.1 By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes

4.2 By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education

4.3 By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university
4.4 By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship

4.5 By 2030 eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations

4.6 By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy

4.7 By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development

Problems

In the United States, public schools are facing high volumes of dropouts, poor working conditions for teachers and unfair distribution of resources between schools in poor versus wealthy areas. Many states have reported jumps in dropout rates since the COVID-19 pandemic, especially as students have had to struggle with gaps in their education left by school closures due to pandemic public health restrictions. In March 2023, for example, North Carolina officials reported the state's dropout numbers were 17% higher than pre-pandemic.

Women Graduates-USA, a chapter of Graduate Women International, looked into the status of all the targets of Goal 4 in relation to the U.S. Their research documented that the U.S. has large gaps in adult literacy, gender disparities in education, lack of education in sustainable development, and poor scores on inclusive and safe learning environments. We need concrete plans at local, state and federal levels to address the following problems in order to achieve the seven Targets of Goal 4 in the U.S.

Early childhood

La Casa de Don Pedro's Early Childhood Education Program in Newark, New Jersey strives to provide education and support for more than 600 expecting mothers and to offer a supportive, nurturing, educational and culturally sensitive program for the mothers and their infants, toddlers and preschoolers. They largely rely on contracts with Head Start, a federal program begun in the 1960s to provide early childhood education, health, nutrition and parent involvement services to low-income children and families. La Casa de Don Pedro runs seven such child care centers in the city.

A problem this community center faces is that there are not enough Head Start centers to meet the need. They are underfunded, very short-staffed and in high demand for its limited enrollment capacity.

Instructors with Child Development Credential Certification are underpaid, making only \$16/hour nationwide. Constant program changes directed by the federal government disrupt the integrity of these programs. One year the structure changed from having children within the same age range in classrooms to having mixed ages in all classrooms. Children are constantly moved around to keep within licensing ratios, resulting in them not receiving continuous care from the same instructor,

which causes instability and affects the bonding needed between the child and instructor. Family social workers are not able to develop a rapport with families due to lack of time as they also cover for teaching staff shortages.

The cities of Newark and Paterson, New Jersey have raised salaries and offered bonuses as incentives to attract newly graduated teachers and qualified certified Early Childhood Education Teachers for their childcare centers. However, the problem still persists of a heavy workload on staff, teacher assistants, long-term substitute teachers and directors, contributing to high turnover rates and affecting the overall quality of their programs.

Preschool children with special needs are not receiving the one-on-one care they need in a classroom setting. Children are not reaching developmental benchmarks, especially in math, literacy and cognitive development. Children with individual education plans are not receiving their recommended therapy sessions.

The dedicated people running these centers work to do the best they can with the resources available, and for low-income working families, the government-subsidized childcare centers are their best option. Well-resourced, private early childhood care centers can cost from \$20,000 to \$50,000 a year or more for one child. This is far beyond the means of working class families.

Primary and secondary school education

There are certainly excellent public schools and very hardworking, devoted teachers throughout the U.S.; 90% of the children in the U.S. today attend public school. But currently, primary and secondary schools face teacher burnout due to inadequate pay, supplies and lack of enough classroom assistants for large classes.

In Los Angeles, 80% of the over 600,000 students in the public school system live in poverty and there is a 23% dropout rate in public schools. In New York City, 10% of public schools students – over 100,000 – go to school from homeless shelters or other non-housed living arrangements. Further, the increase in gun violence in the schools, and attacks on learning curriculum, causes fear and confusion and polarization in what should be a safe learning and nurturing environment. There is also a severe shortage of mental health consultants and professionals in the public schools.

If not properly addressed, these issues will all continue to have drastic consequences in the quality of U.S. public education and for the broader community. At least four million young people lack foundational skills to participate in society, with proficiencies in math and literacy among school-age children declining. According to the U.S. Department of Education, in 2020, 54% of U.S. adults 16 to 74 years old read below 6th grade level. Among high school graduates, 19% are functionally illiterate. These are indicatives of the declining quality of the whole education system.

The funding for public schools in most states is tied to real estate tax – the taxes property owners pay. This means the poorer areas chronically are locked into having less school funding than wealthy communities. Cities and states often try to devise new ways of funding and administering their public school system. The Howard Area Community Center in Chicago reported that Chicago's public school system uses a Student-Based Budgeting model that allocates funding to schools based on the number of enrolled students. The system assigns the same funding to each student regardless of the student's needs. This approach, however, has had a disastrous impact on predominantly Black schools on the South and West sides of Chicago. Schools that are already struggling with inadequate resources and/or serve a large number of students coming from

marginalized communities are hit hardest by this funding model. Every time a student leaves the school, the school has even fewer resources to accommodate the students who remain. This disproportionately impacts poor and black communities negatively, where there are more school closures and less funding. This forces families to send their children to schools outside their neighborhood.

Higher education

The higher education system in the U.S. has been globally recognized as having some of the highest quality tertiary institutions in the world. However, there are many challenges that U.S. higher education institutions face. According to the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, hunger was cited as the third most important issue affecting college campuses, with 42% of community college students regularly experiencing hunger. More than one third of all U.S. college students do not always have enough to eat. Many college campuses have established emergency food closets and feeding programs to aid their students.

The costs of higher education and the amount of debt students accrue impacts students' choice of academic paths and fields of study. Graduates are forced to choose jobs that may have nothing to do with their field of study, just to be able to pay for student loans, which often takes decades.

The U.S. has had the highest average college tuition cost amongst the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) industrialized countries. 69% of U.S. college graduates in 2019 took out student loans. In 2022, they were graduating with an average debt of \$37,172 just for an undergraduate education.

The pandemic exacerbated an extensive mental health crisis that impacts undergraduate and graduate students, and is also faced by university faculty, administration and staff.

Higher education institutions should be playing an important role in research, development and training towards the achievement of the 17 goals in the U.S. and worldwide, such as is the case with their counterparts internationally. But it is still a small minority of universities that have embraced incorporating the 2030 SDGs into their interdepartmental curriculum. These include Georgia Tech, Carnegie Mellon Institute, University of Southern California Viterbi School of Engineering, Rice University and Arizona State University.

Women Graduates-USA, in recognizing that the 2030 SDGs were not being implemented in the U.S. in any coherent manner at the federal level, called on all their members nationwide to build awareness and mobilize people in their local areas to make the SDGs a reality in this country.

Education for people with learning disabilities

Camphill Association of North America reports that young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities in the U.S. face barriers despite federally-mandated educational services through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Schools struggle to maintain qualified special education teaching staff and paraprofessionals. This combined with chronic underfunding leads to students often being made to wait until their educational placements become completely untenable before districts are willing to fund more intensive support or alternative placements, such as day and residential programming.

Inequities are exacerbated even further for students of color and other minority students,

particularly Black girls. Limited opportunities for summer programming and quality extended school year programming can result in learning loss for students with more significant educational support needs.

These challenges follow students past high school into transition programming, which ends at age 21. After 21, educational services cease, and young adults with significant support needs and their families

are often left with few options and an entirely new bureaucracy to navigate.

Into adulthood, vocational training services remain relatively limited despite state policies of establishing independent, competitive employment pathways. College programs for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities are expanding through pilot projects spearheaded through initiatives such as Think College, which is dedicated the developing, expanding and improving research and practice in inclusive higher education for students with intellectual disability.

As “micro-college” and other alternative pathways in higher education grow in popularity thanks to their capacity to adapt quickly to individual student needs and changing community and economic dynamics, we should recognize similar opportunities for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

According to National Center for Learning Disabilities, around 15% of the U.S. population, or one in seven individuals, has some form of learning disability, meaning an estimated 10 million children and adults in the United States have learning disabilities. While access to educational services has expanded dramatically in recent years, young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities in the U.S. continue to face barriers despite federally-mandated educational services through IDEA.

The Camphill Association of North America seeks to address these gaps in educational and vocational training through highly personalized educational programs for children and youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities. They offer comprehensive vocational and educational opportunities for adults participating in Camphill community life. This organization is one such example following a successful approach to inclusive learning. Still, such programs need significant investment, expansion, and development to begin serving a more comprehensive range of individual needs and interests, including and beyond traditionally-academic programs.

Solutions

Per Targets 4.1 and 4.6, achieve full literacy and numeracy for all children consistent with their grade level, and for all women and men by 2030.

- Pre-school daycare centers with quality educational programs and teachers paid a living wage need to be funded and available in all communities for all working parents and families.
- More teachers for all levels of public schools need to be trained and paid a living wage with benefits and adequate school resources.
- Government should increase the share of monies in federal and state budgets allocated to public school education as a priority.
- Fully fund special education in every state and municipality. Specific hiring targets and

qualification mandates should be funded.

- For disabled students, extend transition funding through age 26 to enable young adults more time to transition beyond the educational system into adult services and programs. After age 22 (roughly the age that students might be completing undergraduate programs), young adults should be eligible for another four years of transition funding offered through Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), but not tied to specific educational settings, enabling them to explore different options for their future, including vocational training.
- Free quality schooling for families with incarcerated individuals and mental health issues, as well as low-income families and children raised by grandparents should be prioritized, not to the exclusion of any other grouping.
- Invest in paraprofessional and special educator training, including in-house training programs. Expand state-funded programs enabling paraprofessionals to gain their special education credentials on the job. Encourage learning and exchange between public and approved private school special education faculties. Do not undercut the pay and job stability of teachers by pitting paraprofessionals and teachers against one another.
- Offer accessible vocational training for people with disabilities in disability service provision, rights and regulations, advocacy, and non-profit management. This would promote disabled leadership of disability organizations.
- Develop grant programs for post-secondary institutions and continuing education program providers to develop Plain Language/Universal Design for Learning curriculum and support people with disabilities to utilize vocational training funds (especially in extended transition programming) to explore more pathways in a wider variety of educational contexts.
- Design training, tools and curriculums for teachers at all levels that leverage the 17 Sustainable Development Goals to spur innovation and new approaches teaching about sustainable development and each of the Goals.

Goal 5 Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Targets:

5.1 End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere

5.2 Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation

5.4 Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate

5.5 Ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life

5.6 Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences

Problems

Poverty

The difference between the earnings of men and women in the U.S. has barely closed in the past two decades, according to the Pew Research Center. In 2022, American women typically earned 82 cents for every dollar earned by men. That was about the same as in 2002, when they earned 80 cents to the dollar.

Health care, social work and government and community-based service occupations are overwhelmingly made up of women, according to Economic Policy Institute. Women make up 73% of government and community-based service workers, 76% of health care workers and 78 % of social workers. This work is hard, essential and usually low paid. For women to have “full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life,” we must eliminate the systemic causes of poverty, lack of access to health care, education and affordable housing, as described in the other 16 Goals. For example, working class mothers who cannot afford quality daycare for young children, or private schools for their children offering lots of character-building afterschool activities, also have no time to further invest in their own advancement.

The steepest decline in labor force participation in the first phase of the pandemic was among women with two children; and following the pandemic emergency, the shortage of affordable childcare services has emerged as a barrier for women trying to return to jobs in restaurants and other low-wage sectors.

Women’s Lunch Place in Boston, a day shelter that provides nutritious food and individualized services for women who are homeless or living in poverty, reports that women and children make up 70% of all people living in poverty in the United States. Most of these women face healthcare and housing disparities. A significant percentage of homeless women also suffer illnesses that put them at increased risk, typically heart disease, pulmonary disease, asthma, high blood pressure and diabetes. More than 1,800 women depend on the Women’s Lunch Place each year, but without change in the injustices of low wages, lack of access to affordable housing, good health care and quality education for all, the need for the services of Women’s Lunch Place and organizations like them will continue to grow.

While there are twice as many women billionaires in the U.S. than in any other country (91 as of March 2023), this is no help to the millions of women in the U.S. in low-paying service work jobs. The solution for a farm worker woman, who is earning ten cents less than the few dollars an hour her male counterpart is making, is not “equal pay” with her also low-paid male farm worker. The solution is living wages for all workers, men and women, and for all 17 Goals to be achieved.

Faith in Alabama reports the wage gap in Alabama as follows: when doing the same work as a white male, yearly compensation is decreased by \$31,244 for a black woman, \$12,908 for a black man, \$27,176 for a Latina woman, \$13,984 for a Latino man, and \$12,287 for a white woman. Wages are kept low in the U.S. by pitting whites against blacks, blacks against Latinos, women against men. Women will overcome the wage gap only when all workers organize together for their common needs and interests.

Women comprise 56% of college students, but hold nearly two-thirds of outstanding student loan debt according to the American Association of University Women. Black women graduate with the most debt — \$30,400, on average — compared to \$22,000 for white women and \$19,500 for white men. This relates to Goal 4 and the necessity for high education costs to be brought down. Lack of paid maternity leave The U.S. is the only rich developed nation offering no national paid parental-leave program. There is no obligation for U.S. employers to give paid maternity or parental leave to their workers. There is a law that requires U.S. employers with 50 or more employees to allow mothers and fathers to take unpaid time off, up to 12 weeks for the purpose of pregnancy or child-rearing.

Violence against women

M.U.J.E.R., Inc., (Men & Women United for Justice, Education and Reform) is a grassroots nonprofit based in southern Florida that has been providing support to survivors of domestic and sexual violence and abuse since 1994. They report that rape is the most underreported crime in the U.S., making it difficult to know how many lives are affected by sexual violence. The Bureau of Justice Statistics estimates that only 30.7% of victims report the crime to law enforcement. In Florida, a sexual offense is reported to law enforcement every 42 minutes. One out of every six American women has been the victim of rape or attempted rape in her lifetime. 15% of sexual assault and rape victims are under age 12. Every year, more than three million children witness domestic violence in their homes. Domestic violence is the third leading cause of homelessness among families.

M.U.J.E.R. uses a holistic approach to heal and protect the safety and well-being of victims of domestic and sexual violence, on-scene support response at the hospital or at the scene of the crime and a 24/7 hotline, along with community education activities. Their programs have been proven to be effective, but there are not enough such centers and services available in the country as a whole.

Women incarcerated in the U.S.

The U.S. is one of the top incarcerators of women in the world. There are 172,700 women and girls in prison, jail or detention as of 2023.

According to Prison Policy Initiative, many states are “widening the net” of the criminal justice system’s reach by criminalizing women’s responses to gender-based abuse and discrimination. Policy changes have led to mandatory or “dual” arrests for fighting back against domestic violence, increasing criminalization of school-aged girls’ misbehavior — including survival efforts like running away — and the criminalization of women who support themselves through sex work. Added to that is the over criminalization of drug use and peripheral involvement in drug networks. Women have become the fastest-growing segment of the incarcerated population.

Hour Children, a nonprofit organization in Queens, New York, founded by the Sisters of St. Joseph, provides comprehensive services to incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women and their

children. They report that only 28% of incarcerated women had full-time employment prior to their arrest; 27% were unemployed. Of those who have held a job, two-thirds reported never receiving more than the minimum wage.

50% of women who enter the prison system nationally do not have a high school diploma or GED. An estimated 62% of women incarcerated in state prisons are mothers with children under the age of 18. About half of these children are nine or younger. 64% of incarcerated mothers reported living with their children just prior to imprisonment. It is estimated that there are more than 105,000 children with a parent in prison or jail in New York State alone. Hour Children is successful in aiding the women in rejoining the community, reunifying with their families and building healthy independent and secure lives with their children, however, there are very few programs like this across the country.

Solutions

- Pay living wages to all workers – for both women and men; eliminate poverty pay scales for people of all races and genders.
- Per Target 5.5, prioritize advancing women to leadership positions for full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.
- Carry out all 17 of the Sustainable Development Goals, with women in the lead, especially Goals 1, 2, 3 and 4.
- Make paid maternity leave a right, subsidized by and enforced by law.
- Fund programs like Hour Children, Women’s Lunch Place and M.U.J.E.R. in all states and cities until they are no longer needed because poor women are no longer being incarcerated for economic crimes, facing poverty on the streets or being beaten, assaulted and abused.

Goal 6 Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

Targets:

6.1 By 2030, achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all

6.2 By 2030, achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations

6.3 By 2030, improve water quality by reducing pollution, eliminating dumping and minimizing release of hazardous chemicals and materials, halving the proportion of untreated wastewater and substantially increasing recycling and safe reuse globally

6.4 By 2030, substantially increase water-use efficiency across all sectors and ensure sustainable withdrawals and supply of freshwater to address water scarcity and substantially reduce the number of people suffering from water scarcity

6.5 By 2030, implement integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation as appropriate

6.6 By 2020, protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes

6.a By 2030, expand international cooperation and capacity-building support to developing countries in water- and sanitation-related activities and programmes, including water harvesting, desalination, water efficiency, wastewater treatment, recycling and reuse technologies

6.b Support and strengthen the participation of local communities in improving water and sanitation management

Problems

SDG 6 encompasses a rallying cry for access to clean water for all and must be carried out in the United States as well as in cooperation with developing nations. This is not a “third world” problem alone; this is a major problem in the U.S. and other developed industrialized countries.

The UN defines water security as the “capacity of a population to safeguard sustainable access to adequate quantities of acceptable quality water for sustaining livelihoods, human well-being, and socioeconomic development, for ensuring protection against water-borne pollution and water-related disasters, and for preserving ecosystems in a climate of peace and political stability.”

In the United States, we come across water insecurity in a myriad of different forms in every type of community. The Water Insecurity Correction Coalition (WICC), a nonprofit volunteer organization, identifies three categories of water insecurity found in the United States: contamination and pollution-induced water insecurity, weather and climate-induced water insecurity, and systemic and infrastructural water insecurity.

Contamination and pollution-induced water insecurity

According to a report by the Environmental Working Group, over 1,000 communities in the U.S. have drinking water that is contaminated with toxic chemicals from industrial facilities, agriculture and other sources. Consistent lack of regulation and oversight of industrial water usage has allowed U.S. companies to contaminate water sources without penalty, and has failed to stop the contamination.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) identifies a number of different contaminants that endanger our water supplies, from microorganisms to compounds and chemicals. Waterways, aquifers and other sources of household water across the United States are contaminated, causing health problems and destroying the livelihoods of surrounding communities at risk.

Contaminants such as per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (a.k.a. PFAS), which are manufactured and used in waterproofed garments, dental floss, kitchen ware and many other plastic products, linger in waterways indefinitely and cause a variety of long-term health effects for humans and

wildlife. PFAS has gone unregulated by the government for over two decades, allowing corporations that produce it to dispose of the chemical and its production byproduct waste directly into water supplies or to seep into water sources indirectly. Waterkeeper Alliance analyzed 114 waterways in 34 states and found that 83% of them contained PFAS contaminants, affecting cities like New York, Chicago, Harrisburg, small rural towns like Hoosick Falls, New York and Damascus, Georgia near the Conasauga River, without adequate remediation from the government. This problem is widespread, as the government agencies have ignored the PFAS threat for over 20 years.

The current lack of oversight and regulation puts the health and safety of thousands of communities and ecosystems across the nation at risk. Once the contamination has occurred and is detected, cleanup processes and treatment to remove PFAS contamination is costly, and if done at all, is paid for by the taxpayers, not the corporations who profited from its use.

Other toxins like arsenic, lead, mercury, and uranium plague our waters. As of October 2017, a study from the U.S. Geological Survey estimated that 2.1 million people throughout the U.S. may be drinking domestic well water containing harmful levels of arsenic. The Environmental Working Group examined 50,000 public water utilities and found that nearly 280 harmful chemicals contaminate water supplies across the 50 states.

An estimated 9 million Americans get their drinking water from lead pipes, causing lead poisoning among entire populations such as Flint, Michigan and Newark, New Jersey. As tests have been done by schools, daycare centers and other institutions, lead is being found in countless cities nationwide. Nearly a decade after lead was first discovered in their water, the residents of Flint still use jugs of bottled water for drinking and cooking. Due to the government's failure to inform residents of the availability of free water filters in Flint, many residents use dirty ineffective filters because they cannot afford to purchase new ones.

Farm workers and agricultural communities in the U.S. are the most vulnerable to water contamination. Pesticides, petroleum-based fertilizers and other agricultural chemicals seep into the groundwater and cause harm to those that drink this untreated water from wells and local water districts. A community-based volunteer organization investigated a state-run migrant worker camp in California's Central Valley and found that pesticides had seeped into the water surrounding a farm and contaminated the drinking water supplies of the worker housing units in Yuba City.

In Kern County, California the water is further contaminated from wastewater seepage from oil drilling and hydraulic fracturing operations. Oil and gas operators use and contaminate hundreds of millions of gallons of freshwater for drilling operations annually. Some corporations have routinely injected oil wastewater directly into aquifers.

In the Appalachian region, mountain-top removal mining has led to sludge-contamination of drinking water that is affecting the people in the coal mining community of Martin County, Kentucky. Residents of Oahu, Hawaii near the U.S. navy base endured 30,000 gallons' worth of jet fuel spills into their water supplies in 2021 alone.

The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that 81 oil refineries, 609 organic and inorganic chemical manufacturing plants, 120 plastic molding and forming facilities, 59 fertilizer manufacturing plants, 56 nonferrous metal manufacturing plants and 31 pesticide manufacturing

plants discharge waste into U.S. waterways without any consequences.

Pollution control guidelines for these industries have not been updated by the EPA since the late 1900s, over 40 years ago. This has allowed industries to pollute our waterways for decades, without having to keep pace with advances in water control technologies. Many environmental organizations have worked together to file a lawsuit against the EPA's decision on January 31, 2023 not to update these outdated water control technology standards.

Weather and climate-induced water insecurity

The drought affecting the American West has been impacting residents, businesses, and industrial entities for over two decades. The water supply from the Colorado River has been decreasing at alarming rates, putting five states at risk of losing their main water source. Lake Mead, a man-made reservoir that is fed by the Colorado River, was experiencing historically low water levels, threatening the Hoover Dam's hydroelectric energy production prior to the atmospheric rivers that increased the snow pack in early 2023.

Droughts are exacerbated by increasing population and housing developments in areas that are desert terrain and require water to be pumped in from other areas. The agricultural industry uses a large majority of the water allocated to the West, growing crops that reap the biggest profits and use the most amount of water, but are not affordable food staples required for nutritious diets. These include alfalfa (used as cattle feed), almonds (largely for export) and cotton (which could be replaced with hemp, a crop that uses far less water to grow and process and can be used for everything cotton is used for).

Further, over 17% of fresh water that flows through California's water pipes is lost due to leaks that go unrepaired. While state and municipal governments in areas of the U.S. affected by drought, heat waves and other disasters call on individual households to conserve more water, use less and pay more, no effective adequate work is being carried out to stop the systemic misuse and mismanagement of our water sources across the country by industry and government.

The existing water infrastructure in many areas is not capable of withstanding the extreme changes in weather conditions that are now the norm. This was seen in February 2021 when an unprecedented winter storm reached a large part of the country, including Texas, and caused uninsulated water pipes to freeze, water treatment plants to fail and a simultaneous power outage, plunging tens of thousands of Texans into life-threatening disaster.

Access to affordable water and water-related infrastructure

Food and Water Watch estimates that in a typical year, 15 million people in the U.S. experience a water shutoff for nonpayment due to unaffordable household water utility bills.

Adequate supply of clean drinking water is inaccessible to many minority communities in the U.S. 30% of the members of the Navajo Nation in New Mexico and Arizona don't have access to running water, in many cases due to contamination of water supplies from past uranium and other mining, forcing them to seek it from distant non-potable sources at considerable cost, effort and damage to health to be used only for non-drinking purposes such as washing. The cost of hauling water is at least 70 times more expensive than piped water. The Navajo Nation has a diabetes crisis because sugary drinks are more readily available and cheaper than potable water. While the average American uses 80-100 gallons of water per day for household needs, Navajo Nation members use

about seven due to lack of access. The resulting difficulty in maintaining hand hygiene contributed to a COVID-19 death rate higher in the Navajo Nation than in many other parts of the United States.

Water privatization – the process of transferring ownership of public water services from the government to private companies – results in higher water bills and reduced access to clean water for low-income communities. Major beverage and water bottling corporations, such as Nestlé in the Sacramento, California area, are allowed to buy and monopolize fresh water resources at very little cost to them. They sell it to the public in plastic bottles for large profits as communities become more water insecure.

Many U.S. cities and towns have aging water infrastructure that is in desperate need of repair and replacement. The lack of investment in infrastructure has resulted in frequent water main breaks and leaks, leading to disruptions in water service, increased water bills, soil erosion and public health risks. In 2010, a major water main break in Massachusetts affected the water supply for about two million residents in 30 communities, increasing the risk of waterborne diseases.

The agricultural, energy and manufacturing industries also contribute to water insecurity while they reap large profits. Large agribusiness, oil and gas operators, and semi-conductor chip manufacturers are among those that use massive, unsustainable amounts of water, permitted by ineffective regulations that put private corporate profits over people and the environment. For instance, agriculture accounts for 80% of the water diverted for its use in California. However, most of these crops are not sustainable in California's or the nation's current water scenario.

Water management and rights systems that give deference to corporations have allowed billions of gallons of California's water to be used in water-intensive products like almonds, alfalfa and dairy. Arid California produces 82% of the world's water-thirsty almonds. Alfalfa is a water intensive crop used as cattle feedstock, necessitating an estimated total of 945 billion gallons a year to irrigate all of California's alfalfa acreage. Dairy farms consume enormous amounts of water to irrigate crops that absorb animal waste, water cows, flush manure from barns and run milking equipment. Mega-dairy waste disposal also threatens to contaminate scarce groundwater resources.

“Data farms” such as those created by Intel in northern Oregon, use millions of gallons of fresh drinking water and more electricity than entire cities while receiving millions of dollars in government tax breaks. Despite an historic drought impacting the entire western U.S., both local and state policies in Oregon give tax breaks to attract more data centers. Google's data centers in The Dalles, Oregon have made headlines for paying zero taxes for 15 years and recently coerced the city to spend \$30 million to expand the corporation's data centers' water supply. There are 15 data centers in the town of Hillsboro, Oregon alone. Local residents are organizing to demand their government stop water shutoffs and forgive current water and sewer debts for residents with incomes below 200% of the federal poverty guidelines; they also call for government to conduct a full investigation and report to the public on all water and electricity used by these “data farms” that siphon off resources needed by residents and small business owners in their community.

Solutions

- The U.S. government has committed to achieving Goal 6 by 2030 and must do so consistent with the needs of those most affected by the lack of clean water, including all low-income and indigenous communities. Any plan must include:

- End hydraulic fracturing (“fracking”) to reduce and eliminate the country’s reliance on fossil fuels, while investing in clean energy to eliminate massive use and poisoning of water sources.
- Cancel free and unlimited corporate usage of fresh water sources and enforce regulations for restoration and treatment of all used water.
- Make the oil companies pay to clean up and close the 1,000s of abandoned oil wells leaking toxins into the water systems throughout California, Texas, Louisiana and elsewhere and oversee the cleanup on a timeline.
- Invest in the maintenance and replacement of aging water infrastructure, without raising fees for water service to households.
- Prioritize state support to disadvantaged communities experiencing water shortages and the interests of indigenous communities as determined by indigenous communities.
- Ban the entry of PFAS (forever chemicals) into any water supply.
- Carry out research based on source reduction approaches for chemicals polluting our waterways and implementing them.
- Ban the use of and replace existing lead pipes in all cities, towns and school districts that are used for water transportation; and providing residents with lead pipe water filters immediately in the meantime, to reduce lead exposure while pipe replacement is done, and implementing an alternative water treatment that prevents corrosion in the long-term.
- Keep U.S. industries and corporations accountable to water usage standards to eliminate unnecessary water usage and waste.
- Enforce policies on effective water usage and management based on scientific research and solutions.
- Plan water infrastructure that is able to withstand and prepare for the effects of climate change, and develop public programs that support residents in communities facing adverse water conditions due to extreme weather events.

Goal 7 Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

Targets: 7.1 By 2030, ensure universal access to affordable, reliable and modern energy services

7.2 By 2030, increase substantially the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix

7.3 By 2030, double the global rate of improvement in energy efficiency

7.a By 2030, enhance international cooperation to facilitate access to clean energy research and technology, including renewable energy, energy efficiency and advanced and cleaner fossil-fuel technology, and promote investment in energy infrastructure and clean energy technology

7.b By 2030, expand infrastructure and upgrade technology for supplying modern and sustainable energy services for all in developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States, and land-locked developing countries, in accordance with their respective programmes of support

Problems

Affordability and access

Low-income households pay a higher portion of their income on energy costs than high-income households and have to choose between keeping their lights, air conditioners or heat on and having enough food.

American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy estimates that 24% of households nationwide face a high-energy cost burden, which is generally defined as paying more than 6% of one's income on energy costs. In 2022, electricity and gas disconnections jumped compared to the prior year, led by fossil fuel price volatility, hurting households of color in particular. Utilities in Illinois, Pennsylvania, Georgia, Michigan, Ohio and Missouri were responsible for about two-thirds of the more than 1.5 million 2022 shutoffs documented nationwide. Twenty other states do not require utilities to report any information on household disconnections. Utility companies have disconnected U.S. households from their energy utility service 5.7 million times since 2020 as of January 2023, according to Center for Biological Diversity, while at the same time paying billions to their shareholders and top executives.

During the 2020-2022 height of the COVID-19 pandemic, numerous community-based organizations across the country mobilized volunteers to carry out campaigns to stop shutoffs and lower the prices. Increasing instances of heat waves, freezes and floods throughout the year demonstrate how climate-fueled extreme weather drives up demand for electricity and worsens the threat of utility disconnections.

GRID Alternatives, a nonprofit founded in 2001 on the principle that free, clean electricity from the sun should be available to everyone, has developed a model to make solar photovoltaic technology practical and accessible for low-income communities, while providing pathways to clean energy jobs. Renewable energy can drive economic growth and environmental benefits in communities most impacted by underemployment, pollution and climate change. This is a completely doable task, and the government can take as an example the work of GRID Alternatives who, since 2004, has installed solar for 28,586 households and engaged 47,086 people in solar education and training. Solar can help environmentally burdened communities and saves families money, which they can use on food or health care.

Solar can stabilize and reduce energy costs for the long-term, but historically, access to solar energy has been more challenging for low- and moderate-income households due to lack of home ownership and limited or poor credit history. Having household solar installed can bring great savings on energy costs, resilience against natural disasters, health improvements and more, but it requires the initial outlay of tens of thousands of dollars in financial investment.

There are other renewable forms of energy as well, such as wind, wave, hydroelectric and geothermal energy-generating solutions that do not need to be expensive to customers and burn no fossil carbon-emitting fuel.

Appalachian Voices, founded in 1997 to bring people together to protect the land, air and water of Central and Southern Appalachia and advance a just transition to a generative and equitable clean energy economy, reports that even with an increase in renewable energy technologies, residents and businesses of North Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia have very little choice in their energy provider, nor in how that energy is being produced. Monopoly utility control forces residents to rely on non-renewable energy resources due to a lack of access to clean, affordable alternatives.

Duke Energy in North Carolina and Dominion Energy in Virginia have monopolized electricity in the region, and although Duke and Dominion are privately owned, state laws ensure they make a profit. These industries are allowed to raise rates on energy bills without proving need or justification. In Tennessee, where the government-owned Tennessee Valley Authority controls energy in that state, local municipalities are frequently coerced into avoiding other energy source options.

Impact on human health

Low-income communities and people of color experience greater exposure to pollution from fossil fuel energy sources, such as refineries, drilling wells and furnaces, than do other communities. They are more likely to suffer health and climate impacts associated with environmental pollution.

For more than a century, communities throughout the Appalachian Mountains region of the U.S. have powered the growth of America's industrial might with its coal industry — but as a result the region has suffered from polluted water and air, ruined lands, poor human health and poverty. Appalachian Voices reports that the mining of coal continues to have devastating impacts on human health, evidenced by the recent rise in black lung cases, despite a decrease in coal mining.

Black lung disease, being found in miners as young as 30, can definitely be linked to silica exposure. A 2021 study reiterates these findings when they compared the amount of silica found in lung samples taken from miners born between 1910 and 1930 to samples from miners born after 1930. The study found a significantly higher proportion of silica in the lungs of those born after 1930. Miners inhale this silica when around cut sandstone. The U.S. Department of Labor's Mine Safety and Health Administration's current safety standards allow miners to be exposed to as much as 100 micrograms of silica dust per cubic meter of air, but the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health and the Department of Labor's Office of Inspector General both recommend a limit of no more than 50 micrograms per cubic meter in an eight-hour day, which is the current legal level of exposure in all other industries.

Further reduction and elimination of the use of coal in energy generation, and investment of more funds in the safety equipment and health care available to the miners, is needed to avert more preventable severe respiratory injuries and deaths.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) warns that diesel engine emissions at U.S. ports continue to expose millions of people in nearby communities, whose residents tend to be mostly people of color, to health risks from particulate matter, nitrogen oxides, ozone and other toxins. In addition, the climate is adversely impacted by carbon dioxide emissions and nano-scale airborne particles called black carbon.

According to the U.S. Energy Information Agency, wave energy alone could have provided more than 64% of all utility-scale electricity that the country generated in 2021. Wave energy converters are mechanical devices that use the natural motion of waves to generate electricity. This technology has attracted considerable interest over the years due to its enormous potential, especially along the West Coast of the U.S.

Clean power portfolios that include a mix of renewables, storage and energy efficiency would create 20 to 30 times more long-term jobs than maintaining the fossil fuel systems, yet government at all levels continues to allow the fossil fuel industry, not the scientists, to determine how quickly the transformation is made.

Solutions

- Government officials at all levels must take bold leadership action to put a stop to the fossil fuel industry's blocking of a more rapid transition to renewable clean energy infrastructure, including their efforts to end government subsidies and financial incentives for homeowners and property owners to install solar energy. This relates to Goal 16.5 and the necessity to end the ability of big industry lobbyists to dictate our country's energy policies.
- Clean energy policies must incorporate robust workforce requirements that provide paid job training and direct pathways to employment in clean energy for local workers with living wages. Training programs should target and be appropriately structured to address barriers for disadvantaged communities, formerly incarcerated people, women, veterans and people of color.
- The U.S. must fulfill its obligations to developing nations around the world who are suffering the most from the climate change caused by 150 years of U.S. burning fossil fuels, by sharing the technologies and resources needed for them to develop their energy infrastructure for clean renewables.
- Clean energy policies should seek to maximize benefits, most importantly home utility bill savings for participating households, and not permit incentives for predatory lending or exploitation of communities for financial gain. Organizations such as GRID Alternative must have a voice in the development of robust consumer protection measures, disclosures, and accountability measures that protect vulnerable customers and this needs to be supported across the country.
- Low-income customers should be prioritized in accessing the financial benefits of programs making solar installation available, as well as job opportunities in the growing clean energy workforce.
- Government at all levels must prioritize funding to take stock of and replace sources of harmful emissions in all communities across the country with community-powered clean energy solutions located in or in proximity to residential areas.

Goal 8 Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

The overall promise of the 2030 SDGs is to “Leave No One Behind,” and Goal 8 pledges to carry out policies that will meet these targets:

8.1 Sustain per capita economic growth in accordance with national circumstances

8.3 Promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalization and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial services

8.4 Improve progressively, through 2030, global resource efficiency in consumption and production and endeavour to decouple economic growth from environmental degradation, in accordance with the 10-year framework of programmes on sustainable consumption and production, with developed countries taking the lead

8.5 By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men

8.6 By 2020, substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value

8.7 Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms

8.8 Protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment

Problems

The predominant financial and economic policies in the U.S. that affect all the above targets are taking us in the opposite direction and leaving many people behind.

Job loss during COVID-19 pandemic

According to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 9.6 million jobs were lost in the U.S. during the COVID-19 pandemic between May 2020 and September 2022. In 2023, employment in the U.S. is expected to increase by 1.3 million, meaning only 14% of jobs lost during the pandemic would be recovered by end of 2023.

The new jobs being created are largely in what is now called “the gig economy.” Based on U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics numbers, 36% of U.S. workers could be classified as freelancers or independent contractors, and more than half of the workforce is expected to be part of this so-called gig economy by 2027.

94% of all new jobs created in the last decade were contract-based or freelance where workers labor

longer for less pay, often under dangerous conditions and without health, pension and other benefits that salaried workers, particularly those with unions, have been able to count on in the past.

Living wage jobs are scarce

In Morro Bay, a town on the Central Coast of California known as an idyllic destination spot to explore miles of beautiful sandy beaches, a national estuary, numerous land adventures and excursions in the bay or on the Pacific Ocean, and considered to be a quiet beautiful place to retire, also has the highest number of people living in poverty in San Luis Obispo County. This is because the workers who make the economy run in Morro Bay, individuals primarily from Mexico and Central America, are the service workers in motels, hotels and restaurants often who must hold two or three part-time jobs, while receiving minimum wage or below.

Most live outside or on the outskirts of the town itself, out of sight of both tourists and residents. Often the same people who do this low-paid service work also have jobs as farm workers during growing, harvest or pruning seasons at farms and ranches in outlying rural areas in the surrounding area. Lack of access to social services and labor protections are suffered by both the undocumented and documented workers employed in these jobs. Extremely high housing costs, lack of rent control, minimum wage jobs being the only type of ready employment, and in recent years, a tremendous rise in homelessness, as well as an influx of transient homeless, continue to plague this area. This story could be told thousands of times over about small cities, towns and counties throughout the U.S.

Yes We Can Peacebuilders, a local Morro Bay volunteer organization, blames this poverty on the prioritization of federal government funding of trillions of dollars to the military and for nuclear weapons, with the least amount going to the development of living wage jobs for all and adequate social services for those in need.

Small businesses struggle to survive

Small businesses have 500 or less employees per the definition of the Small Business Administration. They form the backbone of the U.S. economy, as, according to Forbes, small businesses in the U.S. employ 61.7 million workers or 46.4% of all U.S. employees – nearly half. It is the subset of micro-businesses (firms with 1-9 employees) that are the most common type of employer in communities nationwide, and yet they are burdened with such high levels of taxation and low levels of access to financial services that their ability to survive is constantly threatened.

According to the owners of several small businesses in Los Angeles, who are also active in helping their surrounding community, it is almost impossible for micro- or small businesses with even 25 employees to get access to financial resources like loans from banks and tax credits, in contrast with large businesses with hundreds of employees.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, micro-businesses struggled to get the federal PPP loans intended for small businesses to enable them to keep their employees on the payroll, because the large banks would not assist them or process their applications. To get a regular commercial bank business loan, small businesses often must file a Uniform Commercial Code (UCC) indicating assets well over three times the loan amount being requested, and it has taken almost two years for some small businesses to receive their loans.

These small businesses are also taxed to death while large corporations get away with paying no taxes. For example, a small business in California must pay payroll taxes on each employee as well

as on the company's profit; each employee also pays income tax on the salary received. The business also pays state and city sales taxes, property taxes on their building, if they own one, and on assets like furniture and equipment, and there is a 40% tax on any bonuses given to employees at the end of the year. Penalties on missing the payroll tax by even a day can incur a fee of 20% for these businesses.

A small business making a million dollars in profit on paper ends up with barely anything after taxes and payroll. Owners often have to work seven days a week to keep their businesses afloat. Since there is no proper distinction between micro- and small businesses by the Small Business Administration or IRS, companies with 2 to 25 employees pay amounts in taxes disproportionate to their size while, in contrast, big corporations in the U.S. that make billions of dollars in profits often receive tax breaks from the government, or hire accountants to find deductions so they pay no taxes at all. Some large corporations offshore their assets and profits, enabling them to bypass state and federal taxes altogether in the U.S.

More than one in three small businesses from 2020 to 2023 did not survive through the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020 alone, 29.7% of small businesses closed according to the Small Business & Entrepreneurship Council. This has deteriorated and is continuing to erode the backbone of our economy.

Access to credit and capital and financial services

Credit unions are the best and often the only source for low-income working people and small business owners to gain access to credit and financial services. Inclusiv, the only national network of community development credit unions, represents 470 credit unions serving more than 18 million people in predominantly low-income urban, rural, and reservation-based communities across 47 states, Washington DC and Puerto Rico.

Inclusiv (formerly the National Federation of Community Development Credit Unions) has been striving to promote financial inclusion and equity since 1974. More than 46% of its member credit unions are governed by and predominantly serving people of color, 75% of its members are designated as low-income and nearly 60% are also Community Development Financial Institutions Fund (CDFI) certified. Inclusiv channels capital to build capacity for credit unions who dedicate themselves to providing low-income and underserved consumers with fair and responsible financial products and services. But not everyone has these credit unions in their community and must still rely on private banks.

Inclusiv reports that while there have been many initiatives in the banking industry to address inequality and development in under-resourced areas, the current rules of the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) (passed in 1977) fail to confront the deep and pervasive racial discrimination in our financial system that the CRA was intended to address. Inclusiv has been calling for the rules to be strengthened by focusing on racial justice, holding banks accountable for discriminatory business practices in communities of color, and creating strong incentives for banks to increase their investment in responsible and locally-responsive financial institutions.

Inclusiv advocates for black, indigenous and people of color (BIPOC)-led community development credit unions and community development financial institutions. Any council, committee or body that is formed at state or federal level to develop strategy for achieving Goal 8 must ensure that leadership from these community development credit unions are included at the table.

Diminished union representation and power

In order to “protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for workers,” workers need to be organized and have representation. As a result of the plethora of laws and regulations passed and imposed in the U.S. at both state and federal levels since the mid 1930s that redefined what labor unions are and how they could and could not operate, the number of American workers in unions has continued to decline. At this time, only 10.3% of U.S. workers including city, state and federal workers have union representation, with that number falling in every industry and occupation despite increased labor activism. Private sector union membership which stood at 35% in the 1950s has dwindled to a mere 6%.

U.S. labor law puts an enormous barrier in the way of workers joining or establishing a union. These laws also make it relatively easy for employers to short-circuit organizing efforts, even when some of their tactics are technically illegal. Companies are given wide latitude to thwart unionizing with minimal legal sanctions. Union organizers are forced to strategize and organize outside their workplace and figure out how to convince coworkers to join the fight without getting penalized or fired.

The obstacles to forming a union have only grown in recent decades. Twenty-seven states have passed so-called “Right to Work” laws, which make forming a union more difficult and provide a refuge for companies looking to escape unions. Corporations spend millions on highly-paid consultants to develop tactics to suppress unionizing efforts and pressure their workers into submission. Even once workers form a union, it now takes an average of 465 days for the union to sign a contract with their employer. Real wages in the U.S. have been declining each year since the 1960s.

Youth

In 2020, 4,830,700 young people in the U.S. between the ages of 16-24, or 12.6%, were neither in work nor in school, and that figure got worse as the COVID-19 pandemic continued for three years.

Rise in child labor

Federal laws providing minimum protections for child labor were enacted nearly a century ago, leading many to assume that a child working in grueling and/or dangerous jobs was a thing of the past of the U.S. In fact, violations of child labor laws are on the rise, as are attempts by state lawmakers to weaken the standards that protect children in the workplace.

Notably, migrant children who have been coming into the United States without their parents in record numbers are ending up in some of the most punishing jobs in the country, as a The New York Times investigation recently reported. These are not children who have crossed into the country undetected; the federal government knows they are in the U.S., and the Department of Health and Human Services is responsible for ensuring sponsors will support them and protect them from trafficking or exploitation. While many migrant children are sent to the U.S. by their parents, others are persuaded to come by adults who plan to profit from their labor. Sponsors are required to send migrant children to school, but then many of these students juggle classes and heavy workloads, including night shifts at factories using hazardous equipment.

Other children arrive to find that they have been misled by their sponsors and will not be enrolled in school. The Labor Department is responsible for finding and punishing child labor violations, but inspectors in a dozen states say their understaffed offices could barely respond to complaints, much

less open original investigations.

At the same time these human rights violations are being exposed, bills that weaken child labor standards have been introduced or passed in ten states in the past two years alone. Iowa's proposed bill has generated national headlines for being particularly extreme, as it proposes lifting restrictions on hazardous work to allow children as young as 14 to work in meat coolers and industrial laundries, teens as young as 15 to work on assembly lines, and 16- and 17-year-olds to serve alcohol, among a long list of changes.

Solutions

- The labor laws that over-regulated and criminalized the natural power of organized labor should be repealed.
- Mandate living wages, for all who can work, at 47½% of the output dollar or enough to support a family of four in relation to the actual cost of living. Make this a paramount priority for state and federal governments by 2030.
- Make a clear distinction between micro- and small businesses, allowing them to pay taxes in proportion to the size of the business and number of employees, enabling them to provide living wages to their employees and continue to grow as a business.
- Reduce payroll taxes for micro- and small businesses, as businesses and employees are already paying a significant portion of their income as income tax, out of proportion with large companies and corporations.
- Make access to financial institutions and loans easier for small businesses.
- Provide tax credits to small and micro-businesses for development and growth.
- Make big corporations pay a higher percentage in taxes than small and micro- businesses.
- Provide more support for Community Development Credit Unions to advance equitable economic growth in low-income and working class communities.
- States to create state-level Community Development Financial Institutions Fund (CDFI) funds and provide robust funding for the CDFI Fund.
- Remove regulatory barriers to small and Minority Depository Institution credit union growth and sustainability.
- Federal agencies should support access to the secondary market and guarantee programs for credit unions that are working to close the racial wealth gap.
- Address inequities in the financial system and stop predatory lending.

- Federal banking regulators should issue a strong racial equity-focused Community Reinvestment Act rule to hold banks accountable for discriminatory practices.
- Federal banking regulators must ensure that nationally chartered banks do not use their charters to facilitate predatory Fintech, making loans in states where their products would otherwise be illegal.
- Cities and states should support the creation of public banks.
- Carry out Goal 1, 2 and 4 so that youth are in school and can find decent meaningful work that utilizes their education.

Goal 9 Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation

We will focus on how important three of the five targets within Goal 9 are in the U.S.:

9.1 Develop quality, reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructure, including regional and transborder infrastructure, to support economic development and human well-being, with a focus on affordable and equitable access for all

9.2 Promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and, by 2030, significantly raise industry's share of employment and gross domestic product, in line with national circumstances, and double its share in least developed countries

9.4 By 2030, upgrade infrastructure and retrofit industries to make them sustainable, with increased resource-use efficiency and greater adoption of clean and environmentally sound technologies and industrial processes, with all countries taking action in accordance with their respective capabilities

Problems

Lowndes County, Alabama recently made headlines with the story about sewage waste seeping into people's homes. More than 70% of the Lowndes County population is African American and over 28% of residents live in poverty. The clay-like soil found in this part of the country makes the area unsuitable for water drainage; most homes in Lowndes are not hooked up to municipal sewer lines, relying instead on costly septic systems. This lack of adequate sewage infrastructure makes a breeding ground for hookworm. During heavy rain and floods, the rising groundwater can overwhelm the septic system, allowing raw sewage, including fecal waste, to go up to the surface of people's backyards or back up into their bathtubs, toilets or kitchen sinks; that is what happened in the spring of 2023.

However, Lowndes County, Alabama is not the only rural location in the U.S. experiencing serious sanitation conditions. About 46.2 million people, or 15% of the U.S. population, reside in rural counties, spread across 72% of the nation's land area. Many of these communities are under-resourced and have severe contamination problems. They face compounding air, water, and soil contamination from additional polluting sources such as agriculture, transportation and

manufacturing that have largely gone unabated.

As the effects of climate change continue to become more extreme and populations move inland to rural areas away from the coasts with rising sea levels and harsher hurricanes, rural counties across the U.S. that suffer limited or no investment in suitable onsite wastewater technologies are going to be in even bigger trouble. The absence of modern and effective infrastructure that can add protection from breakdowns of basic utilities and curb contamination go unfunded in such working-class areas.

In 2021, the American Society of Civil Engineers (USACE) gave the U.S. a C-minus for the state of infrastructure across the nation. They reported:

- There is a water main break every two minutes and an estimated 6 billion gallons of treated water lost each day in the U.S., enough to fill over 9,000 swimming pools, even though 12,000 miles (19,312 kilometers) of water pipes were being replaced each year.
- Growing wear and tear on our nation's roads has left 43% of our public roadways in poor or mediocre condition, a number that has remained stagnant over the past several years. The surface transportation investment gap is the largest deficit in the categories of infrastructure examined by the American Society of Civil Engineers. Continuing to defer maintenance and modernization is impacting our ability to compete in a global marketplace and maintain a high quality of living domestically.
- There are 30,000 miles of inventoried levees across the U.S., and an additional 10,000 miles of levees whose location and condition are unknown.
- There are more than 617,000 bridges across the United States, with 42% of them at least 50 years old. 46,154 bridges, or 7.5%, are considered structurally deficient, in "poor" condition.
- At the current rate of investment, it will take until 2071 to make all of the repairs that are currently necessary, and the additional deterioration over the next 50 years would become overwhelming if the U.S. does not take concerted action to curtail it. The nation needs a systematic program for bridge preservation like that embraced by some states, whereby existing deterioration is prioritized and the focus is on preventive maintenance.
- Over the last 20 years, the number of high-hazard-potential dams has more than doubled as development steadily encroaches on once-rural dams and reservoirs.
- When the coronavirus pandemic forced millions of Americans to stay home in 2020 and 2021, an estimated one in five school-aged children lacked the high-speed internet connection needed to access lessons and other materials, due to lack of the necessary infrastructure in their area.
- The nation's levees are, on average, 50 years old. The USACE estimates that \$21 billion is needed to improve and maintain the moderate- to high-risk levees in its portfolio, which represents only about 15% of the known levees in the U.S. As more extreme weather events result in increased flooding, such as the \$20 billion in damages caused by flooding in the Midwest during the spring of 2019, the danger of failed levees increases.

- The electrical grids are dangerously vulnerable to bad weather, with 638 transmission outages over one recent four-year period.

- Public transit systems earned a D-minus, with nearly one in five transit vehicles and 6% of tracks, tunnels and other facilities in poor condition. 45% of Americans have no access to transit. Meanwhile, much of the existing system is aging, and transit agencies often lack sufficient funds to keep their existing systems in good working order. Over a ten-year period across the country, 19% of transit vehicles, and 6% of fixed guide way elements like tracks and tunnels, were rated in “poor” condition leading to trains derailing including those carrying dangerous chemicals poisoning air, land and water in nearby communities and endangering lives in the surrounding vicinity.

In February 2023, for example, residents of East Palestine, Ohio were engulfed in toxic fumes for weeks following a 38-car train wreck that unleashed its cargo of hazardous chemicals into the ground and atmosphere, causing immediate illnesses, interruption of local commerce and schools and plausible fears of the toxic chemicals’ long-term health impacts and loss of equity in their homes.

Surfrider Foundation reports that coastal water quality is threatened by storm-water, urban and agricultural runoff, as well as sewage and industrial discharges due to inadequate infrastructure. Nearly ten trillion gallons of untreated storm-water runoff flow into U.S. waterways every year, carrying a cocktail of pollutants such as road dust, oil, animal waste, fertilizers and other chemicals. Years of neglect have also left America’s wastewater infrastructure in disrepair, outdated and failing. Sewage spills and failing wastewater infrastructure threaten coastal water quality by discharging raw and undertreated sewage into local waterways and the ocean. In fact, sewage spills and infrastructure failures release over 900 billion gallons of untreated sewage into surface waters every year.

The growing threats from climate change on our coasts, including sea level rise and more frequent extreme weather events that generate massive amounts of storm-water, will likely result in even more water infrastructure failures in the future. Significant investments need to be made now to prepare our coastal communities to become more resilient and to better manage their water resources.

Solutions

- The government should identify and fully fund the repair or replacement of dangerous, life-threatening infrastructure including bridges, railways, dams, levees and roadways; design these projects to include living-wage, sustainable and safe employment with any training programs being for-pay labor.
- Improve land use planning across all levels of decision-making to strike a balance between the built and natural environments while meeting community needs, now and into the future.
- Enhance the resilience of various infrastructure sectors by including or enhancing natural or “green” infrastructure.
- Streamline the project permitting process across infrastructure sectors, while ensuring appropriate safety and environmental safeguards and protections are in place.

- Ensure all investments are spent wisely, prioritizing projects with critical benefits to the economy, public safety, environment, and quality of life and sustainability.
- Leverage proven and emerging tech to make use of limited available resources.
- Consider lifecycle costs when making project decisions. Lifecycle cost analysis determines the cost of building, operating and maintaining the infrastructure for its entire lifespan.
- Support research and development of innovative materials, technologies and processes to modernize and extend the life of infrastructure, expedite repairs or replacements and promote quality materials and living wages for labor.
- Promote sustainability and long-term economic, social and environmental benefits of a project in infrastructure decisions.
- Congress must fully fund the Highway Trust Fund, which finances most federal government spending for highways and mass transit.
- All parties should strive to close the rural/urban resource divide by ensuring adequate investment in underserved areas through programmatic advance planning and budgeting.
- Enable communities, regardless of size, to develop and institute their own resilience pathway for all their infrastructure portfolios by streamlining asset management, implementing lifecycle cost-analysis into routine planning processes, and integrating climate change projections into long-term goal-setting and capital improvement plans.

Goal 10 Reduce inequality within and among countries

Targets:

10.1 By 2030, progressively achieve and sustain income growth of the bottom 40 per cent of the population at a rate higher than the national average

10.2 By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status

10.3 Ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and action in this regard

10.4 Adopt policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies, and progressively achieve greater equality

10.5 Improve the regulation and monitoring of global financial markets and institutions and strengthen the implementation of such regulations¹

0.7 Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies

Problems

Income and wealth inequality within the U.S.

Over the past three decades, the U.S. has become the most unequal society of all the major developed countries, with an ever-widening gap between its wealthiest and the rest of the population. The 20 richest people in the U.S. have a combined wealth of \$1.6 trillion. The richest man on that list gained over \$69 billion in 2022 alone, which exceeds the combined income of two million home health aides in the U.S. who do back-breaking work caring for the infirm and cannot sustain their own health due to lack of health care benefits and low pay.

Families that have zero or even “negative wealth” (meaning the value of their debts exceeds the value of their assets) live paycheck to paycheck and are just one minor economic setback away from tragedy. Institute for Policy Studies reports that an estimated 28% of black households and 26% of Latino households had zero or negative wealth in 2019, twice the level of whites.

Americans who are not among the ultra-rich get the vast majority of their income from wages and salaries that are insufficient to live a decent life. Household debt is going up because people can’t get by on what they earn, so they are borrowing to get the things they need. Home mortgages, student loans and health care bills are the greatest sources of debt in the U.S. Additionally, increasing unemployment guarantees that some workers are always desperate and therefore willing to work for lower wages out of necessity, bringing levels down for everyone.

The top one percent economically has seen their net worth increase exponentially and holds more than half the total personal wealth of the nation invested in stocks and mutual funds. Meanwhile those on the bottom have dipped into “negative wealth.”

In the United States, wealth inequality is even higher than the vast inequality in income. Wealth is “net worth” or the sum total of one’s assets minus liabilities. Assets can include everything from an owned personal residence and cash in savings accounts to investments in stocks and bonds, real estate and retirement accounts. Liabilities cover what a household owes: a car loan, credit card balance, student loan, mortgage or any bill yet to be paid.

The 2008 financial crisis had a devastating effect on the wealth of the entire bottom 90% of people in the U.S. The biggest hit was to their assets, which included everything from an owned personal residence and cash in savings accounts to investments in stocks and bonds. This has made it difficult for many people to build wealth or even maintain what they had accrued over decades of their life’s labor.

As ordinary working people around the world suffered from the health and economic impacts of the mishandling of the pandemic by the developed nations, the fortunes of billionaires grew exponentially. According to Institute for Policy Studies, the combined wealth of all U.S. billionaires increased by \$2.071 trillion (70.3%) between March 18, 2020 and October 15, 2021, from approximately \$2.947 trillion to \$5.019 trillion, while millions lost their jobs, incomes and homes entirely.

With inflation now at a 40-year high, the U.S. Congress has decided that we need more unemployment and lower wages in order to “cool down the economy” and create a depression, placing the burden on working people. The logic of this policy is never discussed in the media, as it makes no sense since it is not high wages that caused inflation. Corporate profits over the last year are responsible for 54% of the price increases we are paying, while only 7.9% of inflation can be attributed to the cost of labor.

While the cost of food has gone up from 13% to 16%, the profits of the largest food companies such as Cargill, Nestlé and General Mills went up 50%. Heating fuel and gasoline costs for most people in the U.S. went up by 25% and in some cases tripled. The largest oil companies emerged from 2022 with record profits. The total profits from nine of the largest energy companies approached US \$100 billion for the first three months of 2023, and annual profits for 2022 from the same firms totaled \$457 billion. The top western oil companies paid out a record \$110 billion in dividends and share repurchases to their investors in 2022, while the majority of the people who own no stock went into debt to keep their heat on and gas in their cars just to go to work, or to drop off and pick up their children at school.

The billionaire class continues to multiply its wealth based on speculative operations and being granted favorable tax policies by the government to do so. The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that 34% of large, profitable corporations pay zero in federal income taxes. When corporations do not pay federal income tax, the burden of taxation falls on the rest of the population, while we are also told “there is no money” for schools, health care and affordable housing.

These financial and other trade policies that create inequality at home have also spawned great inequality of wealth and income between the U.S. and the people of developing nations. There exists a rapidly progressing international movement towards a multi-polar world seeking more mutually beneficial international relations and less dependence on the U.S. dollar and the financial institutions controlled by the U.S. If there is any work going on to achieve Target 10.5, “Improve the regulation and monitoring of global financial markets and institutions and strengthen the implementation of such regulations,” it is not known, visible or accessible to the general public within the U.S.

“Empower and promote....inclusion”

The suppression of the history and culture of those the country considers “minorities” goes hand in hand with wealth inequality. The work being done by leaders of Akwesasne Nation in upstate New York in building the Akwesasne Freedom School is a demonstration of how to successfully “empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion...” and reverse the decades of exclusion and impoverishment of Native Americans in this land that was once theirs alone.

The Native American Languages Act passed in 1990 states that “...it is the policy of the United States to preserve, protect, and promote the rights and freedom of Native Americans to use, practice, and develop Native American languages...” What the Mohawk Nation in Akwesasne is calling for is the full funding and implementation of that Act, to affirm the right of Native American children to express themselves, be educated, and assessed in their own Native language and promote the right of Native American students to be educated through the medium of Native American languages. But

they are not waiting.

“Our solution has been to form our own school, the Akwesasne Freedom School, which is an independent elementary school that provides a total Mohawk immersion curriculum up to the 11th year when they transfer to public schools, excel in their studies with self confidence and graduate with honors. We founded the Akwesasne Freedom School in 1979 after decades of Mohawk children being forcibly removed from their families and native lands to attend boarding schools run by priests where English was mandatory and Mohawk language forbidden, effectively putting up a barrier between the people and their culture, and breaking families. Family and home are the center of our community. It is essential for our language to be reinforced in the home. Pride in speaking our language is essential. Community support for our language in all phases of community life is critical to the well-being of all Akwesasronon and for the preservation of our culture and life ways. Our history and traditions are important to our identity. They are incorporated in our language which must be preserved, promoted, protected and revitalized.” More schools like this are needed.

Ending disparities for the disabled

People with intellectual and physical disabilities can flourish and thrive when they live in strong, nurturing, natural community settings, with ample support systems, have meaningful and well-compensated employment opportunities, public transportation, access to nutritional food and safe spaces, and affordable housing. When they are denied this, they become marginalized, treated unfairly at best and more often exploited.

Disability services bureaucracies tend to be underfunded and fragmented, and lack the latitude to create the community settings needed, thus allowing this population to be treated as unequal human beings without access to fulfilling their lives.

In the U.S., Social Security and Medicaid are the most significant funding streams available to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Long-term services and supports are intended to support individuals with disabilities across various life needs. Through Medicaid, the federal and state governments have promoted and encouraged a shift toward home and community-based services, away from institutionalization. Yet, their accompanying government regulations restrict autonomy and inhibit the development of strong community ties.

Regulatory roadblocks include highly-restrictive asset limits; a loss in benefits for married couples; being unable to receive services in the home if you are too near another beneficiary – such as would tend to occur within Camphill Communities; restrictions on where you can live or work based on physical and geographical characteristics of a service location rather than actual outcomes or quality of life; minimal training and benefits for direct care professionals, resulting in staff shortage, rapid turnover and instability for individuals in need of support; and an emphasis on the identification of “natural” – i.e., unpaid – supports to replace, rather than enhance, the funded disability support system. This human rights problem is rarely ever a topic of public discussion and awareness.

Camphill Communities, a worldwide social initiative that creates communities designed to include people with and without intellectual disabilities, have overcome barriers by providing support to individuals with disabilities and actively co-creating community farms and relationships. This focus on community participation, creation and integration of each individual within a healthful and supportive context is an integral part of their disability service provision. Camphill Communities is an international movement that recognizes that people with disabilities not only deserve to access their communities but can actively contribute to transforming and contributing to their communities.

Therefore, person-centered approaches must take the individual not in isolation but as a member of an interdependent community. Federal and state regulatory roadblocks present in Medicaid and Social Security regulations too often undermine disability service providers from investing time and resources into mutually beneficial community- and individual-building efforts.

Solutions

- Working people must build organizations and alliances with small businesses, professionals and others, and together demand transformation of the country's economic and financial policies and totally eliminate economic, social and political inequalities.
- Government at all levels, starting with local governments, must form Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Coordination Councils, and have representatives from all categories of work, all communities of people inclusive of Native Americans, as well as from the disabled community, on the council to assess and plan for achievement of Goal 10 and all the other Goals.
- To end the inequality for people with disabilities described above: a) Increase training standards, benefits and compensation for direct support workforce across the lifespan and invest heavily in correcting inequities within the workforce, b) Reorient Medicaid reimbursement systems towards outcomes and quality-based measurements to assess quality of life and the development of meaningful relationships, c) Support and fund community development and networking as a central activity of all disability service organizations and as a vocational practice of direct support professionals, d) Ease restrictive and hyper-individualized austerity policies that prevent people with disabilities from choosing where they want to live, whether they can marry, or whether they can earn a meaningful income without risking loss of services, e) Fund grants for community organizations to build concrete and active relationships between disability service organizations and other community groups.
- Fully implement the Native American Languages Act (1990), which affirms the right of Native American children to express themselves, be educated, and assessed in their own Native language and promotes the right of Native American students to be educated through the medium of Native American Languages.

Goal 11 Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Targets:

11.1 By 2030, ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums

11.2 By 2030, provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons

11.3 By 2030, enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries

11.4 Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage

11.5 By 2030, significantly reduce the number of deaths and the number of people affected and substantially decrease the direct economic losses relative to global gross domestic product caused by disasters, including water-related disasters, with a focus on protecting the poor and people in vulnerable situations

11.6 By 2030, reduce the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities, including by paying special attention to air quality and municipal and other waste management

11.7 By 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities

Problems

Homelessness on the rise

In the U.S. over 580,000 people are experiencing homelessness on any given night: over one half million people in this rich country have no housing to live in, as of the last published count in 2022 by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). HUD further reports an overrepresentation of blacks and indigenous people (including Native Americans and Pacific Islanders) among this population. 7% are veterans, i.e., 33,129 men and women who served in the military are homeless.

Union Station Homeless Services, located within the San Gabriel Valley of California, has focused on evidence-based models and best practices to serve the most vulnerable people in the U.S. who have nowhere else to turn. They report over 69,144 homeless people in Los Angeles County as of 2022, the largest urban population of people with no homes in the U.S.

According to the 2020 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count, 17% are physically disabled, 24% have substance abuse disorders and 22% suffer from serious mental illness. They all need medical care, social services and many just need a good-paying job. 40% to 55% are employed according to various reports, but even two full-time minimum wage jobs do not provide enough pay to rent an apartment. On average, a renter for a modest two-bedroom home, who is seeking to stay within the federally prescribed 30% of income window, needs to earn \$24.90 per hour, which is 3.4 times the federal minimum wage. These are very material problems with very material solutions, yet government continues to collude with the financial elite, serving the interests of less than one percent of the total population over the vast majority. The bold action required to bring about solutions must address this fundamental conflict of interest between the government and the people it is allegedly there to serve.

National Low Income Housing Coalition reports that between 2019 and 2021 the shortage of homes affordable and available to renters with extremely low incomes worsened by more than 500,000 units, increasing from a shortage of 6.8 million to 7.3 million, continuing a long-term trend of diminishing affordable housing.

It is not that there are insufficient housing structures, but rather a lack of affordability. At the end of 2021, almost 19% of rental units in Birmingham, Alabama sat vacant, as did 12% of those in Syracuse, New York. Yet rent in those areas increased by roughly 14% and 8%, respectively, over the previous two years. Rents have jumped even in cities with plenty of apartments to go around.

The United Way of the National Capital Area reported that in certain metropolitan areas, minimum-wage workers must work 80 or more hours per week and average-wage workers must work 50 or more hours per week to afford a humble, one-bedroom rental at fair market rent. In San Diego and Riverside, California, average wage workers have to work 55-plus hours per week to afford a one-bedroom rental. In Washington, DC, minimum-wage workers must work 78 hours per week on average to afford a modest, one-bedroom rental.

Along with the rise of COVID-19, there has been record-high inflation, significant job losses, and rising rent prices that have pushed more people into homelessness.

Corporate control of real estate is a large factor, but government could wield its power to take over property in the interest of public good. How is this situation not at the top of the country's agenda to apply the necessary resources and solve immediately? All the nonprofits in the country that provide services to people living on the street and in temporary shelters cannot solve the systemic problem causing the homelessness.

Many "make it green" projects are being undertaken by cities: installing more bike lanes, parks, rooftop gardens, more trees for shade in business areas and other innovations for more ecological balance in some areas in the name of sustainability. However, to prioritize those neighborhood betterment projects before solving the needs of the people with no homes, when both can be done, can hardly be called progress in sustainability. And the worst heat islands are in the poorest neighborhoods, whose residents are predominantly people of color.

More resources for mitigation and relief required

With both the frequency and intensity of global-warming induced disasters on the rise, there's an urgent need for a different approach to the way states and the federal government respond to better protect people's lives when they know a storm is coming. Responsible entities must ensure that impacted communities are able to recover. In the case of all the mega-storms, tornadoes, floods, fires and winter blizzards that have severely damaged and in some cases destroyed whole communities across the U.S. in the last several years, official aid is always slow in coming, if it comes at all. Communities rely on the help of non-profit volunteer organizations and church groups, which have limited resources. Residents do what they can to help each other, but simply do not possess the resources needed for post-disaster relief, recovery and rebuilding.

An entirely volunteer organization called the Cajun Navy has been praised by the media and government officials for stepping into the void in rescue operations directly after major hurricanes and floods. It's the Cajun Navy and like-minded volunteers who end up taking command and responding to natural disasters and flooding along the Gulf Coast. They have not only been the first responders heavily involved in initial rescue efforts, but they are the ones who speak to media outlets and give residents on the ground situational updates of damage and danger zones.

Official aid to evacuate before the known disaster hits is practically nonexistent – people are left on their own when warned to leave. One example is what happened in 2005 to people in the Lower

Ninth Ward of New Orleans when Hurricane Katrina struck, where people had no means to get out of town by the time the city issued the evacuation orders. No buses or trains were leaving and it being at the end of the month, most people had no money anyway. Those with cars got as far as Jackson, Mississippi before they ran out of gas. There has been no change in the practice in the U.S. of abandoning people when they need to get out of danger fast.

In March 2023, a severe tornado leveled much of the black-majority rural town of Rolling Fork, Mississippi, killing 26 people. Racial disparities existed in Rolling Fork for generations. Many residents there were poor, had low access to information or internet service, were priced out of insurance coverage, and lived in mobile homes that weren't retrofitted to withstand severe weather conditions. With the nearest tornado shelter more than 15 miles away, it set the perfect storm to leave people dead or displaced and scrambling for very slow to arrive aid and assistance.

In 2020, FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) spent \$24 billion on natural disaster response, but individual disaster victims trying to rebuild their lives have seen a very small fraction of those funds. Hurricane Ida in August 2021 was a deadly and extremely destructive Category 4 Atlantic hurricane that became the second-most damaging hurricane to make landfall in the state of Louisiana on record behind Hurricane Katrina in 2005. After Ida, many survivors resorted to sleeping in cars or tents or inside moldy, damaged homes. Some have doubled or tripled up with family and friends.

After months of waiting for FEMA housing, some survivors finally received help from a separate, state-run program, through which each was provided with a trailer. By the beginning of December 2021, about 1,200 families had moved into campers the state got from FEMA — these were units that can be towed by a vehicle. On November 10, nearly three months after the storm, only 368 families had moved into trailers, which they were only allowed to use for six months under the state's agreement with FEMA. After Hurricane Ida, over 4,000 Louisiana families remain in temporary FEMA housing of various kinds.

When Hurricane Harvey hit the Houston area in August of 2017, it wasn't until the following June that every resident was placed in a temporary housing unit. "It can be done if there's a will," said Laurie Schoeman, a disaster recovery specialist for Enterprise Community Partners, a nonprofit, to The New York Times. "But FEMA has steered away from direct housing toward rental and hotel vouchers. FEMA doesn't want to be in the business of housing," Ms. Schoeman said. But if FEMA isn't the government agency to be responsible for arranging for immediate temporary housing after a natural disaster, and the Housing and Urban Development Department isn't responsible, who is? Further, the Stafford Act places this responsibility directly on the shoulders of FEMA.

More intense and longer heat waves

Across the country, increases in heat wave length and intensity have made the summers longer and more dangerous. By mid-century, nearly two-thirds of Americans will experience perilous heat waves, with some regions in the South expected to endure more than 70 consecutive days over 100 degrees.

The summer of 2022 was the hottest in Texas's recorded history. In San Antonio, which would normally experience about three days of triple-digit heat by July, already had three dozen such days as of July 2022. Houston, Texans were using a record amount of electricity to stay cool. Heat is the top weather-related killer in the United States. But like other effects of climate change, it is felt

unevenly. The poor, the elderly, very young children and people with certain chronic medical conditions are most at risk. Treeless city neighborhoods, packed with buildings, parking lots and asphalt roads, absorb and retain more heat than areas with tree-lined streets and parks – they are often referred to as “heat islands.” Nationwide, this pattern is seen in city after city, concentrating heat in majority low-income black and Latino neighborhoods, and when there is no air conditioning in the housing, people die.

In the face of hundreds of deaths by heat wave in Chicago in the summer of 1995, the city invested in refrigerated trucks in which to keep dead bodies, rather than in air conditioners for the households that did not have them.

Solutions exist to solve the problem of lack of access to air conditioning and safety from the extreme heat, but it takes an organized community to demand those solutions be carried out.

Solutions

- Consistent with Target 11.1, the U.S. federal government must fully fund large-scale, long-term policy solutions, approved by the residents in need of new and/or upgraded housing, and give highest priority to renters who, with the assistance of low-cost financing, could purchase homes, eliminating their housing instability. This program must tangibly promote sustainable development by requiring payment of living wages to the program’s workforce.
- Government should make repairs and upgrade existing public and subsidized housing for low-income, elderly and/or vulnerable residents versus doing extensive demolition, wherever feasible; work with architects and engineers that commit to creating solutions in line with the visions and actual needs of the residents. The building plans must reduce the carbon footprint of the housing, and provide protection to all residents in the event of excessive heat and severe storms induced by global warming.
- Government will fund and immediately allocate personnel, transportation and shelter to evacuate and relocate all residents to safety upon first detection of severe storms. Seniors and pregnant women will be moved to facilities with resources and medical professionals in place to protect health and ensure safety, including being capable of delivering and caring for newborn infants.
- The U.S. government will require the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to fulfill its duties to bring about full economic recovery in federal disaster areas in accordance with provisions of the Stafford Act.
- State and federal governments will change land-use and zoning regulations to favor and facilitate development of housing that is truly affordable to low-income workers and to those living on low-fixed incomes, such as Social Security and SSI.
- State and federal governments will leverage eminent domain to secure the control, repair, cleaning, upgrading and utilization of empty or underutilized housing property, including hotels, to place individuals and families to eliminate homelessness in the United States once and for all.

Goal 12 Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

Targets:

12.1 Implement the 10-year framework of programmes on sustainable consumption and production, all countries taking action, with developed countries taking the lead, taking into account the development and capabilities of developing countries

12.2 By 2030, achieve the sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources

12.3 By 2030, halve per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer levels and reduce food losses along production and supply chains, including post-harvest losses

12.4 By 2020, achieve the environmentally sound management of chemicals and all wastes throughout their life cycle, in accordance with agreed international frameworks, and significantly reduce their release to air, water and soil in order to minimize their adverse impacts on human health and the environment

12.5 By 2030, substantially reduce waste generation through prevention, reduction, recycling and reuse

12.6 Encourage companies, especially large and transnational companies, to adopt sustainable practices and to integrate sustainability information into their reporting cycle

12.7 Promote public procurement practices that are sustainable, in accordance with national policies and priorities

12.8 By 2030, ensure that people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature

Problems

Goal 12 of the SDGs focuses on responsible manufacturing, as well as reuse, repurposing, recycling, and reduction at every stage of the product lifecycle, beginning with how materials are sourced for manufacturing and concluding with how we dispose of the products at the end of their useful life. The United States' failure to advance sustainable consumption and production patterns is underscored by the government's lack of monitoring and reporting on the amount of waste generated by industry and the population. This is true on both the federal and state levels. Moreover, where metrics have been established and regulations are in place, they are most often not enforced. This is true across the range of industries, from food production to apparel and textiles, electronics, furniture, packaging of all kinds, construction materials and more.

E-waste

includes both commercial and consumer-discarded equipment and material, including the displays, cables, power supplies as well as cell phones, TVs, computers, laptops and other equipment that accumulates at an increasingly rapid rate every year.

In 2019 alone, the global electronic waste stream, which includes both consumer and commercial products, exceeded 59 million metric tons. E-waste makes up only 2% of materials in U.S. landfills, but it is responsible for 70% of toxic heavy metals at those sites. When dumped, buried or burned, these toxins contaminate our water supply, marine environments, agricultural land and, ultimately, the food chain, endangering both people and animals. In many developing nations, for example in Accra, Ghana, there are vast disposal sites that contain waste of U.S. origin. Valuable and reusable components are harvested from such waste by local people, leading to environmental degradation and human health risks.

In the United States, though a number of local and state governments ban the disposal of certain electronic waste, ignorance and a lack of resources create obstacles to the proper handling of these materials and enforcement of the rules. Idaho, for example, has no laws concerning e-waste; instead it asks its people to “do their part” to handle electronic waste responsibly. Moreover, most state laws and regulations only apply to consumer electronics like phones, TVs and computers. Businesses are required to obey federal laws on dumping hazardous waste like lead from a broken CRT or mercury from backlit LCD panels, but the Environmental Protection Agency labels an item hazardous only if it is broken or disassembled.

The difficulties are compounded by widespread public ignorance as to what hazardous substances are in the equipment. Most manufacturers are reluctant to share that information, and few recognize any responsibility to facilitate the recycling, reuse, or proper disposal of their products. Consequently, the responsibility for handling electronic waste falls on the end user to identify responsible e-waste recycling and disposal companies. The recycling industry in America largely operates free of regulation and faces little risk in failing to act on their stated practices.

The waste doesn't just sit in the places to which we send it. Its valuable, reusable components are harvested by people seeking to earn some money, in unsafe conditions, at great cost to their health and the environment. The burning of PVC-insulated copper wire, which is a practice used in developing nations where working people collect the metal, can release up to 100 times more cancer-causing dioxins than other waste. According to the Center for Biological Diversity, PVC is considered to be hazardous and toxic if leached into the soil or waterways, as occurs as a result of it being burned.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency does have regulations specific to hazardous waste. However, EPA does not define used or discarded intact electronics such as old CRT monitors as hazardous if they are left whole. Once a cathode ray tube (which can contain four to six pounds of lead) is removed from that CRT monitor's housing, then the component is labeled as toxic and hazardous. However there is no comprehensive process for monitoring or enforcing even these regulations.

Consider the commercial audio-visual (AV) industry in the United States, which relies on audio-visual integrators for the design, implementation, service and support of AV solutions such as video conferencing facilities, technology-enabled learning environments, nurse call systems, video production, mass notification systems, building security and digital signage. Over the years, as audio-visual communication technology transitioned from analog distribution to digital and network protocols, the industry removed thousands of miles of analog cabling, almost all of which is sheathed in PVC. Very few AV integrators have been trained to handle and dispose of outdated electronics. The commercial AV industry has no standards or practices for the recycling or disposal

of electronic waste.

A group of AV integration business people concerned about this absence of any regulations for disposal or recycling of AV equipment being discarded, began a new nonprofit called SAvE – Sustainability in AV – to address the immediate need for a country-specific inventory of our industry’s e-waste and its disposal, in order to establish policies, training and best practices in accordance with the 2030 SDGs.

The AV industry (like every other area of the technology industries), for a large part of its revenue growth, relies on technology obsolescence, which means as far as the manufacturer is concerned, the product has reached the end of its useful life and will no longer be sold or supported, even though it still works, or could be repaired and could have a much longer life. This results in a substantial volume of end-of-life and end-of-use products – only a small percentage of which are formally recycled (in 2019, less than 20%). This planned obsolescence is injurious to the environment, yet has become integral to the industry’s business model. In two years, the commercial AV industry projects global revenue growth to \$325 billion in new technology and services. That means the technology we are going to replace will become electronic waste.

Even new equipment can become e-waste before it is ever used. For example, many manufacturers ship new gear with peripherals included in the package that will connect it to every major power standard in the developed world, rather than just the one power supply compatible with that country’s standard. These unnecessary accessories are being burned, dumped or placed in landfills around the world. There are likely tens of thousands of these adapters buried in landfills. As an all-volunteer organization, SAvE is striving to help commercial AV businesses face the impact of electronic waste, with the goal of establishing a collaborative effort to fix this broken system and aim toward a common goal of professional and ethical behavior to benefit the well-being of our communities, our changing climate, and environment.

Fashion industry

Globally 150 billion garments are produced each year. In the United States we wear items an average of 7-12 times before we discard them. The U.S. generates 25 billion pounds of post-consumer textile waste per year. This means that the average American throws away around 82 pounds of textile waste each year. 70 pounds of this waste ends up in landfills. There is no proper recycling or disposal process for clothing. Corporate media tells us what is in style, perpetuates the cycle and shame of not having enough or “the latest” and we have been exporting this culture worldwide. Marketing experts spend time and money analyzing customer incentives, generating sales and marketing strategies, and pushing impulse buying and panic shopping.

Overall intentional, planned waste for profit

The New York Fair Trade Coalition points out that corporate planned obsolescence across the board is leading to depletion of natural resources, increase in waste, and the cycle of replacements continues to speed up. Since the end of WWII the United State government has placed a great importance on consumer spending as a testament to the strength of our overall economy. Plans were put in place advocating for planned obsolescence, shortening products longevity, and perceived obsolescence, changing trends to continuously keep consumer spending high. Marketing messages advocate unhealthy, unnecessary and unsustainable levels of consumption.

Despite the economic and environmental benefits of repairing and reusing, product manufacturers

intentionally limit the ability of recyclers and third-party repair shops to legitimately repair or reuse the products. This is done by limiting access to parts and part information, manuals, and utilizing digital locks that impede the products' reuse.

Solutions

- Government should create incentives and infrastructure support for a circular economy in the audiovisual and electronics industries, which could save upwards of 54 million tons of waste a year. Government must penalize preplanned obsolescence as a manufacturing policy and practice.
- Government must publicly commit to SDG 12, include all stakeholders in studying the scope of the problem, determine ways to measure progress toward sustainability, and use its legislative and regulatory points of leverage to advance progress.
- Carry out the steps necessary to transform the methods of manufacturing in all industry. Incorporate processes for reuse, repurposing, recycling and reduction at every stage of the product lifecycle, beginning with how materials are sourced for manufacturing and concluding with how we dispose of products at the end of their useful life.
- Create training classes like SAVE's sustainability training class, entitled, "There is no away when you throw it away" for commercial AV integrators, resellers, distributors, consultants, and manufacturers to establish the basic knowledge of electronic waste, how it is generated by the AV industry, and where it goes.
- Consumers, wholesale and retail buyers at all levels must organize and demand industry provides guidance on how to dispose of the products they manufacture, and provide the facilities for the recycling and repurposing of the products.
- Government should implement public educational campaigns on sustainable consumption and production practices aimed at all sectors of society, in regards to all industries.
- The government must implement the Fair Repair Bill for all industries, which aims to protect consumer rights by requiring manufacturers to provide customers and independent repair businesses with access to service information and affordable parts.
- Manufacturers must be given standards for creating products with longer lifecycles, using less hazardous materials, and they must become active partners in prolonging the usable life of their products by implementing repair and reuse programs.
- Industry must invest in the building of recycling infrastructure and plants to be readily available to all communities, and follow scientifically sound recycling processes that prevent any re-usable elements and materials from being thrown away.
- Malls, parks, schools, offices and recreational centers should all include aspects of recycling, repairing, reusing and repurposing over consumption of new products.

- Pass the Fashion Act which seeks to hold the fashion industry accountable for their exploitation of workers and the environment.

Goal 13 Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts*

* Acknowledging that the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is the primary international, inter-governmental forum for negotiating the global response to climate change.

This is in reference to the Paris Climate Accord and the pledges made in the subsequent COP26 and COP27 in addition to these targets:

13.1 Strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters in all countries

13.2 Integrate climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning
13.3 Improve education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning

13.a Implement the commitment undertaken by developed-country parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to a goal of mobilizing jointly \$100 billion annually by 2020 from all sources to address the needs of developing countries in the context of meaningful mitigation actions and transparency on implementation and fully operationalize the Green Climate Fund through its capitalization as soon as possible

13.b Promote mechanisms for raising capacity for effective climate change-related planning and management in least developed countries and small island developing States, including focusing on women, youth and local and marginalized communities

Problems

Today, because the necessary actions to curb greenhouse gas emissions and replace fossil fuels with renewables was not taken by the U.S. and other industrially developed countries when scientists first made clear over 40 years ago what the consequences would be, we are now faced with needing to take rapid and extreme measures towards adapting to the inevitable and irreversible changes in the Earth's atmosphere and weather patterns. Climate change and biodiversity loss now pose the greatest threats to wilderness, natural systems, and our human environments.

Climate change has already impacted ecosystems and human communities with shifting seasonal events, altered plant and animal ranges, accelerating sea level rise, extreme precipitation trends, more intense and longer wildfire seasons, worsening pest outbreaks, and longer and more intense heat waves.

Countless species of animals and plants face extinction over the next century. The solutions are not in technologies alone. The solutions are in carrying out the work and changes necessary to reach each of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals – in the U.S. and cooperatively with all nations.

The great carbon imbalance

Great Old Broads for the Wilderness gives voice to the millions of Americans who want to protect their public lands and wilderness for this and future generations. They bring knowledge, leadership, and humor to the wilderness preservation movement as they educate communities about the critical connection between healthy public lands and climate change mitigation. They warn that industrialization and intensive commercial uses of public lands are on the rise, and that these trends, in the context of climate change, have startling impacts.

When oil, natural gas, and coal extracted from public lands are burned, carbon is released into the atmosphere. While forests, marshes, and coastal wetlands act as “carbon sinks” — capturing carbon through photosynthesis and locking it up in deep soils — fossil fuel production on U.S. public lands introduces roughly 4.5 times the carbon into the atmosphere than the lands can capture. From 2017 to 2020 alone, nearly ten million additional acres of public land has been leased for new extraction — an area larger than the state of Maryland. The mature and old-growth forests of the Pacific Northwest are some of the richest carbon sinks in the world — but logging mature and old-growth trees has damaged critical habitats, decimating them by 27% in California, 34% in Washington, and by nearly half in Oregon.

When ranked relative to the world’s worst emitting countries, U.S. public lands rank as the fifth largest carbon emitter in the world.

Public lands and waters can serve as a major bulwark against climate change and its effects. Managing public lands for natural carbon sequestration and eliminating fossil fuel development on them is essential — along with ending emissions — to developing maximum resilience to the impacts of a changing climate. However, the health of these lands is threatened or weakened by those who oppose federal land management and land protections, or deny the science of climate change. These factions seek to slash agency budgets, rendering them ineffective; limit democratic processes that provide for public involvement; and encourage exploitation of public land resources for short-term gain.

Public lands help us to adapt to climate change by providing diverse habitats and connected landscapes that allow space for species to adapt by reducing the impacts of flooding to downstream communities and maintaining cool rivers amid rising temperatures while slowing runoff and recharging depleted water tables. Volunteer nonprofits like Great Old Broads for Wilderness conduct education and community awareness activities to defend public lands, but more is needed.

Disproportionate impacts

Climate change is impacting communities across the globe, but these effects are not felt equally for all peoples. Frontline communities are experiencing the first and often the worst effects of climate change: Indigenous peoples in the southwest, Midwest, northeast and southeast of the U.S., communities of color in both tree-less urban areas and flood-torn rural ones, and the economically disadvantaged everywhere who cannot afford to move, clean up or rebuild when disasters hit or as the pollution from nearby industry or wildfires affect their health and livelihoods.

These communities — both in the U.S. and in developing countries throughout the global south — have fewer economic resources to prepare for and cope with increasing climate disruptions. The environmental damage and weather extremes have cost developing nations greatly in their own efforts to achieve all 17 of the Sustainable Development Goals, starting with eliminating poverty.

And in the U.S. there is a term now for the communities that suffer the worst of the air pollution, heat, water contamination and soil contamination: Climate Justice Communities. Within many we can find grassroots organizations are mobilizing to fight for the necessary cleanups and closures of the sources of pollution and global warming.

Tools against “SDG-washing” and greenwashing

In the absence of sufficient top-down regulation, consumers’ and shareholders’ expectations have become a major driver for enhanced corporate climate action. The now increasingly aware public — faced with toxic air and lost homes from wildfires, changed weather patterns bringing extreme heat and cold not experienced before, and frequent catastrophic storms — is putting more economic pressure on corporations and business to do their part in reversing the damage.

Both government and corporate climate action is key to closing the emissions gap to a 1.5°C increase from pre-industrial level. Many corporations now advertise they have plans for achieving Net-Zero by 2050, and some U.S. companies even advertise on the international market how their business model is consistent with the 2030 SDGs (since most people in the U.S. have still never heard of the SDGs due to the lack of public education or government endorsement, it is not contained in their U.S. advertising).

Greenwashing refers to the marketing practice in which businesses seek to capitalize on the growing movement for environmentally sound products by selling goods labeled as green, most of which actually aren’t. Some of the biggest contributors to greenhouse gas emissions are making these claims. Two non-profit organizations, New Climate Institute and Carbon Market Watch, found the headline climate pledges of most major multinational firms cannot be taken at face value. Bloomberg News in February 2023 reported that the “Net-Zero” pledges made by some of the world’s largest corporations will reduce their greenhouse gas emissions by just 36% and not until 2050, far short of the progress required to avert a catastrophic increase in global temperatures.

Plans of at least two-thirds of these companies rely on carbon dioxide removals from forestry and other biological-related carbon sequestration (nature-based solutions) to claim that their emissions in the future are offset, i.e., that the impact to the climate is the same as if the emissions were never released in the first place. But these approaches are unsuitable for individual offsetting claims, because biological carbon storage can be reversed (e.g., when forests are cut and burned) and because scientists have proven there is a global requirement to reduce emissions and increase carbon storage, not one or the other.

In March 2022 the UN Secretary General, recognizing the danger of greenwashing and SDG-washing and need for scrutiny of corporate climate action, launched a High-Level Expert Group on the Net-Zero Emissions Commitments of Non-State Entities.

Every industry must be analyzed and provided with rules and guidelines for making the needed transformations

Aviation industry: The Center for Biological Diversity reports that greenhouse gas emissions from the aviation sector are a substantial contributor to global warming. If the aviation industry were a country, it would place sixth in emissions, between Japan and Germany. Left unchecked, global aviation will generate an estimated 43 metric gigatons of carbon dioxide emissions through 2050, constituting almost 5% of the global emissions allowable to keep global warming below 1.5 degrees Celsius.

In the United States, aircraft are one of the fastest-growing sources of emissions: Emissions from domestic aviation alone have increased 17% since 1990, to account for 9% of greenhouse gas emissions from the U.S. transportation sector. Flights departing from airports in the United States and its territories are responsible for almost one-quarter of global passenger transport-related carbon emissions, the majority of which come from domestic flights. In 2016, the EPA made a formal finding that greenhouse gas pollution from aircraft endangers human health and welfare, but has yet to release any rules to reduce this pollution.

Flying customers now see billboards from major airlines in the airports touting their Net-Zero emissions goals to be reached by 2050. Scientists have already made it clear with volumes of research and data that 2050 is too late to start decreasing CO² emission, and we must cut CO² emissions and other green house gas emission in half by 2030, and reach zero emissions by 2050 in order to avoid even worse cataclysmic climate change than we are already in store for. Net-Zero is not zero. Those who take the time to research what the actual plans behind the Net-Zero claims are of most airlines have found the plans inadequate, relying largely on technology that does not exist yet, and on carbon credit schemes that allow them to continue to emit while claiming the number of trees being planted in exchange neutralizes their emissions; a premise that has been solidly disproven.

Yet there are ways for airlines to greatly cut their emissions, as has been shown by Xiamen Airlines, which launched its first truly carbon-neutral flight this year, after making numerous changes in everything from how they serve meals, how they calculate the amount of food and water to carry, the weight of the materials now used interior to the plane, the fuel being used and the design of the plane. The airline also highlights in their campaign that these measures are still not enough and the airline industry as a whole must take further measures to operate in a more environmentally friendly manner. International cooperation is needed for the industry to more rapidly make progress in developing non-fossil fuels, electric planes, and develop new models for how service is delivered on the flights.

Solutions

- Government at all levels must ensure an end to the use of fossil fuels nationwide; and stop the fossil fuel industry from blocking necessary progress in development and implementation of alternatives to carbon and other greenhouse-gas-emitting sources of energy in all industries.
- Media should make regular reports on the findings of the UN Expert Group on the Net-Zero Emissions Commitments of Non-State Entities.
- Local and state governments must establish climate change mitigation councils in all “Climate Justice Communities” with its members elected by the local community and with authority towards local government decisions.
- As nature-based climate solutions and public lands stewardship are vital tools to lessening these impacts in conjunction with stopping emissions, old-growth forests, wetlands, and other roadless, intact lands and waters must be restored and protected in order to benefit from their ability to not only lock up carbon, but also to boost resilience for both people and wildlife in

the face of climate change.

- As nature-based climate solutions and public lands stewardship are vital tools for lessening the impacts of carbon emissions, government must restore and protect old-growth forests, wetlands and other roadless, intact lands and waterways. Government will promote nature's ability to lock up carbon and boost environmental resilience to the benefit of people, wildlife and plantlife – all endangered with species extinction due to global warming.
- More public education is needed so that we all can contribute by being better stewards of undisturbed, wild lands and all ecosystems.
- Protect America's wild public lands from threats to its ecological integrity, scenic beauty, cultural resources, natural quiet, and solitude by defending the key laws and policies such as the Wilderness Act, Antiquities Act, Endangered Species Act, and National Environmental Policy Act.
- Government at all levels must uphold and preserve the protected status of public lands by upholding the federal laws and combat efforts to transfer federal lands to states, which put them at risk of being overdeveloped or sold based on ill-conceived policies, narrow ideologies, and short-sighted profiteering self-interests.
- The U.S. government should take the lead in fulfilling its overdue commitment to capitalize the Green Climate Fund to address the needs of developing countries in the context of meaningful mitigation actions, and inspiring the other developed nations to do the same through its actions. The funds required are a small fraction of the profits made by the large fossil fuel, carbon emitting corporations that pay no taxes.

Goal 14 Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

Targets:

14.1 By 2025, prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution

14.2 By 2020, sustainably manage and protect marine and coastal ecosystems to avoid significant adverse impacts, including by strengthening their resilience, and take action for their restoration in order to achieve healthy and productive oceans

14.3 Minimize and address the impacts of ocean acidification, including through enhanced scientific cooperation at all levels

14.4 By 2020, effectively regulate harvesting and end overfishing, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and destructive fishing practices and implement science-based management plans, in order to restore fish stocks in the shortest time feasible, at least to levels that can produce maximum sustainable yield as determined by their biological characteristics

14.5 By 2020, conserve at least 10% of coastal and marine areas, consistent with national and

international law and based on the best available scientific information

14.6 By 2020, prohibit certain forms of fishery subsidies which contribute to overcapacity and overfishing, eliminate subsidies that contribute to illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and refrain from introducing new such subsidies, recognizing that appropriate and effective special and differential treatment for developing and least developed countries should be an integral part of the World Trade Organization fisheries subsidies negotiation

Problems

Marine pollution

Coastal water quality and public health is threatened by storm water, urban and agricultural runoff, and sewage and industrial discharges. Nearly ten trillion gallons of untreated storm water runoff flow into U.S. waterways every year, carrying a cocktail of pollutants, including road dust, oil, animal waste, fertilizers and other chemicals. Years of neglect have also left the U.S.'s wastewater infrastructure in disrepair, outdated and failing. Rain flushes runoff through a storm drain system, or directly sends it into creeks, streams and rivers that lead to the ocean.

In Florida, sewage spills and failing wastewater infrastructure, mismanagement of freshwater resources, and storm water and agricultural runoff are all contributing to these water quality issues. These pollution sources have left a legacy of high levels of nitrogen in Florida's rivers, estuaries and bays that fuel harmful algae blooms. The impact of Florida's declining seagrass meadows resulted in massive declines in manatee population. In 2021, 1,101 manatees died, and over 400 additional manatees died in 2022.

Heal the Bay, an environmental nonprofit in Santa Monica, California, dedicated to making California coastal waters safe and healthy for people and marine life, reports that governments at all levels have not fully accepted the responsibility to properly maintain our wastewater infrastructure that lies mostly beneath the ground and out of sight. The failure to adequately maintain these systems has led to a backlog of roughly \$271 billion worth of necessary infrastructure upgrades. This estimate doesn't include the threat that coastal infrastructure faces from rising sea levels and exacerbated storm events associated with climate change.

The water quality monitoring and public notification programs run by coastal states to protect public health at the beach are resource-restricted. Despite an authorized level of \$30 million to assist coastal states with beach programs through the EPA's Beach Act Grants Program—which SurfRider, a non-profit consisting of a team of science, environmental and legal experts who are dedicated to the protection of the ocean, helped to pass in 2000—funding has remained stagnant at close to \$10 million. While this level of support has kept the beach monitoring programs in approximately 35 coastal states and territories in operation, states are forced to prioritize which beaches to monitor. They also have to limit beach seasons and sampling frequency to stretch the federal grant dollars as far as possible.

Of the 8,532 water test results reported in 2021, 71% indicated low bacteria levels, 9% indicated medium bacteria levels, and 20% measured high bacteria levels that exceed water quality criteria, or Beach Action Values, set by each state to protect public health in recreational waters.

The majority of the water samples that failed to meet health standards were collected from

freshwater sources, such as rivers, creeks and marshes, which are influenced by storm water runoff, or at beaches near these outlets. These results are consistent with national trends, which show that storm water runoff is the number one cause of beach closures and swimming advisories in the U.S. Storm water can wash chemicals and other pollutants from streets and lawns into local waterways, down to the beach and into the ocean. In addition, storm water and flooding after the increasing number and intensities of rain events will cause wastewater infrastructure like cesspools, septic systems, and sewers to fail and release untreated sewage into waterways and the ocean.

Across the country, Surfrider Foundation's Blue Water Task Force programs are measuring high bacteria levels at many beaches and recreational waterways where storm water and failing sewage infrastructure are polluting the water. 95% of samples collected did not meet health standards in 2021.

The problem of plastics in the ocean is well documented and known, but with the current recycling infrastructure and pace of plastic production, less than 9% of plastic is recycled. 70% of waste from public beach clean-ups done by volunteers in Los Angeles County, California is plastic, which is just the shore.

Eight million tons of plastic is still being dumped into our oceans every year. If we continue on our current course, scientists have estimated that by 2050 there will be more plastic than fish in the sea by mass.

Sea level rise

Rising temperatures that are warming the oceans are endangering the survival of ecosystems in the bays and watersheds as seawater expands and sea levels rise. Nature Communications reported a study that detected sea levels on the U.S. southeast and Gulf coasts have risen by half an inch per year since 2010, three times higher than the global average over the same period.

The impact of sea level rise will be felt by humans and wildlife alike. Even if the rate of encroachment is slow now, the Arctic ice cover is now melting at faster rates than predicted. The effects of sea level rise on infrastructure and coastal communities are expensive and disruptive to many aspects of life. Over 127 million Americans live in coastal areas threatened by sea level rise.

In Morro Bay, California, freshwater from two creeks runs down from the hills and mixes with saltwater that comes in with the tides from the ocean. This mix of salty and fresh waters makes Morro Bay an estuary—a unique place that supports an abundance of wildlife and a vibrant coastal community. People visit Morro Bay year-round to appreciate its beauty, to kayak and fish, and to watch the birds and sea otters that thrive there. The Coastal Storm Modeling System has been able to indicate that sea level rise in the Morro Bay region is likely to be between 0.3 m and 1 m by the end of the century. 1 m of sea level rise will wipe out the waterfront, reduce the sand spit by 50 acres and destroy Snowy Plover nesting areas (an endangered species). It will take out Morro Beach entirely and cover the salt marsh. Rising sea levels also mean saltwater encroachment into freshwater creeks and groundwater aquifers, which will impact wildlife and contaminate municipal water supplies.

The Morro Bay National Estuary Program, a local nonprofit that works collaboratively with citizens, agencies, and landowners to help protect and restore the area, has followed and identified the environmental trends. They found, for example, that while large sediment inputs can directly

smother eelgrass and degrade habitats, climate models indicate that tidal marsh elevation gains will not keep pace with sea level rise. This could mean that higher water levels will overcome the high marsh habitat, converting it to mudflats by the end of the century, destroying the eelgrass which sequesters carbon and helps mitigate the effects of climate change.

As a photosynthesizing plant, eelgrass also puts oxygen into the water to support other aquatic life. The plant's floating blades form a sort of underwater forest that provides shelter and a place to find food for a wide variety of wildlife. If the eel grass is destroyed, entire ecosystems will be destroyed, and global warming will keep speeding up. In 2007 there were 344 acres of eelgrass. Over the next decade, eelgrass experienced a precipitous decline to only 13 acres. Restoration efforts are underway, but more is needed.

Ocean acidification

Ocean acidification in southeastern U.S. estuaries and coastal waters are negatively impacting the coastal resources, such as shellfish, finfish, and coral reefs, and the communities that rely on them. For instance, impacts of acidification on coral include decreased growth rates and increase of released carbon from seafloor sediments. Coral reefs provide important coastal resistance to dangerous waves and support the tourism industry. In regard to the aquaculture and fishing industry, Southeast Coastal and Ocean Acidification Network concluded that acidification will continue to threaten hundreds of thousands of jobs and destroy ocean ecosystems.

In the Gulf of Mexico at the mouth of the Mississippi River, every summer a low-oxygen area, often referred to as a Dead Zone, develops off of the Texas-Louisiana shelf when nutrient-laden fresh water from the Mississippi and Atchafalaya Rivers flows into the Gulf of Mexico. Nutrients such as nitrogen and the phosphorous in fertilizer are brought into the river and flow down to the Gulf, contributing to the formation of a low-oxygen area along parts of the Gulf's seafloor. Mobile fish and marine mammals are able to swim away from the low-oxygen area, but weaker swimming organisms can be trapped and die, leaving behind a barren area that would typically be teeming with life. This year, the river was in flood stage for more than 240 days at Red River Landing, an unprecedented length of time, and subsequently the Dead Zone was nearly 7,000 square miles – the eighth largest ever measured.

Solutions

- The U.S. government must consummate all its obligations under the Paris Climate Accord and stop fossil fuel use and emissions in order to slow and reverse global warming, climate change, sea level rising and acidification of the oceans.
- Stop offshore fossil fuel extraction.
- We must mitigate sea level rises by reducing carbon emissions; and adapt to changing conditions by improving the coastal resiliency of our communities. Strategies such as wetland restoration, effective groundwater management and the use of natural infrastructure for shoreline protection can bolster coastal neighborhoods and habitats.
- The Environmental Defense Fund is working with farmers to adopt practices that reduce fertilizer runoff and improve environmental outcomes while optimizing productivity and profitability. With a combination of efficient fertilizer practices, cover crops, restoring wetlands

and other natural infrastructure across the corn belt to trap and treat nitrogen lost from farms, the Gulf of Mexico's dead zone can shrink.

- Provide incentives aimed at the producers and distributors of plastic packaging, and other items made of plastic that end up in the ocean, in order to keep plastic from entering the ocean. Invest in production of biodegradable plastic-like materials to replace plastic, and expand all plastic collection and recycling operations and programs.

Goal 15 Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

To achieve even just these 5 out of the 9 targets for Goal 15, the U.S. has a great deal of work to do:

15.1 By 2020, ensure the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems and their services, in particular forests, wetlands, mountains and drylands, in line with obligations under international agreements

15.2 By 2020, promote the implementation of sustainable management of all types of forests, halt deforestation, restore degraded forests and substantially increase afforestation and reforestation globally

15.3 By 2030, combat desertification, restore degraded land and soil, including land affected by desertification, drought and floods, and strive to achieve a land degradation-neutral world

15.4 By 2030, ensure the conservation of mountain ecosystems, including their biodiversity, in order to enhance their capacity to provide benefits that are essential for sustainable development

15.5 Take urgent and significant action to reduce the degradation of natural habitats, halt the loss of biodiversity and, by 2020, protect and prevent the extinction of threatened species

Problems

The United States is facing unprecedented levels of extinction of species (plant and animal) due to habitat destruction, soil degradation, industrial contamination, the practice of monoculture by big agribusiness, overgrazing, mining practices and an unprecedented amount of forest loss from forest fires and deforestation. There are solutions and it is not too late if bold action is taken now.

As the Mahwah Environmental Volunteers Organization, Inc. (MEVO) in New Jersey describes the situation, beginning with the industrial revolution, the actions of human society have taken our natural resources and precious ecosystem services for granted, destroying them without regard for the consequences. The U.S. economic system and current business model of production does not take into account the ecological and social cost and consequences of the extractive industries.

U.S. economic policies de facto disregard that without a healthy ecosystem, there is no economy.

These resources are finite and have planetary limits. Due to unsustainable forestry and criminal activity by U.S. corporations that takes place in countries around the world, the consequences are clear.

Biodiversity loss

Today, rapidly worsening climate change and biodiversity loss pose the greatest threats to wilderness, natural systems and our human environments. Up to 40% of animal species and 34% of plant species are at risk of going extinct in the U.S., and up to 41% of U.S. ecosystems are at risk of range-wide collapse, meaning they could be lost forever. Among the major animal groups in the U.S., amphibians are the worst off, with 42% at risk, followed by fish (35% at risk), reptiles (22% at risk), mammals (18% at risk) and birds (12% at risk). Bees are 37% at risk. Crayfish are 55% at risk and shrimp 48% at risk. Freshwater species seem to be particularly vulnerable due to an increase in waterway pollution and damming activity. Among plants, cacti are the most threatened group, with 48% at risk, followed by orchids (27% at risk), trees (20% at risk) and grasses (19% at risk). Habitat degradation, land conversion, pollution, climate change and invasive species are the main threats to U.S. wildlife. The highest concentration of at-risk species (fauna and flora) and ecosystems are located in California and Texas, as well as parts of the Southeast.

Forests and protected land

The fight to protect the natural habitat of millions of species has fallen largely upon community-based organizations such as Great Old Broads for Wilderness, a women-led national grassroots organization that engages and inspires activism to preserve and protect wilderness and wild lands in 18 U.S. states.

Great Old Broads for Wilderness reports that since the 17th century, more than 85% of North America's old-growth forests have been lost to logging. Up to one-sixth of the tree species found in the continental United States face possible extinction, yet only a handful enjoy federal protection under the U.S. Endangered Species Act. Mature and old-growth forests provide wildlife habitat, are sources of clean water, and mitigate the effects of climate change by pulling massive amounts of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere through photosynthesis and trapping it deep in the soil. This natural ability to fight climate change makes their destruction through logging and other activities not only tragic, but dangerous to the human and other living species. Today, 18% of federal forests are classified as old-growth and 45% as mature.

The most imperiled ecosystems are tropical forests, tropical grasslands and tropical cliffs, with 100% of each category being at risk of range-wide collapse, followed by tropical savannas (88% at risk), temperate grasslands and temperate forests (40% at risk).

Wilderness lands reduce the impacts of climate change. Therefore, increasing the acreage of designated wilderness is critical to the survival of all life on Earth. However, only 13% of the entire U.S. is protected as wilderness. Alaska contains just over half of America's wilderness, and holds the largest percentage of the protected lands.

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has a new proposed Public Lands Rule being discussed for adoption. In this proposal the BLM considers replanting invasive, non-native plant species (typically preferred by grazing livestock) as "restoration." The BLM needs to clearly define "restoration" to mean an area's return to its natural, native ecological state, and not simply replanting a damaged landscape with more invasive plant species for cows.

Impact of infrastructure – roads, pipelines, mining

The construction of pipelines, roads and utility corridors, and the use and transport of toxic materials negatively affect water and air quality, wildlife habitat and the natural quiet of these lands. There are 380,000 miles of roads in U.S. national forests and grasslands. That's eight times more than the U.S. interstate highway system. Only 2% of the lands in the continental U.S. are roadless. Regulation of mining activities is based on the antiquated Mining Act of 1872, which did not anticipate that mining would become a large-scale industry conducted by multinational corporations. Hardrock mining (gold, silver, and copper) leaves massive scars on the land and pollutes ground and surface water, impacting the health of the land, watershed, wildlife, vegetation and humans. Infrastructure and roads add further damage to natural areas. Energy and mineral exploration and extraction have many harmful impacts in addition to releasing carbon and contributing to greenhouse gas emissions. Even to this day, mining waste is allowed to be dumped directly into lakes and rivers. Companies are allowed to extract mineral resources from public lands without compensation for the resources removed — billions of dollars going into industry pockets, leaving a wasteland in their wake. Though legislation has been introduced to reform the 1872 Mining Law, none has seen success.

Use of public lands

Nearly 40% of all U.S. public lands are overseen by the Bureau of Land Management, whose mission is to manage public lands for multiple use and sustained yield — a mandate that includes conservation. Yet 90% of the lands managed by the agency are open to extraction and other commodity-driven development.

25% of the greenhouse gases emitted by the U.S. come from fossil fuel extraction on public lands. 40% of all U.S. coal is mined on public lands. While forests, marshes, and coastal wetlands act as “carbon sinks” (capturing carbon through photosynthesis and locking it up in deep soils), fossil fuel production on U.S. public lands introduces roughly 4.5 times the carbon into the atmosphere than the lands can capture. From 2017 to 2020 alone, nearly ten million additional acres of public land has been leased for new extraction — an area larger than the state of Maryland.

Soil degradation

Soil degradation in the U.S. occurs for several reasons. The most widespread of these are soil erosion and loss of soil organic matter. However, overgrazing, salinization, acidification and soil contamination are also growing factors. Commercial industrial livestock grazing compacts and erodes soil and destroys biological soil crust. It also consumes and damages natural water resources, destroys the native plants upon which wildlife depend, spreads invasive species, and damages cultural resources.

Commercial livestock grazing impacts more total acreage, across a wider array of landscapes, than any other permitted use of public lands. When ranked relative to the world's worst emitting countries, America's public lands rank as the fifth largest carbon emitter in the world. Great Old Broads for Wilderness estimates that more than \$100 million a year is spent on direct federal subsidies for livestock grazing.

Solutions

- Conserve, connect, and restore at least 30% of land, water and ocean in protected areas by

2030 to avoid massive species loss, secure equitable access to nature's benefits, and prevent and repair the impacts of the climate crisis for all communities. Ensure at least 40% of investments are made in communities of color and frontline communities that have historically seen little to no investment in conservation and equitable access to nature.

- Support increased opportunities for co-management and co-stewardship of public lands with Tribes, Native Hawaiians, Alaska Natives and territorial governments.
- Use the Antiquities Act and other authorities to protect ecologically and culturally important areas.
- Conserve old and mature forests via rule-making and enforcement.
- Reform outdated mining laws and regulations, and increase the funding of enforcement agencies.
- Provide funding for local and regional farmers who are regenerating the land and growing food with natural methods. Stop subsidies to the largest corporate landowners who are growing monocultures, degrading the lands, not restoring them and reaping huge profits.
- Funding for education and skills training for young people to become regenerative farmers and foresters.
- Implementing the study of ecosystem services into the school curriculum, so the students grow up understanding and learn to become stewards of the land.
- Support school gardens in all public schools as a STEM program.
- Although livestock grazing is allowed on wilderness lands under the Wilderness Act, livestock grazing should be eliminated in designated wilderness areas. Further changes must be made in our industrial livestock production to stop the deforestation and biodiversity loss it causes.
- Provide subsidies to regenerative farmers who use their cattle to restore the land in the same manner as when the bison roamed, and not to the factory cattle farms that crowd thousands of cows into small gated spaces creating both environmental and health problems.
- Public land managers should strictly enforce compliance with the federal Roadless Area Conservation Rule (RACR), Wilderness Act and all laws, regulations and policies for roads and routes on public lands. Stop exemptions from the RACR, and allow the few remaining roadless areas to persist without roads to protect habitat connectivity and carbon sequestration.

Goal 16 Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

Goal 16 is often called up by the U.S. in relation to their criticisms of other countries, without addressing honestly the distance between this Goal and the realities of U.S. society at this time.

16.1 Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere

16.2 End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children

16.3 Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all

16.5 Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms

16.6 Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels

16.7 Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels

Problems

U.S. elections

The wealthiest people and their corporations have far more influence over U.S. elections than the majority of the population. U.S. billionaires collectively spent \$1 billion on the 2022 midterm elections, according to research by Americans for Tax Fairness. That total represents a 72% increase over the 2018 midterms and a 3,000% increase since the midterms in 2010, just before the Supreme Court's *Citizens United* decision opened the floodgates for big money in politics. Only 15 billionaires generated almost two-thirds of all billionaire contributions to the 2022 midterm campaigns. This is not conducive to participatory and representative decision-making.

Corruption and bribery

In the U.S. we have legal corruption through lobbying, which enables corporations to spend hundreds of millions of dollars lobbying elected officials at federal and state levels for or against legislation that will affect their ability to make more profit. Fossil fuel corporate lobbyists advocate against pro-environmental protection legislation and for tax breaks. The insurance industry, pharmaceutical companies, big agricultural corporations and the military defense industry have the largest staffs of lobbyists.

Under the former NAFTA and subsequent U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement, large corporations can sue governments at any level that pass environmental or health and safety-related laws that may impinge on their profits. In the first quarter of 2021, the oil corporations in California alone spent more than \$4.3 million on lobbying, a significant portion of it to oppose legislation that would bolster the state's progress toward reducing greenhouse gas emissions, impose tighter regulations for industrial accidents and ensure justice for communities most impacted by pollution and climate

change. This interferes with the pursuit of SDG implementation in the U.S. and is one of the reasons most people in the U.S. have still never even heard of the 2030 SDGs.

In California, the lobbying efforts of oil companies derailed a bill that would have banned any more “fracking” and other forms of oil recovery that involve injecting highly pressurized water or steam and toxic chemical into wells to extract oil and natural gas. That bill would also have mandated physical distances of 2,500 feet between oil and gas operations and places such as homes or schools, a distance based on studies showing a correlation between proximity of the operation and poor health outcomes, including cancers, respiratory ailments and low birth weight in infants.

Big corporations don’t have restrictions on profits and with staffs of attorneys, they receive tax breaks and can engage in price increases with impunity while those most affected by their policies do not have the resources to oppose them. In 2022, the top five oil companies garnered \$35 billion dollars in profit and paid little in taxes, while gas prices rose to over \$6 per gallon and families struggled throughout the country often having to choose between gas money to get to work or food for their families. Corporate media cooperates by repeating the misinformation that this inflation is caused by foreign nations, when it was the extreme jump in the profits of major corporations raising the price of essential goods, not out of necessity but because they could.

Protection from violence

The population of the United States lives with violence all around them. Between January 1 and May 30, 2023, 263 mass shootings were reported in the U.S.; 327 victims were killed.

Domestic violence is now the third leading cause of homelessness among families, and every year, more than 3 million children witness domestic violence in their homes. On average, more than three women and one man are murdered by their intimate partners in this country every day.

U.S. law enforcement killed at least 1,176 people (about 100 people a month, or 3 people a day) in 2022 according to a report from the nonprofit Mapping Police Violence, making it the deadliest year on record for police violence since 2013 when experts first started tracking the killings nationwide. In 2022, 132 killings (11%) were cases in which no offense was alleged; 104 cases (9%) were mental health or welfare checks; 98 (8%) involved traffic violations; and 207 (18%) involved other allegations of nonviolent offenses. There were also 93 cases (8%) involving claims of a domestic disturbance and 128 (11%) where the person was allegedly seen with a weapon. Only 370 (31%) involved a potentially more serious situation, with an alleged violent crime. The numbers have increased each year, despite the massive protests after the killing of George Floyd calling for racial justice, police accountability and reductions in the funding and size of police force.

Without the social, economic and environmental transformations that the 2030 SDGs call for, survival becomes more difficult for U.S. working class people, with less hope for betterment. Conflict between races, ethnic groups and religious groups are promulgated by extremist groups reinforcing and creating disunity among the non-wealthy in the country, leading to increased violence.

Justice system

The criminal justice system is structurally biased against poor people and people of color in U.S. communities with regard to law enforcement, the laws written and sentences assigned. Low-income and working people cannot afford legal counsel equal to the representation the wealthy can afford,

making those who are financially well-off more likely to receive reduced or no charges.

The U.S. has the highest percentage of prisoners in the world. Over seven million people are in its correctional system, nearly all are low income, black or Hispanic. The U.S. rate of incarceration is five to ten times higher than the rates in Western Europe and other developed countries. Nearly one out of every 100 adults is in prison or jail. Pretrial detention of Americans has increased 433% since 1971. More than 94% of U.S. convictions are obtained through plea bargains by low-income people who cannot afford private attorneys.

Blacks make up 40% of the incarcerated population in the U.S., while representing only 13% of the population. The 13th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution abolished slavery but also says “except as punishment for a crime.” This clause has allowed prison labor to flourish into a billion-dollar profit-making “prison-industrial complex;” it is a form of involuntary servitude.

800,000 prisoner-workers toil for mere pennies an hour. Both government entities and private corporations contract prison labor to manufacture all manner of office furniture, mattresses, license plates, dentures, eye glasses, traffic signs, athletic equipment, uniforms, packaging and more. Prisoner-workers cultivate and harvest crops, do welding, carpentry and work in meat and poultry processing plants. Companies and government entities that contract prison labor make such a high profit margin that they ultimately undercut prices of businesses on the “outside,” forcing many into bankruptcy and jeopardizing the livelihoods of thousands in surrounding communities.

Migrant detention centers

The United States has failed to protect the rights to life, personal integrity and health of the migrants who are detained in the over 147 migrant prison centers currently in operation in the United States.

La Resistencia, a grassroots organization in Washington State, has been organizing for over eight years in support of the rights of the immigrants being held in the Northwest Detention Center (NWDC), a private for-profit prison in Tacoma, Washington, and have called for its closure. They report that instead of reinforcing protections for immigrants in detention according to international recommendations, all avenues for releases have been severely curtailed, and detention conditions continue to worsen. Recently the Supreme Court decided that the federal immigration statute does not require bond hearings, regardless of how long proceedings take, severely limiting the right to seek releases. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) recommendations are ignored by the GEO Group Inc. (one of the country’s largest private prison operators), U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and the U.S. government. They further report that the U.S. has increased the number of people detained at migrant detention centers, including the NWDC. As of August 13, 2022, 576,594 total immigrants have been detained cumulatively since March 14, 2020. ICE holds approximately 26,142 people in ICE detention, 68.2% of whom have no criminal record, and many more have only minor offenses, including traffic violations.

In addition to detention conditions at the NWDC related to COVID, hunger strikes, imprisonment, unethical solitary confinement, transfers and deportations, in May of 2023 the University of Washington Center for Human Rights released a report titled “Calls to nowhere: Reports of sexual abuse and assault go unanswered at the NWDC,” exposing the endemic and harmful conditions in detention sites in spite of multiple guidelines to prevent and address sexual assault while in detention. Even after receiving the recommendations from the United Nations, the IACHR and from the University of Washington Center for Human Rights report on solitary confinement, testimonies

document that inhumane solitary confinement continues to be used.

These conditions in the 147 U.S. immigration detention centers receive no media attention, with the exception of occasional sensational stories that reach the media, leaving most people in the U.S. barely aware that these centers exist.

Solutions

- Cancel laws and policies that generate mass incarceration, overwhelmingly affecting the poor and people of color. End the policy of collusion between the public and private sectors that operate U.S. prisons for profit through exploitation of prison labor – end this modern-day form of slavery forever.
- Repeal the *Citizens United* decision, ban lobbying, reaffirm the constitutional right to petition and encourage face-to-face town hall meetings in all communities for all elected officials.
- Federal and State commitment to fully fund in every county or jurisdiction Public Defenders’ offices with sufficient staff and attorneys to provide every defendant case with thorough representation, and eliminate the pressure to plea bargain for reduction of more serious charges.
- Close all private and for-profit prison centers and private immigration detention centers, and establish “non-custodial and community-based” alternatives to immigration detention and remove economic barriers to diversion programs and pretrial services.
- On a federal level, a pathway to citizenship for all undocumented immigrants and an end to immigration detention.
- Strengthen and enforce child labor laws, provide quality education to all children and carry out Goals 1 and 2 to end their poverty.

Goal 17 Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

This important Goal addresses the international cooperation, solidarity between nations and the sharing of resources needed to make the other 16 Goals possible. It has 19 targets in the categories of Finance of official development assistance commitments; Technology; Capacity-building; Trade; and systemic issues such as “Enhance the global partnership for sustainable development, complemented by multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources, to support the achievement of the sustainable development goals in all countries, in particular developing countries” and “Encourage and promote effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships.”

The Solutions are right there

In this interdependent world, improved U.S. cooperation with other nations on global agreements related to climate change and sustainable development is imperative for the achievement of both sustainable development and peace. The U.S. could provide positive world leadership by implementing all 17 Goals at home, beginning with a massive national public education campaign to promote the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and provide support for all states to form SDG Councils with stakeholders from all aspects of civil society involved.

The U.S. could demonstrate integrity by fully honoring its international agreements such as the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and meeting its Official Development Aid (ODA) commitments, without onerous strings. Respect for the U.S. will also greatly increase when it ends the illegal (by international law) unilateral economic and financial sanctions it has imposed on numerous countries in Latin America, Asia and Africa which holds them back from fully achieving these Sustainable Development Goals in their countries.

The United States spent \$877 billion on its military in 2022, nearly 40% of the global total, ten times more than Russia (\$86.4 billion), and three times more than China (\$292 billion). The U.S. military budget is larger than the next ten largest national military budgets combined. More than half the nation's federal budget is for the military. If even half of this figure was spent, instead, on fulfilling our obligations in the Climate Change Paris Accord and in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in the U.S., we would have a much surer chance in achieving a sustainable world and international peace and cooperation before it is too late rather than through the current approach.

In our work promoting voluntary service and action and assisting nongovernmental grassroots organizations across the country that are striving to build systemic solutions to the economic, social and environmental problems their communities face, Commission on Voluntary Service & Action approaches Goal 17 through the framework of building alliances and partnerships with other nongovernmental organizations, educational institutions, faith-based groups and business associations on the domestic level as well as internationally, in order to mobilize people into action across the country to demand government at all levels embrace the 2030 SDGs and prioritize establishing the mechanisms and funding prioritization consistent with achievement of each of these Goals.

CVSA hopes that our work and the work of the hundreds of volunteer-based organizations represented in this report provides an inspiration to those in government to take the necessary actions towards full implementation of the 2030 SDGs while we continue our educational campaign to mobilize the People of the U.S. to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

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Organizations whose work inspired this report and contributed to its content:

Akwesasne Freedom School, Rooseveltown, New York www.foafs.org

A non-government funded, Mohawk immersion school serving all the Mohawk communities in order to preserve their native language and culture.

Appalachian Voices, Boon, North Carolina www.appvoices.org
Appalachian Voices brings people together to protect the land, air and water of Central and Southern Appalachia and advance a just transition to a generative and equitable clean energy economy.

Black Women for Wellness, Los Angeles, California <https://bwwla.org>
Provides health education on strategies to prevent illness and to maintain and restore health, increase accessible, appropriate and affordable health services that positively impact health outcomes for Black women and girls.

Camphill Communities of North America www.camphill.org
A worldwide social initiative that creates communities designed to include people with and without intellectual disabilities. They strive to empower people to grow, learn, and achieve together.

Community Help in Park Slope, Inc. (CHiPS), Brooklyn, New York www.chipsonline.org
A community-based soup kitchen and shelter, run by a community of Brooklyn neighbors and volunteers.

Environmental Justice Clinic, University of Miami School of Law, Miami, Florida
www.law.miami.edu/academics/experiential-learning
An immersive program to build transferable lawyering skills while providing critical legal services to underserved clients and communities.

Faith In Action Alabama, Birmingham, Alabama www.faithinactionalabama.org
To help members of historically marginalized communities realize their power in public life, they bring people together from different faiths, races, economic circumstances, and ZIP codes to dismantle systemic racism to create pathways of opportunities for all Alabamians, and to end systems of oppression as they promote equality and inclusion.

First Friends of New Jersey and New York, Kearny, New Jersey www.firstfriendsnjny.org
Connects immigrants who are impacted by the immigration enforcement system with volunteers dedicated to helping them survive detention, gain freedom and rebuild their lives.

Great Old Broads for Wilderness, Durango, Colorado www.greatoldbroads.org
A women-led national grassroots organization that engages and inspires activism to preserve and protect wilderness and wild lands.

Grid Alternatives, Oakland, California www.gridalternatives.org
A nonprofit dedicated to building community-powered solutions to advance economic and environmental justice through renewable energy.

Hour Children, Queens, New York <https://hourchildren.org>
Provides services to incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women and their children in New York State.

Huerta del Valle, Ontario, California www.huertadelvalle.org
A non-profit grassroots organization managing a network of urban farms and community gardens,

works for an equitable food system.

Inclusiv (formerly the National Federation of Community Development Credit Unions), New York, New York www.inclusiv.org
Helps low- and moderate-income people and communities achieve financial independence through credit unions.

La Casa de Don Pedro, Newark, New Jersey <http://www.lacasanwk.org>
Serving Newark's Latino communities to provide resources that address the social determinants of health: housing, social support, economic stability, food and nutrition and access to health care.

La Resistencia, Tacoma, Washington www.laresistencianw.org
La Resistencia is a grassroots organization led by undocumented immigrants and people of color working to end the detention of immigrants and stop deportations.

Mahwah Environmental Volunteers Organization, Inc. (MEVO) , Mahwah, New Jersey
www.mevo.org
Helps communities create social change, create scalable ecological solutions that inspire and empower people to take action.

Miami Waterkeeper, Miami, Florida www.miamiwaterkeeper.org
A nonprofit organization that advocates for South Florida's watershed and wildlife.

National Family Farms Coalition, Washington, DC www.nffc.net
Represents family farmers, ranchers, fishers and advocacy organizations across the U.S.

NYC Fair Trade Coalition, New York, New York www.nycftc.com
Promotes fair trade businesses and retailers in New York City and educates consumers on the importance of fair trade.

Part of the Solution (POTS), Bronx, New York www.potsbronx.org
Fights poverty and hunger with programs that meet immediate needs and offer long-term comprehensive services.

P.E.E.R. Group, Miami, Florida <https://the-peer-group.org>
Works closely with community members and organizations to advance sustainable development and municipal equity.

Remote Area Medical (RAM)-USA, Rockford, Tennessee <https://www.ramusa.org>
Serves to prevent pain and alleviate suffering by providing free quality health care to those in need.

Silver Valley Community Resource Center, Kellogg, Idaho www.silvervalleyaction.org
A grassroots non-profit organization formed to bring environmental justice to people of the Silver Valley and downstream.

Surfrider Foundation, San Clemente, California www.surfrider.org
Dedicated to protecting the world's oceans, waves, and beaches for all people, through a network of

chapters whose volunteers serve as the first response to local threats in coastal communities across the U.S.

SAVe - Sustainability in AV, Altadena, California www.saveav.org

The first industrywide U.S.-based nonprofit formed to bring stakeholders in the audio-visual (AV) field together to take concerted action to achieve the 2030 SDGs.

Union Station Homeless Services, Pasadena, California www.unionstationhs.org

Works to help rebuild lives of individuals and families in San Gabriel Valley area with the goal of ending homelessness.

Water Insecurity Correction Coalition, Inc. (WICC), New York State www.yeswicc.com

Advocates for and directly aids residents of water-insecure communities, to ensure equitable access to clean water for people across the U.S.

Women Graduates-USA, Chapters nationwide www.wg-usa.org

Advocates for long-term solutions that achieve gender equity and support self-determination for women and girls in all stages of life, education, or career status, in the U.S. and the world.

Women's Lunch Place, Boston, Massachusetts www.womenslunchplace.org

Provides a safe, welcoming day-shelter community, providing nutritious food and individualized services for women experiencing homelessness or poverty.

Yes We Can Peacebuilders, Morro Bay, California www.yeswecanpeacebuilders.org

Dedicated to building a culture of peace, fostering respect for all individuals and collaborating to eliminate poverty, homelessness, racial and sexual discrimination, war and environmental degradation.

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