

## *Research Report*

COMMITTEE : ILO 1

ISSUE : Implementing a framework for work practices in order to reduce companies' environmental impact.

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# ***IMPLEMENTING A FRAMEWORK FOR WORK PRACTICES IN ORDER TO REDUCE COMPANIES' ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT.***

## **INTRODUCTION**

Today, companies are at the heart of the economy and a significant proportion of workers are employed by them. Although companies have the benefit of offering people the opportunity to work as well as distributing goods and services around the world, their environmental impact is not exactly close to zero and it has to change.

In the light of the past decades, the perceivable, accelerating deterioration of our environment has become a global issue that makes our future look grim if unresolved, and many companies have proven to be major actors in this deterioration. Whether it's because of their 24h energy consumption, extensive use of paper, poor waste management or even the pollution caused by their production of goods, they affect our planet in sometimes unimaginably negative ways.

Thus, it's essential that companies obey certain laws in order to limit their negative impacts on the environment. It goes without saying that these must be implemented as fast as possible. But what are the solutions? How can we ensure they're respected? A globally important task arises, one we must achieve: implementing a framework for practices in order to reduce companies' environmental impacts.

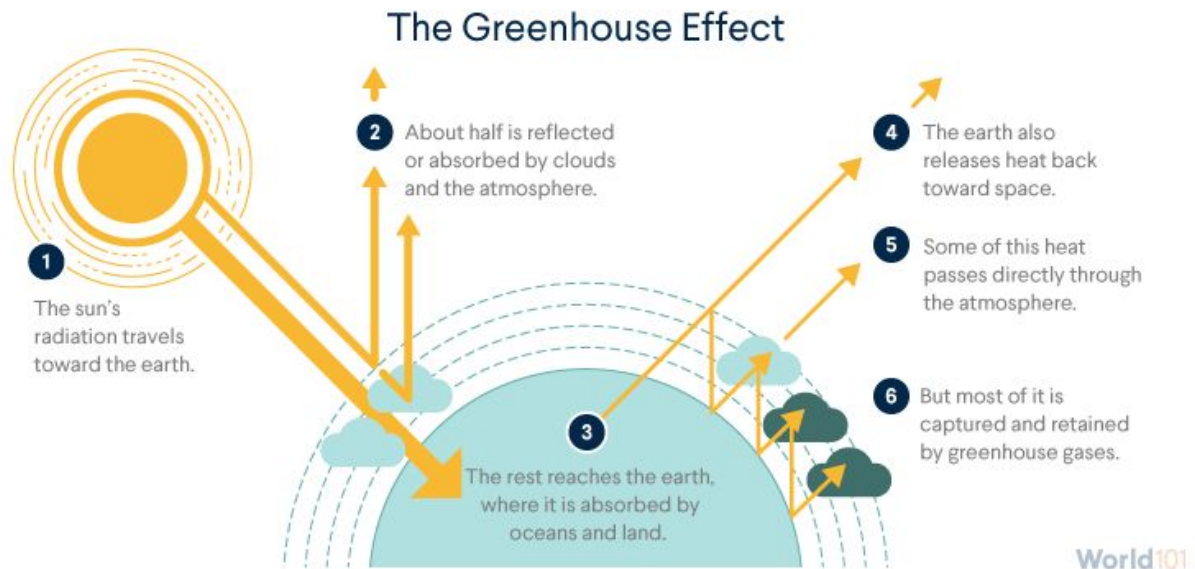
## **KEY WORDS**

**Framework** : a system of rules, ideas, or beliefs that is used to plan, decide and limit something.

**Environmental impact** : the effect that activities of the population and businesses have on the environment.

**Global warming** : a gradual increase in the overall temperature of the earth's atmosphere generally attributed to the greenhouse effect.

**Greenhouse effect** : an increase in the amount of carbon dioxide and other gases in the atmosphere that is believed to be the cause of a gradual warming of earth's surface.



**Company** : Agricultural, commercial or industrial business, run by a person, private in order to produce property or services for the market.

**CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility)** : refers to the taking into account by companies, on a voluntary basis, of social and ethical issues in their activities.

**ILO (International Labour Organization)** : ILO brings together representatives of governments, employers and workers from 187 member States to establish a dialogue aimed at promoting decent work for all men and women in the world. The main objectives of the ILO are to promote rights at work, encourage the creation of decent jobs, develop social protection and strengthen social dialogue in the field of work.

## OVERVIEW

### ENVIRONMENT

When it comes to business, many companies value profit in production over respect for the environment. For example, Coca-Cola, the fifth most valued company in the world, used 3 million tons of plastic packaging in 2019. The amount of plastic this company uses has terrible consequences for the environment. According to Break Free from Plastic and Greenpeace, Coca-Cola is the most prolific producer of plastic rubbish ending up in the ocean. Since this rubbish sends plastic particles into the food chain, many marine mammals end up dying from intoxication every year. The World Wide Fund for nature (WWF) estimated that 100,000 marine mammals die every year as a result of plastic pollution.

In addition to plastic waste, nuclear waste is one more problem to be aware of. The total mass of nuclear waste in the US is estimated at more than 90,000 metric tons, and it remains dangerously radioactive for thousands of years. Although the waste is usually disposed of properly, it remains a threat if handled poorly by wreckless companies and isn't sustainable if the quantity continues to increase.

Another major issue concerning the environment is deforestation. According to the statistics we have on all the land that has been shaved through this process annually, it is estimated that the equivalent of one football field of trees is cut down every 6 seconds. Private and public companies are the main actors of deforestation in the world. Nonetheless, reports find that 70% of 1,500 companies with impact on forests fail to provide data on it. Major brands like Dominos, Mondelez, Next and Sports Direct feature among the 70% that didn't disclose in 2018. Of the 306 that recorded their data, 24% are showing no or limited action to reduce deforestation. The tropics lost 11.9 million hectares of tree cover in 2019, and there's no real sign of it stopping any time soon as businesses continue to cut down forests at an alarming rate.

The companies that are the most harmful to the environment remain the ones based on fossil-fuel extraction. Oil and gas are the biggest contributors to the escalation of carbon compounds in our planet's biosphere: they amount to over 18.04 billion tons of carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere, equivalent to 55% of the total amount. On the other hand, coal is responsible for the remaining 45% of total emissions, amounting to 14.76 billion tons of carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere. As the fossil-fuel extracting companies' profits' generally continue to rise every year, so does the total emissions, and therefore the global temperature.

## **ECONOMY**

The economy is tightly linked to the environment. The Earth provides us with the resources that are essential to production, and therefore essential to the economy. Sadly, the environment also acts as a sink for all of the waste created by companies.

According to a report published by the Carbon Disclosure Project with the Climate Accountability Institute in 2017, only 100 companies are responsible for 71% of greenhouse gas emissions since 1988. Most of these companies are fossil fuel ones, such as BP, Chevron or Shell. These companies are not only dangerous to the environment, but according to the International Monetary Fund, in 2015, 6.5% of the world GDP was spent in subsidizing fossil fuel companies. This means that fossil fuel companies can also be a burden to the economy. This idea becomes more apparent in the current climate of the Coronavirus pandemic. A new report published by the International Energy Agency, states that there is a plunge in the demand for fossil fuel energies, especially coal, oil and gas. This plunge will later on trigger a collapse on the demand for energy that fossil fuels will not be able to answer. This, added to the rise of renewable energy means that clean electricity will play a major role in this year's global energy system.

The demand in energy is not the only aspect of the economy the Coronavirus pandemic has impacted. The virus, for which no vaccine has yet been fully developed, pushed most of the world into a lockdown, which presented great challenges for the economy. As a matter of fact, ILO estimates from June 2020 show that working hour losses during the second quarter of

2020, compared to the last quarter of 2019, reached 14,0 % worldwide, the equivalent of 400 million full-time jobs. Even though actions have been taken to reduce the impact of the pandemic, there is still so much left to do in order to restore the economy and regain a more “normal” way of life. It is of vital importance to keep in mind the environmental impact of our actions on our way to recovery.

## **MAIN INTERNATIONAL ACTORS**

### **UNITED NATIONS**



The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is the leading environmental authority in the United Nations system. UNEP uses its expertise to strengthen environmental standards and practices while helping implement environmental obligations at the country, regional and global levels. UNEP was founded in 1972 by Maurice Strong following the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (Stockholm Conference).

UNEP re-organised its work programme into six strategic areas :

1. Climate change UNEP
2. Post-conflict and disaster management UNEP
3. Ecosystem management
4. Environmental governance UNEP
5. Harmful substances UNEP
6. Resource efficiency / sustainable consumption and production UNEP

### **GOOGLE**

Google's electricity consumption was 5.7 terawatt-hours in 2015, equivalent to the consumption of the city of San Francisco in the same year. This is why Alphabet, the company's headquarters, has been aiming since 2010 to limit its environmental impact by purchasing the equivalent of all of its renewable energy needs. By entering into long-term agreements (called “power purchase contracts”) with promoters of renewable energy projects, the company's objective was to achieve carbon neutrality while supporting suppliers of green energy. So far, Google has signed contracts with around 20 solar and wind farms in different regions of the world. One of its latest operations, for example, resulted in the construction of a 120-megawatt solar power plant in the city of Albany in southeast Georgia. But in fact, this does not mean that the company operates exclusively with green energies, and that it is able to supply its services directly from them.

### **COP21**



COP21 is the 21st Conference of the Parties (COP) to the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, bringing together 195 States and the European Union. It was held from November 30 to December 11, 2015 at Paris-Le Bourget (93), under French presidency. States committed to finding a new international agreement in 2015 to contain global warming below 2 ° C: this is the purpose of COP21. On December 12, 2015, the COP21 was concluded on a first agreement, the Paris Agreement, which provides for limiting the temperature increase to 2 ° or even to move towards the objective of 1.5 ° compared to what it was in the pre-industrial era. The text takes into account the needs and resources of the signatory countries.

The Agreement contains :

- commitments from each country to reduce GHGs
- rules to control the efforts made
- solutions to sustainably finance the fight and adaptation to climate change in developing countries (Green Climate Fund: \$ 100 billion per year from 2020).
- a solutions agenda bringing together the initiatives of non-governmental actors

## NORWAY

As part of its development assistance, Norway is devoting significant resources to international work to curb deforestation and reduce the discharges it causes. No project including the felling of trees, however profitable, can be signed.

And the country does not stop there: it is also eliminating the import of palm oil and soybeans, two products with catastrophic environmental impact. Norway is also currently considering the idea of only offering electric vehicles for sale by 2025. It acts beyond its borders, as at the COP21, the environmental summit held in Paris at the end of November 2015, where it paid 100,000 euros to Brazil to help it fight against deforestation.

## SWITZERLAND

Switzerland's environmental impact per person has decreased by 19% in 20 years, according to a study by the Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN), but it is still 3 times larger than what the planet can endure. In 2017, the Swiss people approved a revised energy law. In the area of housing, renouncing fossil fuels for heating, improving insulation, optimizing the use of energy



and reducing the living space per person are effective measures. Transport is not left out. To ensure that the increase in traffic does not negate the impact of technological advances, there should be a faster shift to lighter, more efficient vehicles with electric motors. The measures already in place are certainly making remarkable contributions, but are not enough to reduce the overall environmental impact by two thirds, as would be necessary. In the area of greenhouse gas emissions, it would be necessary to go much further than current efforts.

## **TIMELINE**

### **03/03/1899**

This date marks the creation of the first environmental statute, which is the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1899, which has been largely superseded by the Clean Water Act (CWA). The Act makes it a misdemeanor to discharge refuse matter of any kind into the navigable waters, or tributaries thereof, of the United States without a permit. Although most current environmental statutes were passed in the time spanning the late 1960s through the early 1980s, the Rivers and Harbors Act sent a message to companies: they must start regulating their business activities so as to limit as much as possible their negative environmental impact.

### **16/09/1985**

In 1985 in Canada, the United Nations created the Montreal Protocol. The Montreal Protocol is an international treaty designed to protect the ozone layer by phasing out the production of numerous substances that are responsible for ozone depletion. It was signed by 197 countries, marking it as the first treaty in the history of the United Nations to achieve universal ratification, and is considered by many the most successful environmental global action. As a result of the international agreement, the ozone hole in Antarctica is slowly recovering. Climate projections indicate that the ozone layer will return to 1980 levels between 2050 and 2070. Due to its widespread adoption and implementation it has been hailed as an example of exceptional international co-operation, with Kofi Annan quoted as saying that "perhaps the single most successful international agreement to date has been the Montreal Protocol". Because companies around the world followed international cooperation, it was a big step forward into adopting a proper framework for eco-friendly work practices.

### **01/06/2017**

On June 1, 2017, United States President Donald Trump announced that the U.S. would cease all participation in the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change mitigation, and begin negotiations to re-enter the agreement "on terms that are fair to the United States, its businesses, its workers, its people, its taxpayers," or form a new agreement. In withdrawing from the agreement, Trump stated that "The Paris accord will undermine (the U.S.) economy," and "puts (the U.S.) at a permanent disadvantage." Sadly, this withdrawal from the Paris agreement from the n°1 economic power in the world really hinders the efforts in implementing environmentally respectful work practices in companies at a global scale. We must hope the US reconsiders this decision and rejoins the accord in the future.

### **25/07/2020**

The operator of MV Wakashio, a Japanese bulk carrier, apologized on Sunday 25th of July for a major oil leak caused after it ran aground in Mauritius, triggering an environmental emergency and ecological disaster that has authorities racing to contain the spill. The Japanese-owned but

Panamanian-flagged ship was on its way to Brazil from China carrying close to 4,000 tons of fuel when it struck the reef on Mauritius' southeast coast on July 25, causing fuel to leak from the cracked vessel. Some 1,000 tons of oil is estimated to have leaked from the ship and around 500 tons of oil has been recovered, but there are still 2,500 tons remaining on the vessel. "We apologize profusely and deeply for the great trouble we have caused," Akihiko Ono, executive vice president of Mitsui OSK Lines, said at a news conference in Tokyo. Mitsui OSK Lines said that the company would "do everything in their power to resolve the issue." Although this ship's accident was a major ecological catastrophe, it serves as a wake up call to companies around the world (especially those based on fossil-fuel extraction and transportation) to focus their efforts in putting a stop to their regularly disastrous actions on the environment and their generally negative impact on it.

## RELEVANT UN TREATIES AND EVENTS

**01/06/2007**

In the 96th Session of the International Labour Conference the Report VI "The promotion of sustainable enterprises" was written. This report recognizes the key role that enterprises take in sustainable development and in the economy of the world. On the basis of decent work perspective this report aims to deepen the contribution of the private sector to a more productive and equitable economic employment growth.

**25/09/2015**

On September 25th 2015 all UN member states adopted 17 Sustainable Developments Goals (SDG) as part of the Agenda for Sustainable Development. These goals aim to end all poverty and hunger, reduce inequality as well as protect our planet and, overall improve the lives of everyone. The eighth goal reads, "Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all". It is directly related with the work ILO does, which includes promoting jobs and enterprise as well as guaranteeing rights at work. Decent work is essential to promote a sustainable way of economic growth. Enterprises must find a way to guarantee all of their workers' rights while being respectful towards the environment.

**02/02/2016**

The Guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all act as a tool for countries to achieve their Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDC), which are reductions of greenhouse gas emissions defined in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), as well as to accomplish the 2030 Sustainable Development

**22/04/2016**

On Earth day, 2016 175 countries signed the Paris agreement in the UN New York Headquarters. This was the first time so many countries signed an international agreement in one day. The document was drafted in the 21st Conference of the Parties in Paris, in 2015. This is a historic accord in which world leaders agreed to fight climate change and curb its effect, as well as to

speed up the necessary actions to attain a sustainable and low-emissions future. The Paris agreement gathers every nation in the world and emphasizes the fact that developing countries will need more support in order to face climate change

## POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

One of the major factors in climate change is greenhouse gases. To a certain extent, these gases are natural and essential for making the Earth habitable. However, since the Industrial Revolution the emission of these gases has grown exponentially and represents a danger to humanity. According to the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), in 2018 emissions reached record levels, carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) increased by 147%, methane (CH<sub>4</sub>) by 259%, and nitrous oxide (N<sub>2</sub>O) by 123%. Oil companies as well as the livestock industry are responsible for a large part of these emissions. To curb this, states could implement greenhouse gas "quotas" so that companies are forced to change their operations and reduce their impact. Such a system is in place in the European Union. Each company has "free" carbon emissions, but if they were to emit more they would have to pay for new credits or face a financial penalty. Companies that do not complete their quotas can sell the rest of their emissions to other companies. This creates a "carbon market" that stimulates the economy and trade, without threatening the jobs of company workers.

In order to reduce the environmental impact of companies, it is essential to take action between companies, states and workers. Firstly, programmes can be implemented with the aim of developing the skills of current employees so that they can adapt to changes in their jobs. In addition, it is inevitable that new jobs will be created when a greener economy is passed. These jobs must be fair, decent and inclusive and today's youth must be trained to take them on.

Finally, companies could create a department to monitor the impact of their actions on the environment and try to reduce it as much as possible. They could also educate company employees on how to reduce their environmental impact in the workplace

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