

# SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY TOPICS OF THE 21ST CENTURY: STUDENT COMMITTEE JOURNAL



***COTTON FIELDS***

BY: ADITYA MADUPUR

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# FOREWORD

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**FAIR LABOR**  
ASSOCIATION

The Fair Labor Association (FLA) has approximately 150 affiliated colleges and universities across North America. Students are an essential part of this relationship because on campuses everywhere, they are some of the most passionate and vocal defenders of workers' rights. The FLA Student Committee is a platform to offer students enrolled at affiliated colleges and universities an opportunity to learn about social responsibility and connect with others who share similar interests. This year, select student committee members chose to write articles about social responsibility and human rights. This collection of their articles is the inaugural issue of the Student Committee Journal. The FLA is excited to provide a platform through which students may share their ideas and opinions about protecting and promoting workers' rights. Share your feedback and questions with the FLA at [services@fairlabor.org](mailto:services@fairlabor.org).

## **Disclaimer**

The views expressed in the Student Committee Journal are those of the students writing in their personal capacities, and the writers stand by the accuracy of their submissions. Opinions expressed in the articles are the authors' own and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Fair Labor Association or the academic institutions where the students are enrolled.

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# INDIAN FARM REFORM

BY: ANIKA BAJPAI

Since late November 2020, tens of thousands of smallholder farmers have been protesting on the streets of India's capital. These protests have escalated with clashes between police and protesters turning violent, the storming of Delhi's iconic Red Fort, and the state-mandated censorship of protesters and journalists. At its core, farmers are sending a simple message to their government: listen to our concerns.

Through highway blockades, nationwide union strikes, and a global social media campaign, these farmers are pressuring Delhi to repeal a series of agricultural reforms passed earlier in the year. These reforms [aim to liberalize the industry](#) by modifying long-standing rules regarding the sale, prices, and storage of produce. These reforms include many pro-business provisions, including the option to enter predetermined contracts with corporations. However, these changes come at the expense of price protections that smallholder farmers have depended on for decades. Farmers worry that their livelihoods will not be able to survive in this new ecosystem.

Economic liberalization and privatization are larger goals of India's Prime Minister, Narendra Modi. Historically, this political effort has received bipartisan and foreign support. This philosophy contrasts India's protectionist policies that were in place for the latter half of the 20th century. During its colonial period, India experienced waves of famines and food shortages that killed millions of people. After these experiences, in the latter half of the 20th century, India's newly independent government invested heavily into agriculture methods later developed during the Green Revolution. These strides led to a surplus of crops, with production accounting for [42 percent of GDP at times](#). The previous agricultural system— supported by the protesters—is a product of this time.

This system protected farmers from market forces by creating a regulated middle market that ensured a degree of price stability. Farmers would bring their harvest to wholesale markets, *mandis*, which then sold to traders at open auction or at a government-set price, also known as a Minimum Support Price

(MSP) depending on the crop. [A regulated number of crops would be stored and the remainder would be sold in a secondary market.](#) MSPs serve as an indicator for the market standard, working to ensure that farmers receive fair prices. While different states in India have variations of this system, millions of farmers still depend on it for their livelihood.

It is not surprising that many farmers are apprehensive about these new policies. In the state of Bihar, where similar laws were put into place in 2006, middle-market sales centers [declined by 87%](#). These free-market reforms in Bihar have caused tangible harm to their farmers. Last year, farmers in Bihar sold their rice at the open market rate of \$16 for 100kg, while farmers in Punjab were able to sell their rice at the government-mandated price of \$25 for 100 kg.

These new reforms come in the form of three acts: [The first creates unregulated trade spaces out of the regulated Mandis.](#) The second lays out a framework for farmers to enter direct contractual relationships with businesses. The third eliminates the previous storage limits set by the government to regulate prices. These acts were passed to make markets more efficient, increase competition, and reduce corruption within middle markets. However, protesters worry that these new types of exchanges will allow actors to leave the regulated wholesale market with MSPs, leading to the collapse of the previous system. This would be a significant loss to farmers, as they would have no benchmark prices to depend on,

and would instead be dependent on fluctuating market prices. Smallholder farmers are wary of the new allowances to deal with large corporations directly. Many fear these agreements will give an unfair advantage to companies with large legal teams and influence. The protesters believe that the stripping of long-standing protections will leave farmers with little bargaining power and few options to maintain their livelihood.

These protests become more salient when we consider that for decades, farming in India has been deteriorating—[41% of the Indian population](#) is employed in the agricultural sector, which only makes up [16% of the country's GDP, compared to 42% in 1969.](#) While once a [lucrative profession](#), the average income of a farmer is only 8931 rupees a month (122 USD). The living wage for a typical family in India was considered to be between [13900 to 19700 rupees per month.](#) Farmer suicides, often tied to financial troubles, are a noted phenomenon in the industry.

In recent months, the protesters have been negotiating with the Indian government over the terms of the acts, but to no avail. In mid-January, the country's [Supreme Court](#) suspended the laws and ordered the creation of a four-member council to consider the farmer's grievances. However, farm unions have indicated they [will not participate in the process](#), as all four members have publicly voiced their support for the reforms.

Many speculate that the 21st century could be the "Asian Century." However, the successful development of nations will be shaped by how both governments and people use their power. In India's case, the government is acting in the hopes of modernizing and improving their economy- attempting to bring prosperity to its people- while the people are taking to the streets to voice their dissent- trying to remain prosperous. While on the surface both parties have similar goals, they each want to take contrasting paths to get there. The ultimate outcome of these historic protests will have consequences on India's economy and the livelihood of millions for years to come.

*This article was prepared by its author. Its content does not constitute the views of the FLA.*



# THE ROAD TO LIVING WAGES

BY: SHANTHINI BASKAR

Workers in global supply chains often earn poverty-level wages that are insufficient to support themselves or their families. In 2019, the average worker in a Fair Labor Association (FLA) affiliate's factory in Vietnam needed [a pay raise of nearly 25%](#) to reach the lowest consensus living wage estimate, as benchmarked by the Global Living Wage Coalition. And in 2018, the FLA found that all of the roughly 6,000 garment workers considered in a study of FLA-affiliates' factories in Bangladesh were [earning far below a living wage](#), measured against living wage benchmarks. The coronavirus pandemic has only worsened inequalities. Global extreme poverty, defined as living on less than \$1.90 a day, is set to increase for the first time in over [two decades](#).

Paying a living wage could help break workers out of the poverty cycle. The International Labour Organization considers living wages a [fundamental human right](#). Embedded in most living wage standards is an ideal of self-sufficiency. By accounting for a household's localized food, childcare,

housing, healthcare, transportation, tax, and other necessary costs, a living wage enables a worker to meet their household's minimum needs, [independent of welfare and other public subsidies](#). For corporations, applying the living wage principle could mean that even the lowest-paid employees in their international supply chains receive fair and livable pay.

A living wage is different from a minimum wage, even though both share an objective: to prevent full-time workers from living in poverty. While the minimum wage is a legal construct often mandated by law, the living wage is usually [a voluntary construct](#) – except where a government sets the minimum wage equal to the living wage. However, this is often not the case because governments, in establishing a minimum wage, balance two, sometimes conflicting, interests: 1) to reduce poverty and enable workers to achieve self-sufficiency through work (in the form of a living wage), and 2) to stimulate employment and economic growth. Thus, living wages are often voluntarily

undertaken by companies and organizations outside of the political process.

Several companies have committed to paying living wages. Patagonia plans to reach [living wages by 2025](#) in partnership with their apparel assembly factories. According to the company, as of 2019, [35% of their 31 apparel assembly factories](#), on average, paid their workers a living wage. This year, Unilever [announced](#) that it would ensure workers who directly supply its goods and services receive a living wage by 2030. This is a historic move from one of the world's biggest consumer goods companies, which operates in 190 countries and counts more than 1.5 million farmers in its supply chains. Unilever's initiative will extend to 65,000 direct suppliers and thousands of agricultural businesses.

Still, the implementation of living wages by corporations faces challenges. Even if a company can pay living wages to their direct employees, the company might struggle to persuade their direct and indirect suppliers to do the same. Suppliers might be concerned about absorbing the consequent labor cost increase, especially when experiencing business uncertainties, such as those brought about by the COVID pandemic. Suppliers might also worry about jeopardizing their factories' competitiveness should they pass on cost increases to customers.

Indeed, the implementation of living

wages cannot be relegated to just one stakeholder group. Besides being perhaps impossible under many circumstances, it might also be unjust to have suppliers bear the full burden. Companies like Unilever hope to [support suppliers](#) by finding ways to absorb the increased costs in the value chain, for instance, by helping suppliers attain productivity improvements. Patagonia [works directly](#) with their factory partners to co-create and pilot tailored, multi-prong approaches to achieve and maintain living wages.

It will also be essential to convey the business case for living wages to suppliers. For one, living wage suppliers would be better positioned to defend existing business and attract new customers. This is especially the case in a world where consumers demand high integrity supply chains from the brands they support. As living wages are meant to meet nutrition and housing needs, living wage suppliers may also experience other benefits such as [less absenteeism and increased worker effort](#).

Consumers must also credibly commit to bearing the burden of price premiums where necessary. In a 2018 [interview with Vox](#), Adheer Bahulkar, a partner in the retail practice of A.T. Kearney, pointed out that "while more than two-thirds of consumers say that they want better living conditions for workers, less than half of the same consumers are willing to pay more for their purchases."

To manage this concern, Unilever has committed to absorbing all cost increases



so that consumers do not pay more. But this strategy might not work for all brands. Fairtrade International's Senior Advisor on Workers' Rights emphasizes that [prices must form an integral part of any living wage pledge](#) for sustainable action that avoids negative stressors on suppliers and their workforce.

The road to living wages as the expectation rather than the exception will be long. With their bargaining heft and long-term relationships with suppliers, large corporations play a critical role in accelerating the transition. Still, collective action from industry-wide stakeholders - regardless of size - will also contribute to the momentum. Smaller companies, for example, can choose to source from worker-owned cooperatives. In addition, until consumers exercise their concern for workers' wages with their dollars, brands and suppliers will have reduced motivation for seeing the cause through. Thus, fully closing the living wage gap will depend on commitment and collaboration between stakeholders from across value chains — from suppliers, traders, and retailers, to labor groups, industry organizations, governments, and consumers.

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# A CASE STUDY IN HONDURAS: CLIMATE IMPACTS ON GLOBAL SUPPLY CHAINS

BY: LUCIE ROCHAT

Honduras is a key player in global food, beverages, and apparel markets. Yet recent environmental issues are destroying Honduran infrastructure in increasingly harmful ways, impacting the ability for Honduras to contribute to and participate in global supply chains. The situation in Honduras provides valuable insights to the coming impacts of environmental issues on global supply chains, and it can serve as a case study to prepare producers for the future.

This brief analysis will first discuss the newly harmful weather patterns in Honduras. Next, the analysis will lay out how Honduras contributes to the global economy and describe the recent trends in its exports. Finally, it will examine how climate issues are impacting Honduran goods, and will consider the broader implications of the Honduran case study.

Severe droughts and extreme storms have devastated the Honduran agricultural economy, as well as forced many Hondurans to migrate in search of more hospitable climatic conditions. The weather has shifted to new patterns with

[long droughts and short periods of intense rain](#), conditions that are challenging for farmers. There has been a severe drought for the last [five years](#), devastating crop production. Honduras is highly susceptible to extreme storms, an issue which climate scientists agree is [worsened by warming temperatures](#). The country is exposed to climate catastrophes due to its geography and infrastructure, and it is feeling the effects of environmental destruction prior to most other nations.

With its central geographic position, warm climate, low relative wages, and expedient domestic laws, Honduras is a competitive production site for many companies located in the United States and in Europe. The main exports from Honduras are food goods, including [coffee, bananas, crustaceans, and palm oil](#). Honduras also hosts a [thriving apparel industry](#), exporting in 2019 about 1.46 billion USD in knit t-shirts and 1.09 billion in knit sweaters per year. In 2017, Honduras was the [eighth largest exporter](#) of textiles and apparel to the United States.

Unfortunately, the climate crisis in Honduras is impacting its production and export capability. [Coffee production](#) dropped in 2014, the first year of the drought. After increasing to a high in 2018, coffee production decreased again in 2019 and 2020. [Palm oil](#) hit a peak in 2016, but production has since sunk. Compared to years of dramatic growth in the early 2000s, the [growth rate of Honduran exports](#) has stalled. Honduran total exports peaked in 2012, and the yearly exports have decreased slightly from 2015 to 2019 (with a slight peak in 2017).

The extreme weather in Honduras impacts production for two reasons: First, given that many of the Honduran exports are agricultural, climate issues are directly harmful to a large portion of Honduran production. Droughts and floods [ravage farms and ruin harvests](#). These weather patterns are especially harmful in Honduras because small-scale farms play a large role in agricultural production. Small and medium size coffee producers [contribute 84%](#) of Honduras's total coffee production. Family farms may not be able to afford to continue through years of unsuccessful yields.

Second, natural disasters are drastically decreasing food and shelter security, forcing many Hondurans to migrate. Aggressive storms flood and destroy Honduran farms and homes. Already [nearly two-thirds](#) of Hondurans live in poverty, and many continue to fall from moderate poverty into severe poverty.

The World Bank predicts that [2 million people](#) are going to be displaced from Central America for climate-related factors by the year 2050, and some experts place this number even higher - up to 4 million. For industries like the apparel sector, this displacement of labor supply will be felt acutely.

Climate conditions thus appear to have two-fold impacts on the Honduran economy; the country is losing agricultural production as well as conditions for stable employment. Climate change is manifesting a dangerous feedback loop; more extreme weather patterns reduce income stability and food security which increases migration, and in turn the migration further reduces income stability and food security.

Honduras is a bellwether of the impacts of climate change on global supply chains. Other neighboring countries in Central America, as well as those across the globe in southern Asia, are similarly vulnerable. Countries involved in production are often the countries that are most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. These countries are generally less wealthy and ill-equipped to face disasters. Agricultural production tends to feel the impacts of climate crises first, but industrial work inevitably follows once poverty and migration take a toll.

There is not a simple solution of how to tackle these issues. Preventative measures that focus on reducing

greenhouse gas emissions are important, but the window for solely prevention-based responses has closed. Companies aiming to source their products from countries that are vulnerable to climate change should be prepared to adapt their practices and aid the communities where their products are made. Providing employee housing and food, or [contributing to food and shelter security](#) through other methods, is one of the best ways corporations can assist in climate relief. There are already many initiatives in Honduras and in other countries that focus on educating and funding small-scale farms to promote more sustainable and diversified agricultural production. By improving food and shelter security, companies can help ensure that agricultural exports continue, and that the working population remains intact.

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# ***FAST FASHION***

BY: ADITYA MADUPUR



# **COTTON FIELDS**

## **ACRYLIC, 2021**

BY: ADITYA MADUPUR

India is the largest producer of crops in the world. To outcompete other farmers, India has begun to use more pesticides and genetically modified seeds in order to increase crop yields. The increase in pesticide use has been linked to “DNA damage, hair loss, nausea and chronic endocrine disorders” ([Lefever](#)). Due to the health problems and the economic troubles of farming, hundreds of thousands of farmers commit suicide.

While field production is the most crucial and intensive work, the people working in it are paid the lowest wages. With the Indian government passing a law that favors large corporate farms, many independent farmers are sinking deeper and deeper into poverty. As a result, many farmers began protesting the law, with tens of thousands of Indians asking for the law to be repealed ([Saaliq](#)).

While wages are important, they are not the only problem in farming. Although I did not depict it in my art, child labor and forced labor are also huge problems in farming. However, companies can combat these issues by paying farmers a decent wage. For instance, Syngenta, a global seed company, “leveraged its affiliation with the Fair Labor Association to raise wages in two regions in India” ([“Seeds”](#)).

# **FAST FASHION**

## **ACRYLIC, 2021**

BY: ADITYA MADUPUR

With the rise of fast fashion, companies increasingly rely more and more on cheap labor. In Bangladesh, an estimated 41 million sweatshop workers are paid just 24 dollars a month. Together, these workers produce around “\$30 Billion of readymade goods” ([Takama](#)). As fast fashion relies on trends, many of the clothes produced are quickly thrown out, producing large amounts of trash.

In the estimated 4,500 sweatshops in Bangladesh, measly working conditions, long hours, and child labor are commonplace ([Takama](#)). The sweatshop workers spend what little money they earn on food, which keeps them in poverty and in the sweatshop.

The Fair Labor Association seeks to combat these types of issues through accountability and capacity-building initiatives. If companies eliminate sourcing from suppliers with sweatshop conditions, sweatshop conditions will be reduced over time.

*These artist notes were prepared by the artist. Its content does not constitute the views of the FLA.*



# THE FUTURE OF WORKER RIGHTS PROTECTION IN THE ERA OF GIG ECONOMY

BY: JUNGHOOON PARK

On January 12, 2021, the battle for the labor rights of gig economy workers in California entered a new phase. The [Service Employees International Union \(SEIU\)](#) along with a group of drivers on ride-hailing services such as [Uber](#) and [Lyft](#) filed a [lawsuit in California's Supreme Court](#) against the state's ballot measure Proposition 22. Passed by popular vote on November 3, 2020, [Proposition 22](#) defines workers who provide transportation and delivery services for app-based platforms as independent contractors, overriding the existing [California Assembly Bill 5 \(AB5\)](#) that expanded the definition of 'employees' to include those who work in gig-based jobs.

Labeling the workers as independent contractors, companies like Uber, Lyft, and [DoorDash](#) can avoid having to provide the workers critical social protections like minimum wage, unemployment insurance, and workers' compensation. Under Proposition 22, companies are free to determine what [constitutes working hours](#), which in turn determines who qualifies for the

minimum earnings and healthcare subsidies outlined in the proposition. Some companies are also pushing the cost of implementing Proposition 22 onto workers by [adding service charges](#) while decreasing recommended tip amounts shown to the consumers.

Regardless of the result of the lawsuit, Proposition 22 is likely to have a substantial impact on the future of the gig economy and gig workers. While the ride-hailing and delivery service companies openly declare to [lobby for similar regulations elsewhere](#), gig-based companies in [other industries could also follow suit](#). The fate of Proposition 22 will establish a precedent for the protection of the rights of a growing number of gig workers.

Discussion on the rights of gig workers so far has largely centered on transportation and delivery service workers such as those working for Uber, Lyft, GrubHub, Instacart, etc. [Transportation, however, accounts for only 5%](#) of the estimated total number of gig workers, broadly defined as those engaged in non-traditional and

temporary employment relationships, working in the US. It is also estimated that more than [25% of the US workforce](#) has engaged in gig work at least in some capacity either as a primary source of income or as a side job.

While only a small portion of these workers are currently using digital or app-based platforms, more workers are expected to be integrated into the digital platforms at an accelerating pace as the global pandemic drives demand for remote and flexible work arrangements. In fact, online freelancing platform [Fiverr](#) had marked an [88% year-over-year revenue growth](#) as of September 2020. A similar company [Upwork](#) also achieved [24% growth in revenue](#) during the same period. Unlike ride-hailing and delivery services that connect workers to the consumers, these platforms offer an online marketplace for businesses to shop for temporary workers or their products. The services provided by workers on these platforms range from creative design works to common office functions such as IT & Development, Finance & Accounting, Customer Service, Sales & Marketing, and Legal Services. It is not only the home-based remote work that is being integrated into the digital gig platforms. Companies like [GigSmart](#) are now offering platforms to hire temporary workers on-demand for manufacturing, construction, food and domestic services, warehouse, seasonal staffing, etc. The implications of Proposition 22 in misclassifying workers on app-based platforms unfolds here. Fiverr, Upwork, GigSmart, and other gig

platforms claim that the workers on their services are [independent contractors](#), not eligible for the benefits and protection that a full-time employee performing the same function might get.

The disruptive power of the digital and app-based gig economy threatens the current model of worker rights protections. Contemporary labor policies and worker protections have evolved under the assumption of a simple employer-employee relationship. Responsibilities for providing minimum wage, insurance, and workers' compensation are attributable to a single company hiring the worker. Even for [traditional home-based](#) jobs such as embroidery or light crafting often performed by female workers, companies traditionally turned to agents or other brokers to manage work schedules and other elements of employment. Online platforms change this dynamic by offering a direct connection between workers and companies. The platform providers do not actively assign work and manage workers like an agent or broker. Instead, workers can make contracts with multiple companies at the same time through these digital platforms, thereby complicating the employer-employee relationships.

Retrofitting the 'employee' status to gig workers is more about addressing the symptoms by forcing them into the conventional employer-employee relationship than about finding new solutions that fit the gig workers. The approach may work for ride-hailing and



delivery service drivers whose relationship with the platform is relatively clear in that they are providing services on behalf of the companies that own and manage the platform. However, the identification of the employer-employee relationship becomes more complicated when one considers other types of gig workers. To whom does a manufacturing gig worker ask for compensation if she injures her wrist while stitching fabric toys for one company yesterday and assembling package boxes for another company today? How could a construction worker file for grievance if she gets disproportionately fewer work assignments because of the color of her skin?

It is undeniably clear that the massive amount of campaign funding by the gig platform companies had a huge influence on the passage of Proposition 22. However, it is worthwhile to consider why the people, especially the gig workers, were attracted to the promise of Proposition 22. By associating the term 'independent contractor' with flexibility & autonomy and 'employee' with control & surveillance, Proposition 22 persuaded workers that they were [choosing for the better](#) by supporting the ballot measure. And it is true at least to some degree that gig workers want flexible and autonomous work arrangements. [A recent study by Yale School of Management](#) of some 200,000 Uber drivers indicates that it takes as much as twice their usual earnings to convince an Uber driver to give up on her flexible

work schedules. The gig economy is changing what the workers value in their work arrangements, and workers are increasingly finding comfort in setting their work schedules and expectations.

The gig economy is already here, and it is only expected to grow both in size and scope. Any kind of work imaginable, even work thought to only be held by conventional full-time employees, is subject to be sourced on-demand. Trying to keep the workers classified as employees is a noble fight that is worth pursuing, but it will only delay the inevitable disintegration of the traditional notion of employment. We need to start thinking about a new solution that works for this new generation of workers; one that does not rely on a simple employer-employee relationship to protect the workers' well-being.

Stronger government involvement is one possible direction to explore. A shift from corporate healthcare to universal healthcare and the introduction of universal basic income to support minimum wage and unemployment benefits could be ways to address the issues that gig workers are facing. As students, researchers, policymakers, corporate managers, and most importantly as workers, we need to convince both the government and employers that it is not only what the workers want but also beneficial for the tripartite. The employers may find it better to pay their way out of complex labor regulations and the state could

focus its resources on directly benefiting its people rather than chasing after companies to enforce such regulations.

*This article was prepared by its author. Its content does not constitute the views of the FLA.*



# MAKING A JUST TRANSITION TO AVERT CLIMATE RISK AND ENSURE EQUITY

BY: JAKE GEHRUNG

Experts agree that COVID-19 only magnified inequalities around the world, as vulnerable and underrepresented communities have had [higher rates of job loss, food and housing insecurity, and hospitalization](#). As we transition to a post-COVID society, these challenges will continue and will be compounded by the increasingly detrimental effects of climate change. It is critical that all sectors and organizations, especially civil society organizations (CSOs) and corporations, collectively support the transition of the global economy to ensure safety and equity for future generations.

## Enter the Just Transition.

For trade unions, this effort dates back to [the 1970s](#) but was primarily developed in the 1990s when North American unions fought to support workers who had been displaced [due to environmental protection policies](#). The movement has evolved into an [“effort to plan for and invest in a transition to environmentally and socially sustainable jobs, sectors and economies.”](#)

The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) has continuously put a spotlight on this issue, particularly as it pertains to climate change. In 2008, Director-General of the International Labour Organization (ILO), Guy Ryder (ITUC General Secretary at that time) spoke on the Just Transition, [saying](#), “The trade union movement calls on governments to take immediate action on climate change...We must collectively initiate an indispensable transition towards a more equitable and just society; a society in which the most vulnerable no longer pay the price of.”

In the context of climate change, the Just Transition has been a call to action on two fronts: **climate mitigation** and **climate resilience**.

As we make an effort to reduce emissions and **mitigate** climate change using innovation and policy, we are already starting to see [a rise of new jobs](#) in renewable and efficient energy technologies. However, when we take a moment to look at who is benefiting from the clean energy transition, we see that

vulnerable and underrepresented communities face several limitations in their access to jobs, clean energy, and efficiency programs. Unfortunately, the issue has only been further complicated with the onset of COVID-19, which has [accelerated job loss in the fossil fuel sector](#) and has thereby increased the demand for training and energy jobs. However, if we can speed up our Just Transition toward a clean energy economy, we can create secure jobs for these displaced workers, while significantly decreasing our greenhouse gas emissions.

It is clear that clean energy jobs offer a [promising opportunity](#) to recover from the current recession and [tackle climate change](#), but this transition could not be considered truly sustainable if we do not consider all communities and their future generations. Since 2015, the United Nations and the International Labour Organization (ILO) have bolstered their efforts to promote clean energy jobs and provisions for fair access to those jobs. In September of 2015, the UN agreed on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the eighth of which is to [“promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.”](#) Simultaneously, the ILO published its [guidelines for the Just Transition](#), which compliments SDG 8 by proposing provisions to advance the pillars of the Decent Work Agenda: social dialogue, social protection, rights at work, and employment. As the world seeks lasting solutions to recover from

this recession, driving a just transition to a clean energy economy and decent work will create jobs, fair access to those jobs, and support the effort to mitigate climate change. CSOs can support workers by advocating for fair training opportunities and access to the new clean energy jobs. In the past decades, unions have played an increasingly [active role](#) in protecting workers’ rights as more jobs in the clean energy sector have become available. These voices will only need to be further amplified as our economy moves past the pandemic.

In addition to jobs, the ITUC elaborated on the barriers to accessing affordable clean energy and efficiency programs in its 2015 [Frontlines Briefing on Climate Justice](#). In the report, ITUC suggests a solution: implementing carbon pricing and using the revenue to support underserved communities. On an international level, UN SDG 7, titled “Ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all,” has been a call to action for nations to address the issue of equitable energy access. Studies show that there is a significant opportunity to comprehensively improve community livelihoods by [implementing](#) the latest [energy technology](#) into [development efforts](#) around the world. All FLA affiliates can take action on energy access and support workers’ communities by advocating for policies that ensure affordable renewable energy and energy efficiency benefits for all communities. But mitigation efforts and clean energy technologies will not be enough to



comprehensively advance the Just Transition. Unfortunately, even if we stop emitting greenhouse gases entirely, it could take [as many as 40 years](#) before the climate stabilizes. In the recent hurricane season, Honduras was hit by both [Hurricane Eta and Iota](#) within two weeks, while COVID-19 continued to spread throughout the country. This unprecedented series of storms and flooding affected 2.9 million people, causing many to lose their jobs. In Bangladesh, intensifying monsoon seasons are compromising the work environment for garment workers. The increasing temperature, humidity, and rainfall, along with the influx of mosquitos and water-borne diseases have posed extreme [health risks](#) for workers in the region. As climate change worsens, [we can expect](#) events like this to occur with greater frequency for at least several decades to come.

Companies can help safeguard worker livelihoods by supporting **resiliency** efforts. In the 2015 ITUC Frontlines Briefing on Climate Justice, the organization states, “We will fight for adequate funding of this transition, as well as for the poorest and most vulnerable of nations to be able to cope with the impacts of climate change.” FLA affiliates, especially CSOs, can advocate for provisions that protect workers from these adverse and worsening conditions. Companies can act by integrating rigorous assessment of climate risks into supply chain auditing and engagement.

We need all hands-on deck to ensure the Just Transition, and for FLA affiliates, this will come in the form of policy advocacy, corporate engagement, and supply chain assessment. Collectively, we must ensure that workers are given fair access to the benefits of a sustainable economy while protecting them from the undue harm of climate change. On both the mitigation and resiliency fronts, there are both challenges and opportunities. Climate change has been a growing crisis for the planet, but governments and corporations around the world have failed to act proportionally to its impacts. COVID-19 has forced us all to understand the many, horrible effects of a global health crisis. And just as the pandemic has taken jobs, homes, and loved ones, the storms, diseases, and ongoing list of climate-induced challenges will threaten our livelihoods for decades to come. But with the climate crisis, we have a chance to prepare for the inevitable risks and mitigate their future impact. In this time of extreme adversity, we can choose to integrate sustainability and equity into our recovery and prepare for the next crisis, or we can go back to our old ways.

*This article was prepared by its author. Its content does not constitute the views of the FLA.*



# STUDENT BIOGRAPHIES

## ADITYA MADUPUR

Aditya is a junior at South Brunswick High School in New Jersey who is eager to raise awareness about global sustainability. As a painter for the Fair Labor student committee, he has been thinking critically about labor and producing art as a representation of various human rights topics. Before joining the Fair Labor Association's student committee, Aditya shadowed an undergraduate at the Conn Center for Renewable Energy in Louisville, Kentucky where he came up with sustainable energy sources like dye-sensitized solar cells, solar concentrators, and lithium batteries. Aditya hopes to continue to advocate for workers' rights and energy conservation through his art and the Fair Labor Association.

## SHANTHINI BASKAR

Shanthini Baskar is a senior at Washington University in St. Louis, majoring in Finance and Economics & Strategy and minoring in Computer Science. She was introduced to the FLA

during her internship at the university's Office of Public Affairs. Through extra-curriculars such as City Faces and Design for America, she has been involved in community-centered work at WashU. These experiences inspire her to explore how we might retool businesses and rethink operating models to better answer important social problems.

## ANIKA BAJPAI

Anika Bajpai is a junior at the ILR School in Cornell University. She is interested in studying the intersection of development policy and industrial relations. This past summer, she researched policy developments and labor rights in Sub Saharan Africa at Verité. In addition to being a member of the FLA's Student Committee, Anika is an undergraduate scholar at the Institute of Politics and Global Affairs, the President of the Cornell Diplomat, and involved in ESL teaching on campus.

## JAKE GEHRUNG

Jake is a recent graduate of the University of New Hampshire. As a High-Performance Buildings Analyst with the Resilient Buildings Group (RBG), he is employing his sustainability and research skills as he manages a variety of residential LEED projects throughout New England. After he completed his undergraduate degree, Jake worked in sustainable food systems, corporate sustainability, climate policy, ESG investing, social impact investing, waste management, and has written a variety of articles on sustainability issues. Jake hopes to continue growing as an ambassador of sustainability through new avenues and is particularly interested in sustainable development.

## LUCIE ROCHAT

Lucie Rochat is a junior at Middlebury College majoring in political science and minoring in math. She is interested in researching the intersection between environmental issues and unethical labor. Last summer, she interned at Verité, a non-profit working for fair labor in global supply chains. At Verité, she worked on a project investigating forced labor in Mauritius. Lucie enjoys engaging with like-minded peers through the FLA's Student Committee, and she is excited to be contributing to the Student Journal.

## JUNGHOOON PARK

Junghoon Park is an MBA/MS in Environment and Sustainability candidate at the University of Michigan Erb Institute for Global Sustainable Enterprise. He is interested in how companies can make informed decisions in the area of business and human rights by measuring and communicating their social performance. He is engaged in various projects at the intersection of social responsibility and monitoring & evaluation including developing performance indicators for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, establishing an evaluation framework for both non-profit and private organizations, and assessing social sustainability indicators.

## MOLLY BARSTOW - EDITOR

Molly Barstow is currently an MBA/MS in Environment and Sustainability candidate at the University of Michigan. She is broadly interested in how business can address some of the world's most pressing social and sustainability issues and is more specifically interested in socially and environmentally sustainable supply chains. Molly previously researched migration in Morocco and worked for a non-profit in Boston that provides free legal services for permanent residents applying for U.S. citizenship. She feels strongly that business has both an obligation and an opportunity to advance positive social and environmental outcomes.