

# HEALTH IN ACTION

Health Poverty Action and Find Your Feet Newsletter

Winter 2024



In this edition:

## Planetary health

**Plus:** The climate crisis in Guatemala and Somaliland, the International Coalition for Drug Policy and Environmental Justice and more...

**HEALTH  
POVERTY  
ACTION**

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# INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the latest edition of your newsletter, Health in Action. My name is Clemmie James, and I am the Senior Policy and Campaigns Officer at Health Poverty Action. I build links with activists and campaigners globally to address key issues like land rights, harmful financial flows and problematic political systems.



Over recent years, I've been working closely alongside partners from across the world to expose how the prohibition of drugs acts as a driver of environmental harm and a barrier to delivering urgent climate justice. Just this October, I attended COP16, the United Nations Biodiversity Conference as part of a global coalition to draw attention to this underappreciated side effect on nature of the "war on drugs".

In this edition, we're focusing on "planetary health" as a holistic way of addressing the interconnections between social and political systems, the natural world and human health.

Our sister organisation, Find Your Feet, talks to partners in Guatemala and Somaliland about the impact of climate change. We also look at how we're supporting the International Coalition for Drug Policy and Environmental Justice as they prepare for the United Nations' COP 30 climate change conference in Brazil next year.

As we launch our 'Planetary Health' appeal, you can contribute to the work that Health Poverty Action and Find Your Feet are doing to build a healthier, more prosperous world.

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Front cover: A Health Poverty Action staff member in mountainous rural Myanmar.

Health Poverty Action and Find Your Feet share resources and expertise so we can better support marginalised communities to enhance their health, livelihoods and wellbeing.

# HEALTHY PLANET, HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

**AS HEALTH POVERTY ACTION WORKS WITH COMMUNITIES, ACTIVISTS AND HEALTH WORKERS GLOBALLY TO PROTECT OUR COLLECTIVE HEALTH AND WELLBEING, WE SEE THE MASSIVE IMPACT OF ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS. 'PLANETARY HEALTH' IS A PERSPECTIVE AND APPROACH THAT ACKNOWLEDGES THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THE ENVIRONMENT, HUMAN SOCIETY, AND HEALTH.**

Over the past 40 years, Health Poverty Action (HPA) has collaborated with people and organisations across Africa, Asia and Latin America to address the issues affecting marginalised communities. Through this work, we've developed our understanding of the links between health, poverty, economic systems, social dynamics and political choices. While much of our work with communities has focused on alleviating immediate pressures, we are also building and contributing to global networks

addressing the underlying issues that drive people into poverty and poor health.

Whether looking at food insecurity, access to clean water, the spread of diseases, or so-called 'natural' disasters, the impact of human activity on global, regional and local ecosystems is undeniable. The concept of 'planetary health' has developed over recent decades as a way of addressing the relationship between the health of human societies and the state of the environment globally.

**Continues over** ▶

## JOIN THE MOVEMENT – HEALTH FOR ALL IN A JUST WORLD

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Researchers are becoming increasingly concerned about changes to the environment that are making it harder for human and non-human life to thrive. Many phenomena they monitor, such as the degree of climate change, the amount of synthetic materials released into the world, disruption of water cycles, and transformation of landscapes, indicate that human impact on the global environment is already reaching unsafe levels.

Likewise, the activists, health workers and communities we work with are seeing and feeling the effects of these broader environmental issues. Unsurprisingly, many people report that climate change is a factor in the challenges their families and communities are facing.

Sylvia Vasquez, HPA Project Coordinator in Guatemala, explains: “We’ve seen differences due to the impact of climate change. We’ve seen changes in rainfall patterns; they’re not as stable as they used to be...The first rainfall is an

“**WE’RE SHOWING PEOPLE HOW TO GROW VEGETABLES IN INNOVATIVE WAYS, IN THINGS LIKE TIN CANS, BUCKETS AND TYRES.**”

important occasion, and now it doesn’t come when expected. This means planting is delayed...and crops often end up ruined.”

While climate-related phenomena like droughts, floods and storms have a devastating impact on lives in many of the communities we work with, other environmental issues are also taking a toll on people’s health. Contamination of water sources spreads infectious diseases, depletion of fish stocks makes it harder for people to feed themselves, and deforestation destroys people’s livelihoods while further destabilising ecosystems and leaving communities more prone to floods and landslides.

▼ **Left: Planting a community vegetable garden in Guatemala. Below: Flooding at the HPA office in Myanmar**



▲ **Above: Communities in eastern Rwanda benefit from fuel-efficient cooking stoves.**

Alongside these communities, we are finding ways to mitigate the effects of these environmental challenges both locally and more broadly. In Rwanda, we’re helping to distribute 100,000 fuel-efficient charcoal cooking stoves. This means families are exposed to less harmful smoke, spend less time and money on securing fuel, less trees are cut to produce charcoal, and less greenhouse gases are released into the atmosphere.

As Beatha, a resident of Gashora in eastern Rwanda, tells us: “The cooking [stove] is very easy to use... and I have noticed a decrease in the amount of firewood I use. My friends and family would like to get the same [improved cooking stove].”

In Guatemala, we support mothers to develop climate resilient

vegetable gardens using sustainable methods, so they can improve their families’ nutrition in an affordable and environmentally friendly manner.

Project Coordinator Sylvia explains: “The idea is to show women how to produce and cultivate vegetables in small plots without using much pesticides or chemicals – an organic approach...For those without space or land, we’re showing people how to grow vegetables in innovative ways, in things like tin cans, buckets and tyres.”

While much of our work with specific communities addresses and responds to the effects of broader environmental issues, we are also connecting with activists and community members globally to advocate for policies and practices that promote and protect planetary health. On page 9 you can read about our work around a critical planetary health issue: building a global coalition to address the links between the prohibition of drugs, environmental degradation and the climate crisis.

We can only engage in these kinds of long-term initiatives because of the support of committed donors. Together, we can continue working to build a healthier, more prosperous world for all.

**Donate now:**

Give to our Planetary Health appeal and help to build a healthier, more prosperous world for all. To donate today, please visit:

 <https://bit.ly/3BPRfkx>



# WORLD IN MOTION

Spotlight on



## REFLECTIONS ON 'PLANETARY HEALTH' AND THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON COMMUNITIES IN GUATEMALA AND SOMALILAND.

Over the past two years, Find Your Feet (FYF) has been working with our local partner Health Poverty Action (HPA) in Guatemala and Somaliland to help families grow more food, improve their livelihoods and access vital services. As these countries face challenges arising from serious climatic change, the concept of 'planetary health' helps us understand and respond to the connections between environmental issues and human health.

Mohamoud Ali Bullale, HPA Country Director in Somaliland tells us: "Climate phenomena over recent years have made it hard for people to find water and grass for animals to graze. The rains failed for the last four rainy seasons. A swarm of locusts devastated Sahil region from June to September of 2022, destroying the crops and grass that existed.

Rural areas in Somaliland are largely based around pastoralist livelihoods. A lot of people are leaving rural areas because their livestock is dying, and they cannot afford to rent or stay with family in the city because of costs. They often move to Internally Displaced Person (IDP) camps where they receive support from non-governmental organisations (NGOs)... in the form of shelter, food, water, healthcare and education."

Similarly, rural communities across Guatemala are struggling to adapt to climate change. Silvia Vasquez, HPA Project Coordinator in Guatemala, details the impact of changing weather patterns:

"There used to be six months of wet weather and six months of dry weather. Now the rains can extend beyond September to October and November. We're seeing frost in

March, whereas previously we didn't see frost past February. The weather is less predictable.

Before, in some areas, they would have first rainfall on a given date, but now it might just be a sprinkle. This has affected cultivation practices, and everything has become less predictable and reliable.

Extended rains can also ruin crops. Last year...rains started and ended late, and there were heavier winds than usual. Planting was late, meaning plants didn't mature when harvest time came, then extended rains caused crops to rot, we saw pest infestation, and winds then damaged and destroyed cornfields."

While the projects we support are helping people in these communities deal with the immediate challenges



▲ Rural communities in Somaliland are facing extended periods of drought.

facing them, a 'planetary health' approach recognises the need for greater collaboration globally to safeguard human life and the ecosystems that nurture us.



▲ Showing community members in rural Guatemala how to establish climate-resistant vegetable gardens.

**Your contributions mean we can work alongside communities and partners around the world to tackle the long-term issues people are facing. Please visit [www.findyourfeet.org](http://www.findyourfeet.org) to donate today.**

# ALTERED STATES

**GEARING UP TO PUT DRUGS AND CLIMATE CHANGE ON THE AGENDA IN 2025**



We are a year away from Brazil – home of the Amazon rainforest – hosting the world’s key climate change conference, COP 30. The International Coalition for Drug Policy and Environmental Justice, founded and facilitated by Health Poverty Action, continues to expand and gear up to put drug policy on the climate agenda.

A year ago, the coalition published a key report, pulling together the emerging evidence to expose how the prohibition of drugs is a barrier to climate action. Since then, we have been busy coordinating research to further the understanding of this key issue, securing funding for hubs in both Brazil and the UK and speaking at key conferences and events across the world including the UN’s Commission on Narcotic Drugs in Vienna and the biodiversity COP in October 2024.

The core of the coalition’s work is to expose the three key ways in which the prohibition of drugs contributes to the climate emergency and advocate for climate sensitive drug reforms: Firstly, prohibition pushes drug production and trafficking into remote areas, often those of key environmental significance such as rainforests. Here, organised drug gangs violently displace indigenous communities and wreak environmental havoc.



Secondly, the vast profits from the drugs trade provide key funding for other environmentally damaging activities such as cattle ranching, deforestation, timber and wildlife trafficking and illegal mining.

Finally, and most significantly, the act of making drugs illegal has created organised drug crime. It has enabled people who traffic drugs to amass great wealth and power, ‘buy off’ officials at all levels and, in many cases, undermine entire states. Countries from all parts of the world have been labelled ‘narco-states’, meaning either that drug crime and governments are deeply entwined or that drug money plays a significant role in propping up a country’s economy.

With one year to go until this key moment the coalition is deep in planning a range of activities, communication and advocacy to get drug policy on the climate agenda.

**You can read and download the report entitled ‘Revealing the Missing Link to Climate Justice: Drug Policy’ here:**

<https://bit.ly/3vFOXUX>



# A GIFT IN YOUR WILL HELPS PEOPLE AROUND THE WORLD CONTINUE TO TAKE CHARGE OF THEIR OWN HEALTH



Stand with the communities, campaigners and health workers who've been taking a different approach to tackling poverty and poor health for 40 years.

Health Poverty Action was founded in 1984 by a young doctor who returned from Afghanistan with a profound understanding of the connection between health and poverty, and how people were overlooked because organisations were unable or unwilling to face political consequences. Today, because of our committed supporters, we work across Asia, Africa and Latin America.

To find out how even a small gift in your will can make a huge difference, please contact [fundraising@healthpovertyaction.org](mailto:fundraising@healthpovertyaction.org) or tick the relevant box in the response form and send it to us for free.



There are many ways to support the work of Health Poverty Action and Find Your Feet. Here are just a few ways, and you can find more on our websites at [www.healthpovertyaction.org](http://www.healthpovertyaction.org) and [www.findyourfeet.org](http://www.findyourfeet.org).



## Overseas challenges

If you've always wanted to visit the countries we work in, why not tackle a challenge abroad? Explore the vibrant landscapes of Cambodia, Vietnam, or Kenya through our overseas challenges. Join #TeamHPA with colleagues or friends for a guided trek that promises not just adventure, but also meaningful experiences.

## London Marathon 2025

Support #TeamHPA as they take on the world-famous London Marathon in 2025. Visit [2025tcs.londonmarathon.enthuse.com/healthpovertyaction/profile](https://2025tcs.londonmarathon.enthuse.com/healthpovertyaction/profile) to support our amazing runners as they raise money, or volunteer to help us on the day by cheering our runners on. If you would like to be part of this world-famous event, get in touch.

## Choirs for Change

If you happen to find yourself in or around the capital during the month of December, then keep your eyes out for HPA and our Choirs for Change campaign! Our partnered choirs will be performing across London Underground Stations to help support us. We still have some slots available, so if you, your friends, your colleagues or your children are members of a choir then please get in touch!

## Get involved!

For more information and to get involved in any of these opportunities, email David at [d.machin@healthpovertyaction.org](mailto:d.machin@healthpovertyaction.org)  
**We can't wait to hear from you!**

GET INVOLVED

# HEALTHY PLANET, HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

**BRINGING PEOPLE  
TOGETHER TO ADDRESS  
THE CAUSES AND  
TACKLE THE EFFECTS  
OF ENVIRONMENTAL  
CRISES**



▲ An internally displaced family in rural Somaliland

Global environmental imbalances related to climate change, industrial pollution, and overexploitation of natural resources are harming our ‘planetary health’ and making it harder for people to survive and thrive, especially in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

We are working with communities to address the immediate challenges arising from these ‘planetary health’ issues – whether helping rural families in Somaliland deal with extended droughts, responding to devastating floods in Kenya, or supporting climate resilient farming in Guatemala.

At the same time, we’re building coalitions with activists and communities globally to tackle the root causes of these catastrophic environmental issues – from ‘free’ market fundamentalism to the impact of the illicit drug trade.

**Please give whatever you can to our Planetary Health appeal today and help communities come together to build a healthier, more prosperous world.**

## How to donate:

**Web:** [bit.ly/3BPRfkx](https://bit.ly/3BPRfkx) (HPA) | [bit.ly/45UDgZ3](https://bit.ly/45UDgZ3) (FYF)

**Email:** [fundraising@healthpovertyaction.org](mailto:fundraising@healthpovertyaction.org) / [fyf@fyf.org.uk](mailto:fyf@fyf.org.uk)

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