



## **Understanding Climate Justice: Concept and Relevance in Present Context**

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### ***Abstract***

*Climate Justice is a new idea in the environmental studies that focuses on just and fair sharing and equitable distributions of the benefits and burdens of environment change particularly climate change. Climate justice is a fundamental aspect of sustainable development Goals under the United Nations Agenda 2020. It focuses on sharing responsibilities to tackle climate change. Climate change is man-made and a political crisis and the solutions to this crisis are complex. The concept of climate justice stresses the fact that the effect of global warming is not felt evenly around the world and the countries. It is basically the Global South that disproportionately felt the worst impacts of it. Therefore, the advocates of climate justice placed utmost importance on distributive justice and procedural justice so that the responses to climate change should not repeat or reinforce existing injustices. Therefore, this study focuses on understanding the concept and relevance of climate justice in the present context.*

**Keywords:** *Climate Change, Climate Justice, Global South, Discrimination, Distributive Justice, Imbalances.*

### **Climate Justice: Understanding the Concept**

Climate Justice is a global movement that tries to ensure representation, inclusion, and protection of the rights of those most vulnerable to the effects of climate change.<sup>†</sup> It urges that the solutions to climate change must promote equity, assure access to basic resources and ensure that young people can live, learn, play and work in healthy and clean environments.<sup>‡</sup> Though justice, fairness, and equality are not completely identical in terms but can be used interchangeably in negotiations and politics.<sup>§</sup> It is related to the concepts like the justice particularly environmental justice. Also, it discusses the other concepts like equality, human

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<sup>†</sup><https://www.unicef.org>, Accessed on 4<sup>th</sup> October, 2022.

<sup>‡</sup>Ibid.

<sup>§</sup>Dooley, Kate. Et.al., "Ethical Choices behind quantifications of fair contributions under the Paris Agreement," *Nature Climate Change*, pp-300-305, 2022.

rights (including collective rights) and the historical responsibilities of climate change. Furthermore, under the sustainable development Goals of the United Nations Agenda 2020; Climate justice remained significant. \*\* According to Mary Robinson, the former President of Ireland and a well-known personality in the field of politics and human rights,

*“Climate Justice insists on a shift from a discourse on greenhouse gases and melting ice caps into civil rights movement with the people and communities most vulnerable to climate impacts at its heart.” ††*

While talking about climate justice reference can be made to three principles of justice that can be used in sharing responsibilities by<sup>‡‡</sup>-

- a) Those ones who create the problems,
- b) Those who have the capacity to its burdens and
- c) The beneficiaries of climate change.<sup>§§</sup>

The concept of climate justice gained momentum and popularity with the rise of grassroots movements like Fridays for Future, Climate action, System changes not climate change, extinction rebellion, etc.<sup>\*\*\*</sup> Though the concept of climate justice has been used extensively to understand climate change and its effects, there is no single definition of the concept. At times it has been grouped along procedural justice where the emphasis has been given to fair, transparent, and inclusive decision-making. Sometimes it has been aligned with distributive justice that stresses the ones who bear most of the cost it. Apart from these two, the third principle of climate justice is “recognition which entails basic respect and robust engagement with and fair consideration of diverse cultures and perspectives”.<sup>†††</sup> It clearly shows how recognition and respect play a vital role in preserving and delivering justice for everyone.

Moreover, a special emphasis is given to the role of the Most Affected People and Areas (MAPA) that implies to groups that are disproportionately vulnerable to or affected by climate change like women, racial minorities, young, older, and poorer people.<sup>‡‡‡</sup> It is very sad to know that weaker sections of society are the most vulnerable to the risks of climate change and suffer its serious consequences. Furthermore, they might also be disadvantaged by responses to climate change which might reproduce or aggravate existing inequalities.

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\*\*<https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/in-focus/2022/08/in-focus-sustainable-development-goal>, Accessed on 11<sup>th</sup> June, 2022.

††UN Climate Action on Water Justice, <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/climate-adaptation>, accessed on 4<sup>th</sup> July, 2022.

‡‡ Ibid.

§§“Action Now,” United Nations, <https://www.un.org/actnow?gclid=CjwKCAjw8JKbBhBY>, Accessed on 17<sup>th</sup> August, 2022.

\*\*\*Dooley, Kate. Et.al., *ibid.*, <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41558-021-01015-8>, Accessed on 4<sup>th</sup> June, 2022.

†††“Seven Takeaways from the Latest IPCC Report,” <https://www.climate-kic.org/news/seven-takeaways-from-the-latest-ippc-report/>, Accessed on 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2022.

‡‡‡Nazrul islam and John Wnkel, “Climate Change and Social Inequality,” Department of Economic and Social Welfare Committee Report, 2017.

This type of injustice has been labeled the 'triple injustice' of climate change.<sup>§§§</sup> It shows the vulnerability of the weaker section.

A few approaches to climate justice recommend transformative justice. Here promoters emphasize how vulnerability to climate change replicates several structural injustices in society. This includes the exclusion of marginalized groups from climate-resilient livelihoods.<sup>\*\*\*\*</sup> Therefore, the primary focus of climate action should be on adjusting the imbalances between these power structures. The advocates of climate justice placed utmost importance on distributive justice and procedural justice so that the responses to climate change should not repeat or reinforce existing injustices. Whereas other conceptions such as the Paris Agreement framed climate justice in terms of the need to restrict climate change within certain limits.

### Historical Background

In the year 1990 with the initiative of the United Nations which has appointed the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) which drafted the Framework Convention on Climate Change (FCCC) and finally adopted it in June 1992 in Rio de Janeiro at the UN Conference on the Environment and Development (UNCED).<sup>††††</sup> The main focus of the conference was to coordinate action on climate change with action on Sustainable Development.<sup>‡‡‡‡</sup> But the central question of climate justice is how to share the responsibilities of slowing down climate change fairly between all the countries. Later on, this issue of a fair share of responsibilities was forcefully imposed by Developed countries on developing countries on. In response to their demands, the FCCC has taken the famous principles of climate justice in Article 3.1 as-<sup>§§§§</sup>

*"The Parties should protect the climate system for the benefit of present and future generations of humankind, based on equity and by their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities. Accordingly, the developed country Parties should take the lead in combating climate change and the adverse effects thereof." \*\*\*\*\**

Article 3.1 of the first principle of climate justice clearly shows the cause-and-effect relation of climate change not only for the present generation but also for future generations too.<sup>†††††</sup> The second principle of climate justice states that responsibilities are common but differentiated which indicated the fact that though every country has some or other

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<sup>§§§</sup><https://www.un.org/actnow?gclid=CjwKCAjw8JKbBhBYEiwAs3sxNwWjtQtyoI-Vg>, Accessed on 5<sup>th</sup> July, 2022.

<sup>\*\*\*\*</sup><https://www.unwomen.org/en?gclid=CjwKCAjw8JKbBhBYEiwAs3sxNwWjtQtyoI-Vg>, Accessed on 1<sup>st</sup> July, 2022.

<sup>††††</sup><https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/what-is-the-united-nations-framework-convention-on-climate-change>, Accessed on 4<sup>th</sup> August, 2022.

<sup>‡‡‡‡</sup><https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/what-is-the-united-nations-framework-convention-on-climate-change>, Accessed on 2<sup>nd</sup> July, 2022.

<sup>§§§§</sup> Ibid.

<sup>\*\*\*\*\*</sup>“Climate Adaptation,” UN Climate Action, <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/climate-adaptation?gclid=CjwK>, Accessed on 2<sup>nd</sup> August, 2022.

<sup>†††††</sup> “It’s Time to Act Together,” UN Climate Change Conference, OTD Fourth World, 2022.

responsibilities, there is a difference in terms of equitable responsibilities for different types of countries. Third and the most important principle is that developed countries' responsibilities must be greater in this context to maintain fairness.\*\*\*\* Though it is debatable fact how much greater a country should be in political terms.

The first climate justice summit took place in the Hague in 2000 which focuses on the claim that climate change is an issue associated with the concept of Rights and to fight against climate change and support sustainable development alliances should be built across states and borders.\*\*\*\*\* Thereafter in the year 2002, international environmental groups meet was held in Johannesburg for Earth Summit. Principles of Climate Justice were adopted at this summit which was popularly known as Rio+10 as it was held 10 years after the first Earth Summit of 1992.\*\*\*\*\* Further various representatives of NGOs and people's movements formed met in Durban, South Africa, and formed the Durban Group for Climate Justice in the year 2004 where they discussed several realistic policies for addressing climate change. +++++

Subsequently, in 2003, the global coalition Climate Justice Now was formed. In the year 2008, the Global Humanitarian Forum at its inaugural meeting in Geneva highlighted the importance of the issue of climate justice.\*\*\*\*\* In Copenhagen Summit which was conducted in the year 2009, emphasized on slogans 'system change, not climate change'.\*\*\*\*\* Further, in the year 2010, the World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth was hosted by Bolivia where Peoples Agreement for greater climate justice was published.\*\*\*\*\* Apart from these developments, the World Resources Institute and the Mary Robinson Foundation, in the year 2013, released their organized dialogues on climate Justice.+++++ This dialogue has come up with an appeal to the draft proposed agreements of COP-21 in Paris in 2015.\*\*\*\*\* The people's Demands for climate justice were signed by approximately 292,000 individuals and as many as 366 organizations in December 2018 at COP 24 to comply with a list of six climate justice demands.\*\*\*\*\* It is important to highlight that one of the major demands of climate justice was to provide water justice.\*\*\*\*\* There

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\*\*\*\* Ibid.

\*\*\*\*\*"Climate Justice," Sustainable Development Goals, UN, <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2019/05/climate-justice/>, Accessed on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2022.

\*\*\*\*\*UN Conference on Environment and Development, 2002, <https://www.un.org/en/conferences/environment/johannesburg2002>, Accessed on 4<sup>th</sup> July 2022.

+++++ Ibid.

\*\*\*\*\* Tracey Skillington, *Climate Justice and Human Rights*, Springer: New York, 2017.

\*\*\*\*\* Ibid.

\*\*\*\*\* World People's Conference on Climate Change, 2010.

+++++ Ibid.

\*\*\*\*\*Marry Robinson Foundations Climate Justice Statement, <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/mary-robinson-foundation-climate-justice-statement/>, Accessed on 6<sup>th</sup> August, 2022.

\*\*\*\*\*The People's Demands for Climate Justice, <https://www.peoplesdemands.org/>, Accessed on 6<sup>th</sup> August, 2022.

\*\*\*\*\* Ibid.

are some of the very important milestones of the movement called climate justice. But this issue has not received the kind of significance from many countries, especially from the developed western countries. For that reason, it becomes a priority for developed and underdeveloped countries to generate debates on this issue and make this a relevant topic of academic and policy-making decisions.

### **Climate Change: An Unequal Crisis**

The effect of global warming is not felt evenly around the world. The countries and communities in the Global South disproportionately felt the worst impacts of it. Artificial floods, crop failure, extreme heat, heat waves, water shortages, air pollution, etc. are due to climate changes.<sup>††††††††</sup> It can be mentioned here that climate change is both man-made and has political linkages. However, the solutions to this crisis are complex and chaotic in global politics. Though global warming is a global crisis, the concept of climate justice stresses fair share and justice. One should not be victimized by another for their social and economic status.

On top of that, the proponents of this concept argue that the blame for creating the crisis is not even shared properly. The countries like the United States are responsible for more than a quarter of all carbon emissions to date whereas the total for the entire continent of Africa is under 3%. Apart from that United Kingdom which is causing 1% of carbon emissions accounted for over half of all global carbon emissions until 1882.<sup>§§§§§§§§</sup>

This situation of disparity is not accidental but is the result of deliberate political choices made by rich Western and European countries.<sup>§§§§§§§§</sup> If one looks into the geopolitical issues of climate change, there's a link with European colonialism even in the present context as well.<sup>\*\*\*\*\*</sup> Since most of the wealth of Europe and North America was created, was from Africa, South America, and Asia.<sup>††††††††</sup> The powerful western countries drained land, resources, and manpower from countries these Afro-Asian countries during their colonial reign.<sup>§§§§§§§§</sup> This economic exploitation has led to massive disparity which so defines the world in the present context. Furthermore, this economic exploitation continues even after decolonization. They have been continuing such exploitation from their colonies with the help of powerful companies which have no respect for local communities or the environment.<sup>§§§§§§§§</sup> These have got reflected in severe and distinctive climate change in the pliability of countries around the world. Those countries of the Global South faced most of the injuries and found themselves without adequate resources to adapt to the crisis which was

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<sup>††††††††</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>§§§§§§§§</sup>United Nations Climate Action, <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/science/climate-issues/land?gclid>, Accessed on 7<sup>th</sup> July, 2022.  
<sup>§§§§§§§§</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>\*\*\*\*\*</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>††††††††</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/conferences/environment/johannesburg2002>, Accessed on 4<sup>th</sup> July 2022.  
<sup>§§§§§§§§</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>§§§§§§§§</sup> Ibid.

created by the actions of the Global North. Thus, the issue of climate change and climate justice again bring the importance of the North-South debate into academic discussions and remain very crucial.

There is a similarity in the situation when talking about a country's internal crisis. It is mostly the richest people who are responsible for a disproportionate amount of carbon emissions, whereas it is the poorest and most marginalized who are hit first and hit hardest by the effects of global warming. These sections of society are the ones that are least equipped to adapt to the upheavals of climate change. This shows how for years till now disparity between the global South and Global North is causing the disproportionate distribution of the impact of climate change and the demand for climate justice attains utmost relevance.

### **The Disparity in Causality and Burden**

Studies have shown a huge disparity between causality and the burdens of climate change. There is a huge difference if the responsibilities of man-made climate change among individuals and groups. In a Report published by Oxfam and the Stockholm Environment Institute in the year 2020, the richest 1% of the global population causes more than twice the combined share of emissions of the poorest 50%.\*\*\*\*\* This is really a piece of shocking information and it's high time to pay attention to its seriousness. Studies have claimed that most of the wealthiest citizens of the world are responsible for maximum climate impacts. Therefore, for a fair share of responsibilities richest 1% should take most of the burden of climate change reform initiatives. So that they must initiate robust actions to move into a safer environmental condition. ††††††††† Hence it is infuriating to know that problems of disproportionate causality can be witnessed everywhere in terms of climate change. Many people and nations which are facing the worst effects of climate are surprisingly the ones least responsible for it.

It is sad to witness such unequal and unjust environmental casualties due to a man-made crisis. However, a fair share of responsibilities in the present context can be a solution to tackle this problem and can make this world a better place to live in. In case developed countries take responsibility for their share of climate change and come forward to help carbon emissions climate justice can be achieved in no time. Therefore, it can be urged those countries to reduce pollution and help to heal the environment. This is the need of the hour.

### **Climate Justice and Disproportionate Impacts on Dis-advanced Groups**

Climate change has disproportionate impacts on disadvantaged groups. This has generated important concern in academic discourse and remains an important area of discussion. These inequalities are driven by demographic features like differences in gender, race, ethnicity, age, income, etc. it not only increases the risk of exposure to the harmful effects of climate change to the disadvantaged groups but also cumulates their vulnerability to the destruction caused by climate change as they will be the last one to receive any

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\*\*\*\*\*<https://www.pathfinder.org/focus-areas/climate-resilience/>, Accessed on 4<sup>th</sup> August, 2022.

††††††††† The Economics of Climate Change- IMF F&D, December 2019.

emergency relief.†††††††††† These sections of society are so vulnerable that they are hardly included in the process of planning which can help them cope up with the impacts of climate change.

Though climate change is becoming a serious issue in the world. Extreme weather events such as heat waves, air quality, artificial floods, and so on disproportionately impact these groups.§§§§§§§§§§ Similarly, women are the worst sufferers of climate change than men and it has disproportionate impacts on women no matter in which social condition they might be living. Women have to pay the cost of any extreme weather situation more than men do. Likewise, indigenous people have to face serious consequences of climate change even when they have contributed the least to climate change.

Further, Due to the minimal income sources of the disadvantaged group. These sections of people are left with very few resources with which they are supposed to cope with climate change. It is interesting to note that the ability of people to ease and adjust to the negative effects of climate change is determined by the aspects like income, race, class, gender, capital, and political representation.\*\*\*\*\* Communities with lower income sources or of certain colors have little or no adaptive resources which ultimately makes them more vulnerable to climate change.†††††††††† Further, it has been witnessed in several incidents that poor people neither have any resources nor any insurance that can be helpful to recover from any kind of environmental disaster. Additionally, in most cases, they are the ones who receive an inadequate and unequal share of disaster relief and recovery assistance.†††††††††† On top of that, they hardly have any kind of involvement in the decision-making process, political or legal processes which are related to climate change and the natural environment.

To receive distributive climate justice in addressing the disproportionate impacts of climate change, there is a need for involvement by disadvantaged groups in the planning and policy-making process.§§§§§§§§§§ This can be an effective way which can help minority and vulnerable groups to achieve justice.

## Conclusion

To sum up it can be said that the environment is not an issue that simply can be separated from human concerns. Climate change is so serious at present if we do not take any

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†††††††††† UN Women, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/explainer/2022/02/explainer-how-gender-inequality-and-climate-change-are-interconnected>, Accessed on 7<sup>th</sup> August, 2022.

§§§§§§§§§§ <https://www.preventionweb.net/news/extreme-weather-events-have-significant-negative-impact-skin-disease>, Accessed on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2022.

\*\*\*\*\* [https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/communicating-climate-change?gclid=CjwKCAiAhKycBhAQEiwAgf19egJxJdxjxYF8tw0ZBtWFMsnCvX4ZOcOqmKuHdz4fEdUewByYJdFFbhoCvsYQAvD\\_BwE](https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/communicating-climate-change?gclid=CjwKCAiAhKycBhAQEiwAgf19egJxJdxjxYF8tw0ZBtWFMsnCvX4ZOcOqmKuHdz4fEdUewByYJdFFbhoCvsYQAvD_BwE), Accessed on 15<sup>th</sup> September, 2022.

†††††††††† <https://www.oecd.org/env/cc/2502872.pdf>, Accessed on 17<sup>th</sup> September, 2022.

†††††††††† Ibid.

§§§§§§§§§§ <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/climate-adaptation?gclid=CjwKCAiAhKycBhAQEiwAgf>, Accessed on 17<sup>th</sup> September, 2022.

action the entire human existence will be in crisis. Here it can be quoted. It will be not possible for human beings to survive without a just climate situation. While the seriousness of climate change requires utmost importance from global communities, in reality, disparity and unjust distribution of the impacts of climate change remain prominent. It is the right of everyone to get a fair share of environmental resources as a member of human society. But the existence of severe disparities between the developed countries west and the developing world has generated significant debates around the concept of climate justice. This rich and poor as well as advantage and disadvantage issue gained momentum and led to the mobilization of various protest movements around the globe demanding fair share and justice.

But from various studies, it has been assumed that the climate crisis is not only a scientific matter but a political one too. For that reason, discussions on climate change should also highlight issues like power, access to resources, justice, etc. Hence, the topic gained popularity in social science discussions as well. However, to achieve climate justice, it can be understood from the study that developed countries should take responsibility for creating this crisis so that they can take steps to make changes to their actions and policies. By supporting developing countries developed countries can help in cleaning the industrial wastes and bring changes for sustainable climatic conditions. On top of this, efforts by individuals and organizations remain important in creating awareness among people. Further, last but not least effective environmental policies for sustainability by various governments nations will be helpful in this regard. Governments are expected to take legislative actions to hold companies accountable for the harm they cause to people and the environment overseas. This can be achieved by upholding the rights of the indigenous people and communities in safeguarding forests, lakes, etc.

Furthermore, it is necessary to deliver fair justice to the aggrieved people so that their rights can be restored and justice prevails. Therefore, the voices of disadvantaged groups, people, and countries should be heard with utmost seriousness and deliver them fair treatment which will restore justice. This can bring make the entire human society and environment sustainable which can make the decision-making process just and dynamic. This paper hence shows the seriousness of the issue of climate justice and the need to provide necessary assistance in achieving justice so that everyone can enjoy a pure and unpolluted environment without any discrimination.

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