



## Preface

There is little doubt that climate change will lead to unprecedented changes in the natural environment, which will in turn affect the way we live, with potentially dramatic consequences on our health, energy sources and food production systems.

There is also increasing recognition that these impacts are being felt disproportionately by poor people who already live under precarious conditions. Climate change, with its many facets, further exacerbates existing inequalities faced by these vulnerable groups. It threatens to undermine the realization of fundamental rights for many people and to reverse progress made towards the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It is a global justice concern that those who suffer most from climate change have done the least to cause it.

The concept of climate justice acknowledges that because the world's richest countries have contributed most to the problem, they have a greater obligation to take action and to do so more quickly. However, many fear that whatever international agreement is reached between governments, it will compound the already unjust burden on the poor and vulnerable. A rapidly growing number of social movements and civil society organizations across the world are mobilizing around this climate justice agenda. Citizens from both the South and the North are drawn to this concept, in part, because many are already experiencing the impacts of climate change and they worry about the fate of their families, homes and livelihoods.

It is the role of NGLS to ensure that these voices and perspectives are brought to the table. These voices can help lead to more innovative forms of collaboration to address daunting global challenges. Our experience suggests that the solutions to the problems that we face as a planet will only succeed if they have both broad input and broad ownership from all stakeholders.

*Climate Justice for a Changing Planet: A Primer for Policy Makers and NGOs* examines how to move towards a climate justice agenda and to ensure that equity is at the core of any solution to climate change. It compiles the latest research and analysis made by several international organizations and by the aforementioned civil society movement, highlighting in particular the need for climate change to be addressed simultaneously with the furthering of the international development agenda, achieving poverty reduction goals and respecting international human rights norms. It clearly demonstrates that climate justice is not only an ethical imperative, but also an economic and social one.

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*“Adaptation is becoming a euphemism for social injustice on a global scale. While the citizens of the rich world are protected from harm, the poor, the vulnerable and the hungry are exposed to the harsh reality of climate change in their everyday lives. Put bluntly, the world’s poor are being harmed through a problem that is not of their making. The footprint of the Malawian farmer or the Haitian slum dweller barely registers in the Earth’s atmosphere.”*

*— Archbishop Desmond Tutu*



# Introduction

## Equity and Justice



*“Human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development.”*

*—1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development*

Climate change may be the most significant challenge the world faces today. It will affect everyone, regardless of geographical location or socioeconomic status. It may determine the way we produce food, our access to water, our health, where we live, and the diversity of plant and animal species. No other current concern can claim the scale of climate change – and the scope of the potential catastrophe if the world fails to act in time.

Climate change was originally perceived as mainly a scientific or environmental issue. While it does have a scientific basis and involves all aspects of the environment, it has emerged through the economic and political systems that govern the world today. These same systems are now charged with sorting out the threats from climate change. However, actions to date have fallen short, while global temperatures climb and the greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions that cause climate change continue to grow.

As a phenomenon that affects the whole world, climate change clearly warrants a comprehensive global response. While this has been the intent of international negotiations held on the subject, starting with the 1992 UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and continuing through the annual meetings of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the convention, there has been an ongoing tendency to focus on some issues and interests, but not others.

One of the most fundamental gaps involves the equity dimensions of climate change. Climate change at its heart reveals the still stark divides in resources, development paths and emissions contributions between rich and poor nations, and rich and poor people within those nations. Almost all aspects of climate change can be traced along these lines: who has caused it, who can cope with it and how, who will survive and even benefit, and who will be hardest hit by its consequences.

Because of its magnitude, climate change shines a strong light on longstanding inadequacies in the way the world operates, politically and economically. The UNFCCC noted the inequities that have resulted and committed nations to reducing them. But since then, many disparities have deepened or gone unresolved. Contested international negotiations have produced partial solutions, not all of which have been fully implemented. Still missing is the crucial acknowledgement that no solution will work without equity at its core. A path of development and low emissions is possible for everyone – if extreme imbalances in development are evened out.

Equity is foremost a matter of justice and human rights, recognizing that groups that have benefited most from high levels of emissions in the course of their development are now called upon to ensure that other groups have equal opportunities to develop, within a framework of mutual efforts to slow the pace of climate change. The fact that some of the people with the lowest levels of emissions and development will suffer some of the most severe consequences of climate change must also be rectified.

Equity also fosters effectiveness and efficiency. Given a common goal – a livable planet – it ensures that resources, including financial and technical ones, go where they are needed most, not just where they are likely to produce profits. Efficiency comes from making the most appropriate choices now for the world as a whole, rather than delaying them until the consequences are more severe, expensive and difficult to fix.

Given the history of climate change negotiations to date, a position of equity is also pragmatic, because it will be the only way to strike a meaningful political consensus that will be viewed as fair and result in sustained action by most countries.

In recent years, the notion of “climate justice” has emerged as a way of encapsulating the equity aspects of climate change. Climate justice builds on a platform of equitable development, human rights and political voice. It is an agenda that seeks to redress global warming by reducing disparities in development and power that drive climate change and continued injustice. This implies transformative changes and the need to look beyond national boundaries to what is good for the world as a whole.

*Climate Justice for a Changing Planet: A Primer for Policy Makers and NGOs* considers how to move towards a climate justice agenda. It is designed for people engaged in climate change policy-making, whether through governments or non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as well as others interested in better understanding the current discourse. Chapter 1 explores international discussions on climate change through an equity lens, and takes a critical look at attempts to mitigate emissions. Chapter 2 examines four major gaps in equity – development disparities, vulnerable groups, global governance and finance – that must be central topics for climate justice policy advocacy. Chapter 3 introduces possible policy directions.

The booklet is premised on the notion that political will strong enough to forge a meaningful international consensus on tackling climate change can emerge – and transform both the content of decisions and how they are made. By definition, this process must uphold the basic principles, universally endorsed, of human rights to sustainable development, security and the shared resources of a common planet. The alternative: a patchwork response and worsening inequities in a steadily warming world.