
Climate Justice: Empowering Marginalized Voices in Environmental Discourse

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Original Article

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Keywords

Abstract

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Climate justice, a cornerstone of environmental ethics, endeavors to ensure an equitable distribution of both responsibilities and benefits in addressing the impacts of climate change. Rooted in principles of fairness and human rights, climate justice aims to rectify the disproportionate effects of climate change on vulnerable communities and future generations. This article explores the foundational concepts of climate justice, including its intersection with environmental justice and the imperative of shared responsibility in mitigating climate-related challenges. It emphasizes the importance of centering fairness and human rights in decision-making processes and underscores the disparities in climate change impacts across different populations. Moreover, the article delves into the specific vulnerabilities faced by marginalized groups, including women, individuals with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and youth, emphasizing the need for inclusive approaches to climate action. In the context of Pakistan, a country highly vulnerable to climate change impacts, the dynamics and prospects of climate justice are critically examined. Despite formidable challenges, there are promising avenues for advancing climate justice through civil society advocacy, government initiatives, and international cooperation. By prioritizing equity and resilience-building efforts, Pakistan can strive towards a more just and sustainable future for all its citizens.

1. Introductory View

Climate justice is a pivotal concept within the discourse of environmental ethics, which focuses on ensuring a fair and just allocation of both the responsibilities and rewards associated with addressing climate change effects, rooted in principles of fairness and human rights. Climate justice seeks to rectify the disproportionate effects of climate change on vulnerable groups and future generations. In other words, Climate justice is a part of environmental justice. It's about making sure that the

problems caused by climate change are shared fairly among all stakeholders, and that everyone works together to solve them (Global Witness, 2023). It involves both 'rights and duties,' meaning that companies, individuals, and governments have responsibilities to assist those who will be most impacted by climate change. (Manzo, R, 2021). Climate justice means making fairness and human rights central when we make decisions and take action about climate change. It talks about how some countries and communities have more responsibility for causing the climate crisis than others. It suggests that the countries, industries, businesses, and people who have become rich by emitting lots of greenhouse gases should help those countries and communities which are affected by the climate change even though they haven't caused much of the problem. (United Nations Development Programme, 2023). Even in the same country, the impacts of climate change are not uniformly felt across populations; certain individuals and communities experience its effects more acutely than others because of unfair differences based on things like race, ethnicity, gender, and how much money they have. Women are hit harder by climate change because they have fewer things to help them deal with sudden changes. People with disabilities face more risks from climate change. This includes dangers to their health, ability to get food and water, and their jobs, especially in poorer countries. Indigenous Peoples, who take care of most of the world's diverse plants and animals, are facing more dangers to their lives, jobs, and traditional knowledge. Today's children and young people didn't cause the climate crisis, but they'll face its impacts as they grow up. Since older generations made choices that put their rights in danger, we need to focus on their rights in all decisions and actions about climate change. As a matter of human right, everyone should have the ability to live with respect and freedom. However, the climate crisis is causing people to lose their lives, jobs, and culture. It is making it hard for many to find enough food and water. Climate change also affects people's health. As temperatures rise and extreme weather happens more often, the air and water get dirty, making people sick. This can lead to health problems like heat exhaustion, diseases, not having enough food, and being hurt by disasters. The effects are worse for groups of people who are already struggling and can't easily deal with climate change. From 2010 to 2023, many more people died from floods, droughts, and storms in places that are highly at risk compared to safer areas. The climate crisis can also mess up a country's education system. When it's too hot or extreme weather happens, it can damage schools system and make it hard for kids to go to school. This affects the futures of young people (Schlosberg, 2012).

In Pakistan, the dynamics and prospects surrounding climate justice are of critical importance given the country's vulnerability to climate change impacts. The nation faces a multitude of challenges, including extreme weather events, water scarcity, melting glaciers, and agricultural disruptions, all of which disproportionately affect marginalized communities. The dynamics of climate justice in Pakistan are shaped by socio-economic disparities, inadequate infrastructure, and limited reach to resources for adaptation and resilience-building efforts. Despite these challenges, there are promising prospects for advancing climate justice in Pakistan. Civil society organizations, along with government initiatives, are increasingly advocating for policies that prioritize the rights of vulnerable populations and promote sustainable development practices. Moreover, there is growing recognition of the need for international cooperation and climate finance to support Pakistan's initiatives in confronting and adjusting to the impacts of climate change, encompassing both mitigation and adaptation strategies while ensuring equity and fairness. With concerted efforts and inclusive approaches, Pakistan has the potential to address climate justice concerns, safeguarding the rights and well-being of its citizens while building a more resilient and sustainable future.

2. Bedrock of Climate Justice

Climate justice prioritizes human rights as a core element of global development efforts. It acknowledges the challenges faced by poor communities affected by climate change, it advocates

for fair allocation of climate funds, and encourages the involvement of vulnerable groups in decisions regarding climate solutions. This concept is gaining traction in the evolving international sustainable development agenda. However, its ability to influence policies and actions depends on the establishment of a robust operational and conceptual framework (Briefing. 2013). Climate justice understands that even though some people didn't cause much pollution, they will suffer the most from climate change. Governments need a good plan for climate justice that considers ideas from political, environmental, social, and developmental justice. Environmental justice means sharing risks fairly, understanding different people's needs, and recognizing everyone's rights. Environmental justice consists of three main parts: fair sharing of environmental risks, acknowledging people's different needs and experiences, and involvement in the political decisions about environmental policies. Using these earlier ideas, climate justice acknowledges the rights and needs of poor people who are most affected by climate problems. It asks that the money for dealing with climate change is shared fairly and encourages everyone, especially women and young people, to take part in decisions. This means that climate justice makes sure human rights are the focus of worldwide development actions (Roser, & Seidel, 2016).

3. Climate Justice and Marginalised Communities

The meaningful inclusion and active engagement of women, youth, indigenous populations, and marginalized communities are indispensable factors in shaping the course of our planet's future, fostering equitable development, and nurturing sustainability for generations to come. It's crucial that they have opportunities to engage in decision-making processes and contribute to policy implementation with meaningful roles or empowerment. It is pertinent to mention here that, throughout history, young people have often been at the forefront of movements addressing environmental, social, and racial injustices. However, in recent years, their mobilization around climate justice has reached unprecedented levels. Inspired by figures like Greta Thunberg, millions of children and youth worldwide have voiced their concerns and demanded urgent action from their governments on climate change. They emphasize the pressing nature of the issue, recognizing that they will bear the brunt of its consequences more than previous generations. For children born in the 21st Century, the impacts of climate change are already evident, with increased vulnerability to climate-related disasters and everyday challenges like poor air quality and contaminated water. The repercussions extend to issues like stunted growth in millions of children globally and the potential for millions more to be pushed into extreme poverty by the time today's young climate activists reach their late 20s. Additionally, projections suggest a significant rise in malnourished children by 2050 due to the effects of climate. Considering these concerns and feeling dissatisfied with the slow progress and limited scope of previous climate negotiations, 330 youth delegates from more than 140 countries, with a significant majority from the global south, convened at MOCK COP26 in 2020. Together, they crafted a comprehensive global conference declaration focused on six primary themes, one of which was climate justice. Moreover, during the latest COP 26 summit, tens of thousands of young people and other activists flooded the streets of Glasgow, calling for urgent action and highlighting the importance of climate justice (UNICEF Report, 2022). In 2006, Ricardo Lagos, who was the UN's special envoy for climate change and the former president of Chile, said that adapting to climate change starts with development, but we need a big change in thinking to make sure we have enough money and help the poorest people the most. However, making big changes isn't just about getting enough money or making sure the poorest benefit the most. We have to understand how big the challenges of adapting to climate change are and create ways for the most vulnerable people to adapt where they live. These ways should share the costs and benefits of adapting more fairly (Page, 2011). A group called the High-Level Panel said that money for dealing with

climate change should be public, something countries have to do, reliable, given as grants, and not have conditions attached to it.

4. Barriers to Realizing Climate Justice

There exist numerous hurdles that countries and communities encounter in their pursuit of climate justice.

Lack of Transparency and Inclusivity in Climate Negotiations and Strategies- The perspectives and contributions of women, youth, natives, and vulnerable groups are essential pillars in safeguarding the future well-being and sustainability of our planet. Therefore, it is crucial that they are provided with platforms enabling their participation in decision-making and policy implementation. However, these underrepresented voices may sometimes be included merely for the sake of superficial inclusivity, resulting in limited roles or lack of empowerment, a phenomenon known as 'tokenism.'

Insufficient access to education and resources concerning the environment, climate change, and human rights- This limitation prevents many individuals, particularly those most affected, from engaging in meaningful discussions and policy initiatives. Language barriers compound the issue, particularly for local communities and Indigenous Peoples involved in decision-making processes.

In numerous countries, environmental activists and defenders encounter grave risks for advocating environmental rights and justice. They may face imprisonment, threats, violence, enforced disappearances, or even death. Such threats create a hostile environment, discouraging defenders from asserting their rights and demanding justice.

On a global scale, less rich countries have long been urging wealthier nations for increased financial and technical support. Although there has been some progress regarding potential finance for loss and damage, many assessments reveal that rich nations have yet to fulfill the \$100 billion annual climate finance commitment agreed upon in 2009, scheduled to commence in 2020. Given the inadequacy of the existing target and the escalating effects of global warming, countries are already deliberating on establishing a new annual goal that is both science-based and financially sufficient to address the mounting climate crisis (Shue, 2014).

In addition to the obstacles mentioned earlier, here are more barriers for realizing climate justice:

Economic Inequality: Economic disparities between countries and within communities can hinder efforts to address climate justice. Poorer communities may lack the resources needed to adapt to climate change impacts or transition to sustainable practices.

Political Resistance: Political resistance or lack of political Will can impede progress in achieving climate justice. In certain instances, governmental bodies might opt for immediate economic benefits at the expense of the enduring environmental and social well-being of communities and ecosystems, thereby sacrificing long-term sustainability for short-term gains

Institutional inactivity: Bureaucratic structures and institutional disinterest within governments and organizations may slow down efforts to enforce measures, policies and initiatives intended at promoting climate justice.

Lack of Data and Information: Insufficient data and information about the effects of climate change on marginalized groups can make it difficult to design effective adaptation and mitigation strategies.

Technological Barriers: Limited access to technology, particularly in developing countries, can hinder the adoption of sustainable practices and renewable energy solutions.

Legal and Regulatory Challenges: Inadequate or outdated legal frameworks and regulations may hinder the enforcement of climate justice policies and impede progress towards sustainability.

Addressing these additional barriers demands collaborative endeavors and joint initiatives involving States, civil society organizations, and global institutions to promote equity, inclusion, and sustainability in climate action initiatives.

5. Initiatives taken by UNDP for Realization of Climate Justice

UNDP has a rich history of collaborating with nations on matters concerning the rule of law, human rights, and access to justice, with a particular attention on climate justice. This includes supporting constitutional reforms, advocating for the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment, and championing environment-related human rights. Moreover, UNDP has aided in the making and execution of environmental and environmental laws and regulations, as well as fostering access to information, public involvement and justice in ecological dealings.

A number of States are embedding human rights considerations in their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). Through the Climate Promise initiative, UNDP is working to ensure that the revision of NDCs under the Paris Agreement is a more inclusive and rights-based process. This entails providing guidance on engaging youth meaningfully and promoting gender equality in climate action plans. UNDP also endeavors to ensure the involvement of native groups in the NDC process (UNDP). UNDP supports countries in tackling climate justice issues through various initiatives. These include:

Capacity Building: UNDP helps countries strengthen their capacity to understand, address, and adapt to climate change impacts, particularly focusing on vulnerable communities.

Policy Development: UNDP assists States in making and enforcing climate policies and regulations that promote justice, equity, and inclusion, ensuring that the voices of marginalized groups are heard and considered.

Access to Finance: UNDP helps countries access climate finance and develop sustainable funding mechanisms for climate adaptation and mitigation projects, ensuring that resources are allocated fairly and reach those most in need.

Advocacy and Awareness: UNDP advocates for climate justice at global, regional, and national levels, raising awareness about the imbalanced repercussions of climate change on disadvantaged populations and promoting inclusive solutions.

Community Engagement: UNDP facilitates community engagement and participation in climate action initiatives, empowering domestic peoples, women, youth, and other vulnerable people to contribute to decision-making processes and solutions.

Through these efforts, UNDP aims to support countries in addressing climate justice issues and building resilient and sustainable futures for all.

Around the globe, numerous countries are making strides to place justice at the core of environmental and climate issues. Here are a few examples: In **Vietnam**, collaborative efforts between the government and the business sector are underway to implement the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. In **Latin America** and the Caribbean, countries like Panama and Argentina are focusing on enhancing access to information and justice, along with

public involvement in environmental policy dialogues. They are actively engaged with the Escazú Agreement, the world's first binding treaty addressing environmental human rights, which recently entered into force. UNDP's efforts in **Lebanon** involve bolstering the Ministry of Environment's capacity in environmental policy development, encompassing laws, regulations, and other policy mechanisms. **Turkey** is conducting training programs for young lawyers on climate justice to equip them with the tools to safeguard the rights of persons and groups threatened by environmental change. Additionally, the training aims to encourage governments and companies to adopt more climate-friendly policies and practices.

6. Prospects for Climate Justice

The future of climate justice entails a collective effort to tackle the disproportionate effects of climate change on vulnerable groups, promote equity in climate action, and ensure the meaningful partaking of all stakeholders in decision-making processes. It involves implementing policies and initiatives that prioritize the needs of marginalized groups, promote sustainable development practices, and foster resilience to climate-related challenges. Additionally, the future of climate justice requires continued advocacy, education, and awareness-raising efforts to mobilize global action and craft a further sustainable world for current and upcoming generations.

The voices and demands of marginalized communities and groups are gaining significant traction on the global stage. Across the globe, activists are mobilizing in the streets to advocate for change, with young climate leaders leading the charge in highlighting issues of intergenerational climate justice. In a landmark move in 2022, the UN General Assembly affirmed that every individual has the inherent right to access a hygienic, vigorous, and sustainable environment, recognizing it as an essential component of basic human rights. This declaration underscores the interconnectedness between climate change, unsustainable resource management, pollution, and biodiversity loss with the gratification of all human rights. It is anticipated to galvanize action and empower individuals to hold their governments accountable for environmental stewardship.

Responding to the urgent calls from children and young people worldwide, the United Nations Committee on Rights of Child underscored children's right to a healthy environment, with a particular attention on climate change. Through an inclusive drafting process involving over 16,000 children, the committee clarified the obligations of nations and the private sector in safeguarding this right. Small Island Developing States have been pivotal in advocating for climate justice in international negotiations. In March 2023, the United Nations General Assembly passed a historic declaration urging the International Court of Justice to provide a consultative view on countries' obligations regarding climate change. Originating from a proposal by Pacific Island students, the resolution, championed by Vanuatu and backed by a coalition of 17 nations, strives to gain a comprehensive understanding of nations' international legal duties concerning the preservation of the climate system and the consequences of inflicting substantial damage upon it, particularly for small island states and future generations.

The landscape of climate litigation is also evolving rapidly, with citizens, youth, and communities increasingly resorting to legal action against governments and corporations to address climate-related harms and injustices. At United Nations Climate Change Conference or Conference of the Parties of the UNFCCC commonly known as COP27, a groundbreaking decision was made to establish new funding mechanisms, including a dedicated fund, to aid particularly vulnerable countries and communities in responding to climate-induced loss and damage. This initiative will allocate new and additional financing specifically for addressing loss and damage experienced by those most affected.

The momentum behind the movement for climate justice is poised to intensify as the effects of climate change become more pronounced, signaling a resolute dedication to forging a future that is both fair and sustainable for every individual.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, climate justice emerges as a critical imperative within the realm of environmental ethics, aiming to ensure equitable distribution of responsibilities and benefits in confronting the impacts of climate change. Rooted in principles of fairness and human rights, climate justice endeavors to rectify the disproportionate effects of climate change on vulnerable communities and future generations. This article has delved into the foundational concepts of climate justice, elucidating its intersection with environmental justice and the necessity of prioritizing equity and human rights in decision-making processes. Moreover, it has underscored the unique vulnerabilities faced by marginalized groups, emphasizing the need for inclusive approaches to climate action. In Pakistan, a country profoundly vulnerable to climate change impacts, the dynamics and prospects of climate justice are of paramount importance. Despite formidable challenges, there are promising avenues for advancing climate justice through collaborative efforts involving civil society advocacy, government initiatives, and international cooperation. By prioritizing equity and resilience-building efforts, Pakistan can aspire towards a more just and sustainable future for all its citizens. The future of climate justice hinges upon collective endeavors to address the disproportionate effects of climate change, promote equity in climate action, and ensure the meaningful participation of all stakeholders. It involves implementing policies and initiatives that prioritize the needs of marginalized groups, foster sustainable development practices, and bolster resilience to climate-related challenges. Additionally, continued advocacy, education, and awareness-raising efforts are essential to mobilize global action and craft a more sustainable world for current and future generations. As the momentum behind the movement for climate justice intensifies, fueled by the increasing impacts of climate change, there is a resolute dedication to forging a future that is fair and sustainable for every individual. By embracing the principles of fairness, equity, and human rights, nations can pave the way for a world where climate justice is not merely an aspiration, but a tangible reality for all.

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