

Chapter 3

Towards a Climate Justice Agenda

“Climate change is already undermining the realization of a broad range of fundamental rights for many people – the right to health and even life, rights to food, water, shelter and property, rights associated with livelihood and culture are all affected. Our challenge is to build accountability for human rights into future efforts to address climate change. By doing so, we will better understand who is most at risk and how we should act to protect them.”

— Mary Robinson, October 2009

A climate justice agenda is founded on the principle of equity, across all aspects of climate change, but beyond that point it must be a living agenda. The elements will likely shift over time to fulfill the needs and priorities of different peoples and nations, as they define them, and to protect the environmental resources on which we all depend.

It is beyond the scope of this booklet to offer a set of comprehensive recommendations for a climate justice agenda. Presented here are some starting points to begin reframing current climate change debates, as part of a broader process of people claiming their rights to sustainable development and participation in decisions that affect their lives.

Make justice the starting point. This is the only approach that is comprehensive enough to tackle climate change, foster sustainable economies, and be politically acceptable to the majority of countries. Climate change talks have been contentious and consensus difficult, but the push to strike agreement at all costs carries the risk that decisions made to reduce inequities will be postponed, while climate change threats continue to grow. There can be no grand global bargain without justice at its core.

Build on existing development and human rights agreements. Both adaptation and mitigation activities should be carried out under the well-established development and human rights frameworks affirmed by decades of national and international policies and actions. Climate change cannot be reversed at the expense of poverty eradication or by thwarting the right to development. The continued tendency to view climate change and development as parallel rather than intertwined issues will hinder progress on both fronts.

Step up action—urgently—to slow climate change. As a whole, the world has the knowledge, resources and technology to counter climate change. It articulated a common political vision in the UNFCCC. Given the escalating pace of global warming, it now has to act with far greater urgency to realize these commitments. Change is possible even if it requires major economic and political rearrangements around the core principles of equity and sustainable development.

Aim high—adopt the most ambitious targets. Climate change predictions have consistently proven to be underestimated. Using the most pessimistic calculations recognizes that some countries and peoples face lower thresholds for threats than others. By aiming for the most ambitious targets, there is a greater likelihood that sufficient steps will be taken in time. Given the risks for small islands and low-lying territories as discussed in Chapter 1, the world should take a precautionary approach and aim to keep temperature changes to a maximum of 1.5 degrees C. The 1990 baseline for emissions cuts must apply to all industrialized countries – it is unjust to allow extra years to be added to a history of overconsumption of atmospheric space. Overall greenhouse gas emissions should be reduced and kept at a ceiling of 350 ppm, and the trajectory of global emissions must shift downward no later than 2015.

Move adaptation to the foreground. Adaptation efforts need to move promptly to the foreground of international and national support for development and climate change, even as mitigation efforts are dramatically scaled up. Contributions to adaptation financing by industrialized countries should be linked to the depth of their own mitigation efforts, the ability to pay and historic emissions. In developing countries, national development plans, backed by national and international financing, should integrate adaptation and “climate proofing” across all relevant sectors. They should focus on strengthening resilience among vulnerable groups, such as through social protection schemes and targeted investments in public services and infrastructure. All of these steps should be taken urgently, given that the costs of adaptation rise when actions are delayed.

Transform the systems and institutions that have created climate change. Tinkering around the edges describes much of the response to climate change so far. This falls short of what is needed. As the world stalls, only some people continue to reap rewards from current political and economic configurations. Billions more do not. Governance and development models should be built around notions of justice and equity, with the objective of working for the planet and people as a whole, and evening out imbalances that are not sustainable. It is not enough to talk about low-carbon pathways through technology, for example, without also rethinking current models of production, global trade and consumption patterns.

Reduce exclusion in global decision-making. Climate change talks and actions have featured a few voices and priorities, and neglected many others. The small island developing States (SIDS), least developed countries (LDCs) and indigenous peoples face particular threats that are not being adequately addressed, in addition to the injustice of being low emitters struggling to cope with severe impacts on development and even territorial integrity. The notion of developing countries being at the table should be refined to emphasize that this must include those who do not have a powerful role in the global economy.

All major climate change decisions should take place within the UN system, as the most democratic international forum, including those related to the use of adaptation and mitigation funds, and the setting of targets. At the same time, new accountability mechanisms need to be developed to ensure that these decisions accord with the fulfillment of the broadest spectrum of human and sustainable development needs.

Call on both industrialized and developing countries to set climate and development targets. Both climate change and development have to be viewed from a global framework under which appropriate, equitable and sustainable balances can be struck. Targets should be part of national planning and set in agreement with informed citizens about the kind of world people want to share. They should reflect the notions of historical responsibility and common but differentiated responsibilities, as well as variations in development contexts. The Greenhouse Development Rights framework, which integrates responsibility and capability indicators, is one model that could be applied to defining emissions targets.

Industrialized countries could take the lead and demonstrate what can be achieved by adopting and implementing targets of a 45 percent decline in emissions over 1990 levels by 2020. Developing countries, particularly those with fast-growing economies, may need to adopt targets by 2020 or before, but they should not be required to accept binding targets until industrialized countries demonstrate how lower carbon growth can work, commit to equitable and inclusive global institutions and frameworks, and provide sufficient financial and technological support in accordance with national development plans.

Agree on a convergence in per capita emissions. This should be set at an annual 2 tons of carbon dioxide and equivalent greenhouse gases per person by 2050, with minimal scope for deviation. Current mitigation and development plans and targets should be framed with this average in mind.

Back a public investment approach to climate change. Key decisions should be made by the public sector in accordance with public interests, and deliberately linked to objectives such as reducing emissions while ensuring equitable access to energy services required for development. An appropriate public policy framework could, for example, build links between the adoption of green technology, the expansion of energy services, and the generation of new opportunities for decent jobs. In industrialized countries, for the near term, other public policy priorities should include allocating responsibilities for emissions between producers and consumers, and setting a price on carbon through taxation or regulations on market minimums.

The private sector can play a role in addressing climate change, but the market should operate in service to development, not the other way around. An under-supervised market should not be viewed as a reliable source of actions or financial flows on the scale required to stop climate change. Even a growing chorus of private sector firms, based on the recent global crisis, has called for putting effective policy and regulation of markets at the heart of the response to global warming. Market imperfections will otherwise continue to hinder mitigation options, such as those to achieve greater energy efficiency. A high bar should be in place to ensure, rather than assume, that markets are making contributions to reducing climate change and fostering sustainable development.

Challenge market-based cap and trade, and offset programmes. These have contributed little to emissions reductions. There is a lack of conclusive evidence on whether the problem is the models being used or current approaches to implementation. To be warranted, both systems need to make clearly demonstrable contributions to lower emissions and climate justice –

such as through significant transfers of resources to adaptation for vulnerable groups. Both should be rigorously monitored for whether or not they are perpetuating inequities, as when industrialized countries mostly pursue offsets to reach emissions targets instead of significantly reducing their own emissions. Development costs caused by carbon, such as impacts on health and food security, should be factored into the market price of carbon regardless of where in the world they originate.

Free up finance. The sums for halting climate change are large but feasible. There should be an immediate scaling up of investments to slow the pace of change and avoid more substantial future costs. Since the sums calculated by international organizations have been low and subject to revision, other figures should be considered as potential reference points, such as the US \$24 trillion for climate debt proposed by NGOs (see Box 12). The magnitude of actions in developing countries should be determined by the predictability, speed and scale of international financial support.

Transfers to developing countries should be consistent with the priorities they identify, such as those in national adaptation and development plans. They should be unfettered by conditionalities and additional to the existing ODA commitment of 0.7 percent of GNP. They should not be sent through international debt mechanisms that impose additional penalties, particularly on poor countries with limited responsibility for climate change. All countries should have access to finance, but priority countries should be those facing the greatest vulnerabilities from climate change. The Greenhouse Development Rights Framework could be applied to designating funding amounts from industrialized countries and transferring funds to developing countries. Each industrialized country should have a national plan in place spelling out how it will achieve existing commitments to ODA and additional commitments to financing for climate change.

Regardless of its source, financing should be tied directly to new opportunities for development that is equitable and sustainable. It should not reinforce existing failed systems, on the finance or climate side, or entrench the privileges of some groups over others. Carbon intensive energy subsidies should be phased out entirely in industrialized countries and justified in developing countries in terms of providing measurable development benefits to poor and marginalized peoples. Financing for land-use programmes such as forest conservation and grasslands restoration should be linked to the development rights of people who are poor or use the land as part of indigenous traditions.

Take climate change technology out of the for-profit-only box. Everyone wins if temperatures stop rising. But a for-profit orientation and restrictive policies related to technology, such as those governing trade and intellectual property rights, continue to benefit a few people rather than sustainable development at large. While monetary incentives are important drivers of innovation, the incentive of a habitable world needs to be predominant. There is a long history of targeted public financial support for technology so that it can evolve, and be diffused and priced at levels allowing widespread adoption. In the near term, diffusing existing technologies for mitigation in industrialized countries will require a minimum carbon price underpinned by stable institutions and regulations, energy efficiency standards, public procurement and benchmarking.

For developing countries, technology transfers need to encompass priority adaptation needs. They should also be connected to opportunities to adopt green technologies that support equitable development, decent jobs and a low-carbon path, in view of future mitigation. Overall, the role of technology in developing countries needs to be understood as something that requires large-scale transfers from industrialized countries and less restrictive intellectual property rights, but must also move towards the rapid expansion of domestic capacities. Technology and finance policies should include investments in domestic research and development, the promotion of local technologies, and the cultivation of relevant educational skills.

Engage the general public in debate about the significance and urgency of climate change. Concerted advocacy should explain to the general public, in non-technical ways, what is happening and what is at stake for them, their societies and the world. The phenomenon of climate change transcends political orientations and group identities, but some voices are heard more than others. Do the points of view represented in climate change negotiations reflect those of people at large? If not, how can public perspectives be articulated? Targeted advocacy should mobilize civil society groups, parliamentarians, local officials and other groups who may be working on development and rights issues affected by climate change, but without a concerted focus on climate justice. At all levels of decision-making, Principle 10 of the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development should be applied. It states that environmental issues are best handled with the participation of all concerned citizens.

Box 12: NGOs Propose Measures for Justice

A Platform for Climate Justice, a consortium of people's movements in Asia, has highlighted solving climate change and injustice through the transformation of global economic, political and socio-cultural systems. It urges the broad recognition of climate debt, along with reparations to redress it, estimating a figure of US \$24 trillion from the climate debt incurred between 1800 and 2008. Emissions should be stabilized at 350 ppm by 2020 and temperature rises kept within 1.5 degrees C. Northern countries must make most of the cuts, although Southern governments should adopt clear national targets for promoting renewable energy and shifting to low-carbon technology. The group opposes trade agreements that undermine measures to solve the crisis, and maintains that strict regulations are needed for transnational corporations.

— *Source: A Platform for Climate Justice of Asian Movements, Organizations and Networks 2009.*

List of Annex I Countries

The extent to which developing country Parties will effectively implement their commitments under the Convention will depend on the effective implementation by developed country Parties of their commitments under the Convention related to financial resources and transfer of technology and will take fully into account that economic and social development and poverty eradication are the first and overriding priorities of the developing country Parties.

— The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

Australia
Austria
Belarus
Belgium
Bulgaria
Canada
Croatia
Czech Republic
Denmark
Estonia
European Community
Finland
France
Germany
Greece
Hungary
Iceland
Ireland
Italy
Japan
Latvia
Liechtenstein
Lithuania
Luxembourg
Monaco
Netherlands
New Zealand
Norway
Poland
Portugal
Romania
Russian Federation
Slovakia
Slovenia
Spain
Sweden
Switzerland
Turkey
Ukraine
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
United States of America

List of Kyoto Protocol Countries

As of October 2009, 184 States have signed and ratified the Kyoto Protocol

Albania	Algeria	Angola
Antigua and Barbuda	Argentina	Armenia
Australia	Austria	Azerbaijan
Bahamas	Bahrain	Bangladesh
Barbados	Belarus	Belgium
Belize	Benin	Bhutan
Bolivia	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Botswana
Brazil	Bulgaria	Burkina Faso
Burundi	Cambodia	Cameroon
Canada	Cape Verde	Central African Republic
Chile	China	Colombia
Congo	Cook Islands	Costa Rica
Croatia	Cuba	Cyprus
Czech Republic	Côte d'Ivoire	Democratic People's Republic of Korea
Democratic Republic of the Congo		Denmark
Djibouti	Dominica	Dominican Republic
Ecuador	Egypt	El Salvador
Equatorial Guinea	Eritrea	Estonia
Ethiopia	European Community	Fiji
Finland	The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	
France	Gabon	Gambia
Georgia	Germany	Ghana
Greece	Grenada	Guatemala
Guinea	Guinea-Bissau	Guyana
Haiti	Honduras	Hungary
Iceland	India	Indonesia
Iran	Ireland	Israel
Italy	Jamaica	Japan
Jordan	Kenya	Kiribati
Kuwait	Kyrgyzstan	Lao People's Democratic Republic
Latvia	Lebanon	Lesotho
Liberia	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	Liechtenstein
Lithuania	Luxembourg	Madagascar
Malawi	Malaysia	Maldives
Mali	Malta	Marshall Islands
Mauritania	Mauritius	Mexico
Micronesia	Moldova	Monaco
Mongolia	Montenegro	Morocco
Mozambique	Myanmar	Namibia
Nauru	Nepal	Netherlands
New Zealand	Nicaragua	Niger
Nigeria	Niue	Norway
Oman	Pakistan	Palau
Panama	Papua New Guinea	Paraguay
Peru	Philippines	Poland
Portugal	Qatar	Republic of Korea
Romania	Russian Federation	Rwanda
Saint Lucia	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	Samoa
Sao Tome and Principe	Saudi Arabia	Senegal
Serbia	Seychelles	Sierra Leone
Singapore	Slovakia	Slovenia
Solomon Islands	South Africa	Spain
Sri Lanka	Sudan	Suriname
Swaziland	Sweden	Switzerland
Syrian Arab Republic	Tajikistan	Thailand
Timor-Leste	Togo	Tonga
Trinidad and Tobago	Tunisia	Turkmenistan
Tuvalu	Uganda	Ukraine
United Arab Emirates	United Kingdom	United Republic of Tanzania
Uruguay	Uzbekistan	Vanuatu
Venezuela	Viet Nam	Yemen
Zambia		