

Carbon Projects and Climate Justice: Ensuring Access to Information, FPIC and Equitable Benefit-Sharing

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Carbon Projects and Climate Justice: Ensuring Access to Information, FPIC and Equitable Benefit-Sharing

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Abstract

This paper discusses how carbon projects can promote climate justice. The paper argues that with the world witnessing a mounting climate crisis that disproportionately affects vulnerable regions, nations, communities and individuals, carbon projects have emerged as a vital solution towards fostering climate justice. It examines how carbon projects can spearhead progress towards climate justice. Despite their efficacy in the pursuit of climate justice, the paper observes that poorly implemented carbon projects can undermine effective climate action. It discusses some of the key challenges in carbon projects and their impact on climate justice. In light of these concerns, the paper argues that it is imperative to design and implement carbon projects in a sustainable manner in order to promote climate justice. It discusses how this ideal can be achieved by ensuring access to information, FPIC and equitable benefit-sharing.

1.0 Introduction

With climate change having adverse and disproportionate impacts on people and planet, climate justice has emerged as a key global ideal towards upholding equity, fairness, inclusivity and human rights in climate action. It has been observed that the impacts of climate change including intense droughts, water scarcity, severe fires, rising sea levels, flooding, melting polar ice, catastrophic storms and declining biodiversity are on the rise globally undermining development efforts¹. However, these impacts are not felt equally. For instance, the poor, marginalized and disadvantaged populations including

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¹ United Nations., 'What is Climate Change?' Available at <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/what-is-climate-change> (Accessed on 12/03/2026)

indigenous peoples, local communities, women and girls and the youth are more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change². In addition, due to geographic and economic vulnerability, people and communities in the Global South are extremely vulnerable to climate change and its impacts³.

Climate change is therefore a major cause of injustices and inequalities since it affects individuals, communities, nations and regions differently. It has been observed that people and communities who have contributed the least to climate change are being affected by it the most, and are likely to be less able to protect themselves from its impacts⁴. The concept of climate justice acknowledges and seeks to redress these injustices and inequalities. It has been observed that climate justice acknowledges that although climate change is a global crisis, its effects are not evenly felt around the world⁵. It focuses in protecting human rights of the most vulnerable including the poor, women and girls, the youth, indigenous peoples and local communities in the face of climate change⁶. By recognising the disproportionate impacts of climate change, climate justice seeks solutions that address the root causes of climate change and in doing so,

² Climate Justice Global Alliance., Available at <https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships/climate-justice-global-alliance> (Accessed on 12/03/2026)

³ Giles. M., 'The Principles of Climate Justice at CoP27.' Available at <https://earth.org/principles-ofclimatejustice/#:~:text=That%20response%20should%20be%20based,the%20consequences%20of%20climate%20change> (Accessed on 12/03/2026)

⁴ Oxfam., 'Climate Justice.' Available at <https://www.oxfam.org.au/what-we-do/climate-justice/> (Accessed on 12/03/2026)

⁵ What is Climate Justice?., Available at https://globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/land-and-environmental-defenders/what-climate-justice/?gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=13050085427&gbraid=0AAAAADm6LOBCAWyvG1rV8P9t7a-3ITtgC&gclid=Cj0KCQiAo4TKBhDRARIsAGW29beo0CN5gLtHcdqr42LaywMKxO5VVBWiMDiQOaj-Bj3eLN4oXC55Ah0aAkN1EALw_wcB (Accessed on 12/03/2026)

⁶ Aliozi. Z., 'Climate Justice and Human Rights, in a World in Climate Emergency' Available at <https://repository.gchumanrights.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/2eba3de1-1427-481b-a2d6-07818e00a53b/content> (Accessed on 12/03/2026)

simultaneously address a broad range of social, racial, and environmental injustices caused by the climate crisis⁷.

Climate justice therefore seeks to uphold equity, inclusivity, fairness and human rights in global, regional, national and local responses on climate change⁸. Fostering climate justice is vital towards protecting the most vulnerable while confronting climate change and its impacts.

This paper discusses how carbon projects can promote climate justice. The paper argues that with the world witnessing a mounting climate crisis that disproportionately affects vulnerable regions, nations, communities and individuals, carbon projects have emerged as a vital solution towards fostering climate justice. It examines how carbon projects can spearhead progress towards climate justice. Despite their efficacy in the pursuit of climate justice, the paper observes that poorly implemented carbon projects can undermine effective climate action. It discusses some of the key challenges in carbon projects and their impact on climate justice. In light of these concerns, the paper argues that it is imperative to design and implement carbon projects in a sustainable manner in order to promote climate justice. It discusses how this ideal can be achieved by ensuring access to information, FPIC and equitable benefit-sharing.

2.0 Carbon Projects and Climate Justice: Promises and Pitfalls

Carbon projects refer to investment in activities that aim to reduce, avoid or remove greenhouse gas emissions from the atmosphere⁹. Carbon projects have also been defined

⁷ Center for Climate Justice., 'What is Climate Justice?' Available at <https://centerclimatejustice.universityofcalifornia.edu/what-is-climate-justice/> (Accessed on 12/03/2026)

⁸ United Nations Development Programme., 'Climate change is a matter of justice – here's why' Available at <https://climatepromise.undp.org/news-and-stories/climate-change-matter-justice-heres-why> (Accessed on 12/03/2026)

⁹ Carbon Offset Projects., Available at <https://www.climatepartner.com/en/knowledge/glossary/carbon-offset-projects> (Accessed on 13/03/2026)

as environmental projects that mitigate the negative impacts of greenhouse gases¹⁰. Carbon projects enable states, companies, communities and individuals to lower greenhouse gas emissions and earn carbon credits¹¹. It has been observed carbon credits represent reduction of greenhouse gas emissions to compensate for emissions generated somewhere else¹². Carbon credits are earned as a result of reduction or removal of greenhouse gases from the atmosphere enabling governments, companies and individuals to offset their greenhouse gas emissions¹³. They are generated and earned by projects that reduce or remove greenhouse gas emissions including protecting forests, restoring wetlands, switching to renewable energy or improving energy efficiency in buildings and industries¹⁴.

Carbon projects have emerged as a vital solution in protecting people and planet from the adverse impacts of climate change towards climate justice. It has been correctly pointed out that every person is impacted by climate change to some extent¹⁵. In particular, individuals and communities in the Global South are being disproportionately impacted by climate change due to several unfavourable factors including geographical vulnerability and underlying socio-economic and developmental challenges¹⁶.

¹⁰ Northern Rangelands Trust., 'What are Carbon Offset Projects and how do they Work?' Available at <https://www.nrt-kenya.org/carbon-project-faq#:~:text=Carbon%20offset%20projects%20are%20environmental,traditional%20and%20contemporary%20grazing%20methods>. (Accessed on 13/03/2026)

¹¹ World Bank Group., 'Stories From the Field - A Look at World Bank Carbon Finance Projects in Africa' Available at <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/climatechange/publication/projects-reducing-emissions-earning-carbon-credits-africa> (Accessed on 13/03/2026)

¹² Conservation International., 'What are Carbon Credits?' Available at <https://www.conservation.org/learning/what-are-carbon-credits> (Accessed on 13/03/2026)

¹³ United Nations Development Programme., 'What are carbon markets and how do they work?' Available at <https://climatepromise.undp.org/news-and-stories/what-are-carbon-markets-and-how-do-they-work> (Accessed on 13/03/2026)

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Conservation International., 'Why are Carbon Projects Important?' Available at <https://www.conservation.org/learning/why-are-carbon-projects-important> (Accessed on 13/03/2026)

¹⁶ Giles. M., 'The Principles of Climate Justice at CoP27.' Op Cit

Consequently, it has been observed that investing in carbon projects is vital in protecting people and planet, especially in the Global South, towards climate justice¹⁷.

It has been observed that carbon projects are being implemented all over the world strengthening the global response on climate change¹⁸. For example, driven by the global energy crisis, the environmental impacts of fossil fuels and policy momentum, renewable energy projects, in particular solar photovoltaic and wind energy, have grown drastically in the recent past¹⁹. In particular, it has been observed that renewable energy investments are beginning to bear fruit in several African countries with wind and solar power dominating non-hydro renewable energy generation and installed capacity in the continent²⁰. Renewable energy projects are proving numerous benefits for people and planet including new industrial opportunities and jobs, greater energy security, cleaner air, universal energy access and a safer climate²¹.

Carbon projects are also being implemented in form of investments in nature-based solutions. Nature-based solutions leverage on the benefits of nature and the power of healthy ecosystems to protect people and planet, optimise infrastructure and safeguard a stable and biodiverse future²². This idea involves working with nature to address societal challenges, support human well-being, confront climate change and enhance

¹⁷ Conservation International., 'Why are Carbon Projects Important?' Op Cit

¹⁸ World Bank Group., 'Stories From the Field - A Look at World Bank Carbon Finance Projects in Africa' Op Cit

¹⁹ United Nations Environment Programme., 'Renewable Energy' Available at <https://www.unep.org/topics/energy/renewable-energy/renewable-energy> (Accessed on 13/03/2026)

²⁰ United Nations., 'Advancing SDG 7 in Africa.' Available at <https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/2023%20Advancing%20SDG7%20in%20the%20Africa-062923.pdf> (Accessed on 13/03/2026)

²¹ International Energy Agency., 'The Energy World is Set to Change Significantly by 2030, Based on Today's Policy Settings Alone' Available at <https://www.iea.org/news/the-energy-world-is-set-to-change-significantly-by-2030-based-on-today-s-policy-settings-alone> (Accessed on 13/03/2026)

²² International Union for Conservation of Nature., 'Nature-Based Solutions' Available at <https://iucn.org/our-work/nature-based-solutions#:~:text=About%20Nature%2Dbased%20Solutions&text=They%20target%20major%20challenges%20like,are%20critical%20to%20sustainable%20development> (Accessed on 13/03/2026)

biodiversity²³. It has been observed that carbon projects such as reforestation, wetland restoration and sustainable land management are key nature-based solutions that are tackling the climate crisis while providing other benefits such as biodiversity conservation, and food and water security²⁴. Further, mangrove conservation and restoration is another key carbon project that harnesses the power of nature to mitigate climate change, conserve biodiversity and enhance the livelihoods and well-being of coastal communities²⁵. According to the United Nations, the carbon benefits from protecting and planting mangroves are immense since they are powerful blue carbon sinks that absorb and store more carbon when compared to terrestrial forests²⁶.

Carbon projects are therefore important in the quest towards climate justice. It has been observed that many of these projects are located in the Global South including in least developed countries proving numerous benefits for people and planet²⁷. For instance, it has been pointed out that carbon projects have an important impact on poor communities, creating jobs, and improving health and education through the use of carbon revenue for the benefit of communities²⁸. They are also helping to conserve and restore ecosystems including vital carbon sinks such as wetlands, tropical forests and mangroves thus bolstering climate action²⁹.

²³ What is the Nature-based Solutions Initiative and what are nature-based solutions?., Available at <https://www.naturebasedsolutionsinitiative.org/what-are-nature-based-solutions#:~:text=Examples%20of%20Nature%2Dbased%20Solutions&text=Protecting%20or%20restoring%20forests%20and,floods%2C%20soil%20erosion%20and%20landslides> (Accessed on 13/03/2026)

²⁴ United Nations Development Programme., 'What are carbon markets and how do they work?' Op Cit

²⁵ United Nations., 'Kenyan Coastal Villagers Earning a Living from Selling Carbon Credits' Available at <https://www.un.org/ar/Nairobi-unic/story3> (Accessed on 13/03/2026)

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ World Bank Group., 'Stories From the Field - A Look at World Bank Carbon Finance Projects in Africa' Op Cit

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ United Nations Development Programme., 'What are carbon markets and how do they work?' Op Cit

Despite their key role in strengthening climate action, carbon projects can also cause injustices and inequalities. For instance, it has been observed that most carbon projects are being implemented in lands and territories belonging to indigenous peoples and local communities³⁰. This process requires large-scale land acquisition often at the expense of vulnerable communities and ecosystems³¹. In some instance carbon projects have been implemented without the Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) of indigenous peoples and local communities leading to human rights violations including displacement of vulnerable populations from their lands and territories³². Poorly implemented carbon projects are also damaging the environment including vital ecosystems thus undermining environmental sustainability³³. For instance, it has been observed that clearing land to support renewable energy developments such as wind and geothermal projects can impact wildlife, biodiversity and ecosystems³⁴. Poor governance in carbon projects is also linked to misappropriation and mismanagement of funds undermining equitable benefit-sharing with local communities³⁵.

In light of the foregoing concerns, it is imperative to ensure that carbon projects are appropriately designed and implemented in order to foster climate justice.

³⁰ Land rights are a tool for justice in carbon markets., Available at <https://www.tmg-thinktank.com/blog/land-rights-are-a-tool-for-justice-in-carbon-markets> (Accessed on 13/03/2026)

³¹ Ibid

³² Indigenous land disputes cloud Kenya's carbon market ambitions., Available at <https://www.climatechangenews.com/2025/05/15/indigenous-land-disputes-cloud-kenyas-carbon-market-ambitions/> (Accessed on 13/03/2026)

³³ United Nations Development Programme., 'What are carbon markets and how do they work?' Op Cit

³⁴ Environmental Impacts of Renewable Energy Sources., Available at <https://www.adecesg.com/resources/blog/environmental-impacts-of-renewable-energy-sources/> (Accessed on 13/03/2026)

³⁵ Schmid. D.V., 'Are forest carbon projects in Africa green but mean?: A mixed-method analysis' Available at <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17565529.2022.2054400#abstract> (Accessed on 13/03/2026)

3.0 Ensuring Access to Information, FPIC and Equitable Benefit-Sharing in Carbon Projects

Carbon projects have emerged as an important solution as the world bolsters efforts to confront climate change. If appropriately designed and governed, carbon projects can be powerful tools in driving climate action while delivering other benefits for people and planet including job creation, investments in social amenities, biodiversity conservation, food and water security and ecosystem restoration³⁶. However, poorly designed and implemented carbon projects can also undermine human rights particularly against indigenous peoples and local communities while also causing environmental degradation.

It is therefore imperative to ensure that carbon projects are well designed, implemented and governed in order to achieve climate justice. Actualising this ideal involves ensuring access to information in carbon projects³⁷. It has been observed that access to information is a fundamental tenet of carbon justice since it ensures that all stakeholders including investors and local communities have the awareness and understanding to effectively participate in carbon projects³⁸. For instance, the availability of data and information especially in the Global South can enable investors to adequately assess the landscape of carbon markets before making informed decisions on investments in carbon projects³⁹. Further, ensuring access to information for indigenous peoples and local communities can enable their meaningful participation in carbon projects which is vital in harnessing their indigenous and local perspectives, knowledge and practices for sustainable carbon projects⁴⁰.

³⁶ World Bank Group., 'Stories From the Field - A Look at World Bank Carbon Finance Projects in Africa' Op Cit

³⁷ Natural Justice., 'A Pathway Towards Just Carbon Markets: A Legal and Policy Guide for African Countries' Available at https://naturaljustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/CARBON-MARKETS-REPORT_Submitted_Natural-Justice.pdf (Accessed on 13/03/2026)

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ Ibid

There is also need to uphold FPIC in carbon projects. FPIC is a fundamental right of self-determination that ensures participation by all people with a particular focus on indigenous peoples and local communities in development projects in order to ensure that such projects are conducted in a sustainable manner taking into account their economic, social and cultural impact⁴¹. According to the United Nations, FPIC allows indigenous peoples to give or withhold consent to a project that may affect them or their territories⁴². Further, it has been observed that once indigenous peoples have given their consent, FPIC allows them to withdraw it at any stage⁴³. FPIC is at the heart of carbon projects requiring governments and investors to ensure that indigenous peoples and local communities have an active and meaningful voice concerning activities being implemented in their lands and territories⁴⁴. FPIC ensures that indigenous peoples and local communities are adequately informed about the details and potential impacts of a carbon project before such projects are implemented⁴⁵. This is key in securing a social licence to operate from indigenous peoples and local communities thus ensuring acceptance of carbon projects, minimizing conflicts and strengthening implementation of such projects⁴⁶. Ensuring FPIC is therefore necessary towards effectively designing and implementing carbon projects towards climate justice.

⁴¹ Owen, J.R. and Kemp, D., "Free Prior and Informed Consent', Social Complexity and the Mining Industry: Establishing A Knowledge Base," *Resources Policy*, Vol.41 (2014): 91-100

⁴² United Nations., 'Free Prior and Informed Consent – An Indigenous Peoples' right and a good practice for local communities – FAO' Available at <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/publications/2016/10/free-prior-and-informed-consent-an-indigenous-peoples-right-and-a-good-practice-for-local-communities-fao/> (Accessed on 13/03/2026)

⁴³ Ibid

⁴⁴ Free, Prior and Informed Consent in Carbon Credit Projects., Available at <https://systemica.digital/en/consentimento-previo-livre-e-informado-nos-projetos-de-credito-de-carbono/> (Accessed on 13/03/2026)

⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁶ Ibid

It is also necessary to ensure equitable benefit-sharing in carbon projects. Equitable benefit-sharing has been identified as a fundamental principle of carbon justice which ensures that both the monetary and non-monetary benefits from carbon projects are enjoyed by all stakeholders including indigenous peoples, landowners and local communities who contribute significantly to the success of these projects⁴⁷. Equitable benefit-sharing ensures that all stakeholders enjoy benefits from the successful implementation of carbon projects. For instance, investors can benefit from return on investment in carbon projects⁴⁸. On the other hand, local communities where such projects are implemented can benefit through job creation, investments in health, education and infrastructure, and ecosystem restoration⁴⁹. It is therefore necessary to adopt equitable benefit-sharing arrangements in order to ensure that carbon projects uphold the tenets of climate justice.

4.0 Conclusion

There is need to ensure good governance in carbon projects in order to foster climate justice. If well implemented, carbon projects can promote climate justice by strengthening climate action, protecting ecosystems and enhancing socio-economic benefits for vulnerable populations⁵⁰. However, poor implemented carbon projects can undermine climate justice by causing human right violations and damaging the environment⁵¹. Consequently, it is imperative to ensure access to information, FPIC and equitable benefit-sharing in carbon projects towards fostering climate justice for people and planet.

⁴⁷ Rethinking benefit sharing in African carbon projects., Available at <https://fsdafrica.org/publication/rethinking-benefit-sharing-in-african-carbon-projects/> (Accessed on 13/03/2026)

⁴⁸ Natural Justice., 'A Pathway Towards Just Carbon Markets: A Legal and Policy Guide for African Countries' Op Cit

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⁵¹ Ibid

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World Bank Group., 'Stories From the Field - A Look at World Bank Carbon Finance Projects in Africa' Available at <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/climatechange/publication/projects-reducing-emissions-earning-carbon-credits-africa>

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