

*Effective Climate Governance for All: Compensating Vulnerable Communities facing Irreparable Loss
and Damage from Extreme Weather and Rising Sea*

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Effective Climate Governance for All: Compensating Vulnerable Communities facing Irreparable Loss and Damage from Extreme Weather and Rising Sea

Kariuki Muigua*

Abstract

This paper discusses how effective climate governance can be achieved by compensating vulnerable communities facing adverse climatic events. The paper observes that despite climate change being a global problem, its impacts are felt unevenly across regions, nations, communities and individuals. In particular, the paper observes that some communities are more vulnerable to the effects of climate change. The paper discusses how adverse climatic events including extreme weather and rising sea are impacting vulnerable communities across the world. Due to the disproportionate impacts of climate change across communities, the paper notes that compensating vulnerable communities facing irreparable Loss and Damage from extreme weather and rising sea is a matter of justice, equity, fairness and human rights. The paper discusses how this ideal can be achieved towards effective governance for people and planet.

1.0 Introduction

Effective climate governance is crucial towards protecting people and planet. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) observes that the world is in a climate emergency¹. Regions, nations, communities and people all over the world are experiencing the adverse impacts of climate change, which include changing weather patterns, rising sea level, and more extreme weather events such as intense droughts, catastrophic storms and flooding². The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development notes that climate change is one of the greatest challenges of our time whose adverse impacts undermine the ability of all countries to achieve Sustainable Development³.

Strengthening climate governance is therefore key towards addressing the impacts of climate change on people and planet. In particular, it has been observed that unless urgent climate action is taken to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions all over the world, warming could pass

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¹ United Nations Environment Programme., 'Climate Action' Available at <https://www.unep.org/en/what-we-do/climate-action> (Accessed on 29/10/2026)

² United Nations., 'Climate Action.' Available at <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/climate-action/> (Accessed on 29/10/2026)

³ United Nations General Assembly., 'Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.' 21 October 2015, A/RES/70/1., Available at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/21252030%20Agenda%20for%20Sustainable%20Development%20web.pdf> (Accessed on 29/10/2026)

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2.9°C this century, with catastrophic consequences for life on the planet⁴. Climate change has been identified as the greatest existential threat to our planet⁵. Without urgent action, consequences of climate change including rising global temperatures, desertification, disappearance of species, water scarcity, and crop failure will worsen in coming years threatening the well-being of both humanity and nature⁶.

Sound climate governance is therefore necessary towards preventing, mitigating and adapting to climate change and its impacts⁷. Climate governance focuses on the institutions, laws, rules and processes that guide collective efforts at all levels to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to effects of climate change⁸. It has been correctly observed that effective climate governance is key towards enabling the world to appropriately confront climate change⁹.

This paper discusses how effective climate governance can be achieved by compensating vulnerable communities facing adverse climatic events. The paper observes that despite climate change being a global problem, its impacts are felt unevenly across regions, nations, communities and individuals. In particular, the paper observes that some communities are more vulnerable to the effects of climate change. The paper discusses how adverse climatic events including extreme weather and rising sea are impacting vulnerable communities across the world. Due to the disproportionate impacts of climate change across communities, the paper notes that compensating vulnerable communities facing irreparable Loss and Damage from extreme weather and rising sea is a matter of justice, equity, fairness and human rights. The paper discusses how this ideal can be achieved towards effective governance for people and planet.

⁴ United Nations Environment Programme., 'Climate Action' Op Cit

⁵ What Are the Effects of Climate Change?., Available at <https://www.nrdc.org/stories/what-are-effects-climate-change> (Accessed on 29/10/2026)

⁶ Ibid

⁷ European Environment Agency., 'Governance of climate change mitigation and adaptation' Available at <https://www.eea.europa.eu/en/europe-environment-2025/thematic-briefings/climate-change/governance-of-climate-change-mitigation-and-adaptation> (Accessed on 29/10/2026)

⁸ Climate Governance and Policy Frameworks., Available at <https://www.nature.com/nature-index/topics/14/climate-governance-and-policy-frameworks> (Accessed on 29/10/2026)

⁹ World Bank Group., 'Climate Change Governance' Available at <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2021/12/06/climate-change-governance> (Accessed on 29/10/2026)

2.0 Impact of Climate Change on Vulnerable Communities

The effects of climate change are felt unevenly across regions, nations, communities and individuals. For instance, it has been observed that vulnerable and marginalized individuals, groups and communities including indigenous peoples, local communities, women, the youth, the elderly, people of colour, persons with disabilities and people and communities in developing countries are more affected by climate change when compared to other segments of the population¹⁰. In addition, it has been observed that nations in the Global South are extremely vulnerable to climate change and its impacts despite their negligible greenhouse gas emissions¹¹.

Climate change has disproportionate effects across the world. It has been observed that climate change magnifies inequalities by unevenly affecting those least equipped to handle its effects¹². For instance, developing countries, which have contributed the least to global emissions are, in many cases, now the most vulnerable to climate disasters¹³. UNEP notes that while climate change is global, developing nations and communities are disproportionately vulnerable to its effects¹⁴. In most cases, climate change has uneven impacts on those who cannot afford goods and services they need to buffer themselves and recover from its effects¹⁵. The United Nations observes that climate change disproportionately affects the poorest and most vulnerable fuelling injustices and inequalities¹⁶.

The adverse impacts of climate change are particularly being felt by vulnerable communities. For example, it has been observed that vulnerable communities in developing countries depend directly on activities that are the most affected by climate change, notably, agriculture, forestry, and fishery¹⁷. Extreme weather events such as floods and droughts are impacting these sectors undermining the livelihoods, well-being and survival of vulnerable communities¹⁸. In particular, it has been observed that extreme weather events disproportionately affect indigenous and local

¹⁰ Center for Climate Justice., 'What is Climate Justice?' Available at <https://centerclimatejustice.universityofcalifornia.edu/what-is-climate-justice/> (Accessed on 29/10/2026)

¹¹ 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 29/10/2026)

¹² The Disproportionate Impacts of Climate Change., Available at <https://courses.ems.psu.edu/meteo7/book/export/html/2471> (Accessed on 29/10/2026)

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ United Nations Environment Programme., 'Responding to Climate Change' Available at <https://www.unep.org/en/where-we-work/africa/regional-initiatives/responding-climate-change> (Accessed on 29/10/2026)

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ United Nations., 'Five ways the climate crisis impacts human security' Available at <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/science/climate-issues/human-security> (Accessed on 29/10/2026)

¹⁷ United Nations., 'Five ways the climate crisis impacts human security' Op Cit

¹⁸ Ibid

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communities whose livelihoods, culture and spiritual well-being directly depend on local natural resources and ecosystems¹⁹. Indigenous peoples and local communities are among the first to face the direct consequences of climate change, because of their dependence upon, and close relationship, with the environment and its resources²⁰. Extreme weather events are impacting local ecosystems and resources including water resources, forests, pasture, arable land, and fisheries undermining the well-being of vulnerable indigenous and local communities who depend on these resources²¹. It has been observed that the increasing frequency and intensity of extreme weather events such as droughts, floods, storms, cyclones and heatwaves causes injustices and inequalities against vulnerable and marginalized indigenous and local communities²².

Rising sea levels is another consequence of climate change that is undermining the livelihoods, well-being and survival of vulnerable communities. It is estimated that global sea levels have risen by about 21 to 24 centimetres since 1880²³. Rising sea levels has been attributed to a combination of factors including melt water from glaciers and ice sheets and thermal expansion of seawater as it warms²⁴. The United Nations notes that sea level rise is now accelerating at an unprecedented level, reshaping coastlines and increasing risks for islands, coastal cities, river deltas and Arctic communities²⁵. Rising seas threaten land, livelihoods and even statehood of vulnerable Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and low-lying coastal countries²⁶. For instance, it has been observed that SIDS such as Kiribati and the Maldives are grappling with the existential threat of rising seas²⁷. The impacts of climate change including sea level rise, increasing temperatures and frequency and intensity of tropical cyclones, and storm surges are adversely affecting SIDS, some of which are in low-lying areas of just 5 meters above sea level at the highest

¹⁹ United Nations., 'The Effects of Climate Change on Indigenous Peoples' Available at <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/climate-change.html> (Accessed on 29/10/2026)

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Ibid

²² Filho. W.L et al., 'Impacts of climate change to African indigenous communities and examples of adaptation responses' Available at <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-021-26540-0> (Accessed on 29/10/2026)

²³ Climate Change: Global Sea Level., Available at <https://www.climate.gov/news-features/understanding-climate/climate-change-global-sea-level> (Accessed on 29/10/2026)

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ United Nations., 'Sea level rise: an existential threat?' Available at <https://www.un.org/en/focus/sea-level-rise> (Accessed on 29/10/2026)

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ The Disproportionate Impacts of Climate Change., Op Cit

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point making them more vulnerable to these impacts²⁸. In particular, rising seas displace entire communities in SIDS while also threatening their statehood²⁹.

The impacts of climate change are therefore felt unevenly across regions, nations and communities. In particular, it has been observed that many developing nations are located in regions particularly vulnerable to climate change such as low-lying islands, arid zones, and tropical areas³⁰. Vulnerable communities in these areas are disproportionately impacted by rising sea levels, intense droughts, heatwaves, and storms³¹. Climate change therefore causes injustices and inequalities since vulnerable communities who have contributed the least to the accumulation of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere are the most impacted by extreme weather events. Consequently, promoting climate justice is necessary towards effective climate governance that prioritizes the needs of the most vulnerable. Climate justice acknowledges that the impacts of climate change are unevenly distributed, with those who have contributed least to the climate crisis, especially people and communities in vulnerable and marginalized contexts, bearing its most severe consequences³². Climate justice has been described as a moral and ethical principle that seeks to address the disproportionate impact of climate change on vulnerable communities³³. This concept recognises that the consequences of climate change, such as extreme weather events, rising sea levels, and resource scarcity, are not distributed equally, with marginalized and disadvantaged populations often bearing the brunt of these effects³⁴. In light of these inequalities, climate justice advocates for fair, equitable and inclusive climate governance that prioritize the needs of those who are most affected by climate change³⁵.

It is therefore necessary to promote climate justice for vulnerable communities impacted by extreme weather and rising sea towards effective climate governance for all.

²⁸ Bafana. B., 'Climate Change is No 'Future Scenario' for Pacific Island Nations; Climate Change is 'Real' Available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/climate-change-no-future-scenario-pacific-islandnations-climate-change-real> (Accessed on 29/10/2026)

²⁹ United Nations., 'Small Islands, Rising Seas' Available at <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/small-islands-rising-seas> (Accessed on 29/10/2026)

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Ibid

³² United Nations Development Programme., 'Climate Justice: A youth guide to legal responsibility, policy action and accountability' Available at <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2026-04/undp-climate-justice-a-youth-guide-to-legal-responsibility-policy-action-and-accountability.pdf> (Accessed on 29/10/2026)

³³ United Nations., 'Climate Justice Global Alliance' Available at <https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships/climate-justice-global-alliance> (Accessed on 29/10/2026)

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ Ibid

3.0 Compensating Vulnerable Communities facing Irreparable Loss and Damage from Extreme Weather and Rising Sea

With climate change having disproportionate impacts all over the world, fostering climate change is necessary towards protecting people and planet. In particular, vulnerable communities including indigenous and local communities, and communities in low-lying islands, arid zones, and tropical areas are adversely impacted by climate change³⁶. Extreme weather events such as intense droughts, heatwaves, and storms are severely impacting vulnerable communities by affecting their livelihoods, food and water security, availability of natural resources, and human health and well-being³⁷. In addition, vulnerable communities in SIDS are adversely impacted by rising seas which displace entire communities, undermine livelihoods, cause loss of human life and threaten the statehood of these nations by rendering entire regions uninhabitable³⁸.

Compensating vulnerable communities facing irreparable Loss and Damage from extreme weather and rising sea is therefore a matter of justice, equity, fairness and protection of fundamental human rights. In order to achieve this objective, the Fund for responding to Loss and Damage (FRLD) was launched at the 2022 United Nations Climate Change Conference/Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP 27) when parties agreed to set up funding arrangements for responding to loss and damage associated with the adverse effects of climate change, including a focus on addressing loss and damage³⁹. The purpose of the Fund is to provide loss and damage funding for vulnerable countries hit hard by floods, droughts, rising seas and other climate disasters⁴⁰. UNEP notes that establishment of the FRLD is a major milestone in global climate governance since the Fund aims to provide financial assistance to nations most vulnerable and impacted by the effects of climate change towards climate justice⁴¹.

The FRLD is critical in global climate governance since it aims to empower developing countries and their communities that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change in responding to economic and non-economic loss and damage associated with the adverse effects

³⁶ United Nations., 'Small Islands, Rising Seas' Op Cit

³⁷ The Disproportionate Impacts of Climate Change., Op Cit

³⁸ United Nations., 'Small Islands, Rising Seas' Op Cit

³⁹ UNFCCC., 'Decision -/CP.27 -/CMA.4: Funding Arrangements for Responding to Loss and Damage Associated with the Adverse Effects of Climate Change, Including a Focus on Addressing Loss and Damage.' Available at https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cma4_auv_8f.pdf (Accessed on 30/10/2026)

⁴⁰ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change., 'Five Key Takeaways from COP27.' Available at https://unfccc.int/process-andmeetings/conferences/sharm-el-sheikh-climate-change-conference-november-2022/five-key-takeawaysfrom-cop27?gclid=EAlaIQobChMI-5_C16jRgAMVDzAGAB1Ikw6NEAAYASAAEgL_QfD_BwE (Accessed on 30/10/2026)

⁴¹ United Nations Environment Programme., 'What you Need to Know about the COP 27 Loss and Damage Fund.' Available at <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/what-you-need-know-about-cop27-loss-and-damage-fund> (Accessed on 30/10/2026)

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of climate change, including extreme weather events and slow onset events⁴². This Fund addresses the urgent and growing needs of vulnerable communities in developing countries facing severe and irreversible impacts of climate change⁴³. In order to promote climate justice, FRLD finances initiatives to help vulnerable communities recover from climate-related losses and damage resulting from incidents such as climate-induced extreme weather events, rising sea levels, and other climate-induced crises⁴⁴.

FRLD is therefore key towards protecting vulnerable communities facing irreparable Loss and Damage from extreme weather and rising sea. It has been observed that climate change can lead to irreparable Loss and Damage especially when its impacts go beyond mitigation and adaptation capabilities of vulnerable nations and communities, encompassing both economic and non-economic losses such as destroyed infrastructure, crops, and loss of habitats due to extreme weather⁴⁵. Irreparable Loss and Damage refers to the negative consequences that arise from the unavoidable risks of climate change, including rising sea levels, prolonged heatwaves, desertification, the acidification of the sea and extreme events, such as bushfires, species extinction and crop failures⁴⁶.

Despite its role in promoting climate justice, it has been observed that financial flows to the FRLD remain low⁴⁷. This undermines the capacity of vulnerable nations and communities to recover from irreparable Loss and Damage caused by extreme weather and rising sea. It is therefore necessary to enhance financial flows to the FRLD in order to ensure adequate and effective compensation for vulnerable communities facing irreparable Loss and Damage from extreme weather and rising sea. In particular, developed countries have a greater responsibility in enhancing financial flows to the FRLD towards climate justice. For example, according to the principle of *common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities*, everyone is to act on climate change but justice and equity demands that those who have contributed more to the problem assume a greater responsibility for solving it⁴⁸. Consequently, it has been observed that this principle requires developed countries to act first and fast in cutting greenhouse gas

⁴² United Nations Climate Change., 'Fund for responding to Loss and Damage' Available at <https://unfccc.int/fund-for-responding-to-loss-and-damage> (Accessed on 30/10/2026)

⁴³ Fund for responding to Loss and Damage., 'Supporting country-owned efforts in responding to climate-induced loss and damage' Available at <https://www.frlld.org/> (Accessed on 30/10/2026)

⁴⁴ Ibid

⁴⁵ The Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis., 'Challenges of Making the Loss and Damage Fund Work for Kenya and Developing Countries' Available at <https://kippra.or.ke/challenges-of-making-the-loss-and-damage-fund-work-for-kenya-and-developing-countries/> (Accessed on 30/10/2026)

⁴⁶ United Nations Environment Programme., 'What you Need to Know about the COP 27 Loss and Damage Fund.' Op Cit

⁴⁷ The Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis., 'Challenges of Making the Loss and Damage Fund Work for Kenya and Developing Countries' Op Cit

⁴⁸ United Nations., 'Finance and Justice.' Op Cit; Rio Declaration, Principle 7(1992) UN Doc.A/Conf.151/26

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emissions and also to provide financial support to countries with more limited means so they can keep up with enormous financial burdens as climate change accelerates⁴⁹. It is therefore necessary for developed countries to comply with this principle in order to enhance climate finance flows to the FRLD for climate justice. Further, it has been observed that international, regional and national financial institutions and donors can also play a pivotal role in supporting the FRLD towards strengthening global climate governance⁵⁰.

Effective governance of the FRLD can also ensure adequate, equitable and responsive compensation for vulnerable nations and communities facing irreparable Loss and Damage from extreme weather and rising sea. For example, utilising simplified accreditation and access requirements can ensure that vulnerable countries are able to access Loss and Damage funding in an efficient and expeditious manner through the FRLD⁵¹. There is also need for representative and inclusive decision making that ensures that climate activities are owned by and determined by most affected communities including indigenous and local communities and vulnerable groups⁵². Inclusive climate governance ensures that initiatives funded by the FRLD are tailored to respond directly to country-specific needs and priorities, ensuring that solutions are locally driven and contextually appropriate⁵³.

Through the foregoing initiatives, it is possible to promote effective climate governance for people and planet.

4.0 Conclusion

Climate change has disproportionate impacts on nations, communities and individuals across the world. Promoting climate justice is therefore necessary towards effective climate governance that focuses on equity, fairness, inclusivity and protection of human rights in the face of climate change. In particular, compensating vulnerable communities facing irreparable Loss and Damage from extreme weather and rising sea is crucial towards climate justice and effective global climate governance. It is imperative to actualise the FRLD towards attaining climate justice for effective climate governance for all.

⁴⁹ Ibid

⁵⁰ Anderson. K., 'What is the COP 27 Loss and Damage Fund?' Available at <https://greenly.earth/en-us/blog/company-guide/what-is-the-cop27-loss-and-damage-fund> (Accessed on 30/10/2026)

⁵¹ Shawoo. Z et al, 'Operationalising the Loss and Damage Fund.' Available at https://www.germanwatch.org/sites/default/files/germanwatch_sei_operationalising_the_loss_and_damage_fund_2023.pdf (Accessed on 30/10/2026)

⁵² Ibid

⁵³ Fund for responding to Loss and Damage., 'Supporting country-owned efforts in responding to climate-induced loss and damage' Op Cit

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