

Equity and Justice in the New Era: Combining Indigenous Traditional Science, Law and Modern Technology for a Holistic Climate Action Framework in the Global South

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Abstract

This paper explores how holistic climate action can be realised in the Global South. The paper posits that tackling climate change is a matter of equity and justice in the Global South. It notes that despite the negligible contribution of the Global South to the climate crisis, countries, communities and people in this region stand out disproportionately as the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. The paper argues that climate change raises inequalities and injustices in the Global South by destroying nature and devastating human lives, health, livelihoods and economic development. Due to the adverse effects of climate change on people and planet, the paper asserts that effective and holistic climate action is crucial towards promoting Sustainable Development in the Global South. Consequently, the paper suggests how holistic climate action frameworks can be achieved in the Global South by combining indigenous traditional science, law and modern technology.

1.0 Introduction

With the impacts of climate change worsening all over the world, it has become increasingly vital to promote equity and justice for both people and planet. 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 flooding¹. In particular, it has been observed that human activities primarily burning of fossil fuels such as coal, oil and gas, are emitting greenhouse gases that are warming the planet faster than at any time in at least the last two thousand years². This has led to adverse climatic and weather events including heatwaves, wildfires, floods, sea-level rise, tropical storms,

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¹ United Nations., 'Climate Action.' Available at <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/climate-action/> (Accessed on 28/08/2026)

² United Nations., 'What is Climate Change?' Available at <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/what-is-climate-change> (Accessed on 28/08/2026)

droughts and hurricanes that are increasing in scale, frequency and intensity with severe impacts on people and planet³.

The adverse effects of climate change undermine equity and justice since they are causing dangerous and widespread disruption, depletion and degradation of nature while also affecting the lives, health, livelihoods and well-being of billions of people all over the world⁴. In particular, climate change fuels inequalities and injustices since it has disproportionate impacts on vulnerable individuals, groups and communities including indigenous peoples and local communities, women, the youth, the elderly, people of colour, persons with disabilities and people and communities in developing countries⁵. Consequently, climate change has been described as one of the greatest challenges of our time whose adverse impacts undermine the ability of all countries to achieve Sustainable Development⁶. Effective and holistic climate action is therefore necessary towards fostering Sustainable Development while addressing the inequalities and injustices caused by the climate crisis.

This paper explores how holistic climate action can be realised in the Global South. The paper posits that tackling climate change is a matter of equity and justice in the Global South. It notes that despite the negligible contribution of the Global South to the climate crisis, countries, communities and people in this region stand out disproportionately as the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. The paper argues that climate change raises inequalities and injustices in the Global South by destroying nature and devastating human lives, health, livelihoods and economic development. Due to the adverse effects of climate change on people and planet, the paper asserts that effective and holistic climate action is crucial towards promoting Sustainable Development in the Global South. Consequently, the paper suggests how holistic climate action frameworks

³ World Health Organization., 'Climate Change' Available at <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/climate-change-and-health#:~:text=Key%20facts,diarrhoea%20and%20heat%20stress%20alone>. (Accessed on 28/08/2026)

⁴ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change., 'Climate change: a threat to human wellbeing and health of the planet. Taking action now can secure our future' Available at https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/downloads/press/IPCC_AR6_WGII_PressRelease-English.pdf (Accessed on 28/08/2026)

⁵ Center for Climate Justice., 'What is Climate Justice?' Available at <https://centerclimatejustice.universityofcalifornia.edu/what-is-climate-justice/> (Accessed on 28/08/2026)

⁶ 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 28/08/2026)

can be achieved in the Global South by combining indigenous traditional science, law and modern technology.

2.0 Impacts of Climate Change on Equity and Justice in the Global South

It has been observed that climate change is a matter of equity and justice⁷. For example, even in the same country or community, the impacts of climate change may be felt unevenly due to structural inequalities based on race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status with women and girls, people with disabilities, indigenous and local communities, and the poor being disproportionately impacted⁸. In addition, due to inequalities among nations, the impacts of climate change are distributed unevenly around the world with developing countries and vulnerable populations within those countries, being more susceptible to climate-induced loss and damage⁹. Further, due to intergenerational inequalities and injustices, children and the youth who have little to no contribution to the climate crisis are likely to face the worse effects of climate change as they advance in life with future generations also at risk¹⁰.

Climate change can therefore undermine equity, justice and human rights due to its disproportionate impacts on nations, communities and individuals. In particular, climate change fuels inequalities, injustices and human rights concerns in the Global South. For instance, it has been observed that despite their little contribution to the climate crisis, developing countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) region and the Pacific islands continue to suffer the worst impacts of climate change¹¹. Climate change has more destructive and widespread effect on countries and communities in the Global South, which have been marginalised and have fewer resources to adapt or respond to its adverse consequences¹².

Despite climate change being a global phenomenon, its effects are more widespread and intense in the Global South. For instance, it has been observed that variable weather,

⁷ 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 28/08/2026)

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid

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 28/08/2026)

¹² Bandera. G., 'How climate colonialism affects the Global South' Available at <https://www.fairplanet.org/story/how-climate-colonialism-affects-the-global-south/> (Accessed on 28/08/2026)

intense natural disasters, and increased climate extremes associated with climate change are a global phenomenon, but the impacts and implications are felt most severely by disadvantaged countries and communities in the Global South¹³. A sharp contrast in respect to the impacts of climate change can be seen between the regions that have most benefited from fossil fuel exploitation, the Global North which is responsible for nearly 90 percent of global carbon emissions, and the Global South which despite its negligible greenhouse gas emissions, continues to be the most impacted region¹⁴. In particular, it has been observed that despite its little contribution to climate change, with less than three percent of global greenhouse gas emissions, Africa stands out disproportionately as the most vulnerable region in the world¹⁵. The impacts of climate change are devastating Africa's economies, environment and natural resources, infrastructure, food and water systems, public health and livelihoods¹⁶.

In light of the foregoing, it has been pointed out that consequences of climate change are evidently far worse in the Global South due to inequalities and injustices. This has been attributed to several factors including prevailing low levels of socio-economic development which means that countries, communities and individuals in the Global South cannot effectively anticipate, respond and recover from the adverse effects of climate change¹⁷. In addition, it has been observed that due to geographic vulnerability, the Global South continues to shoulder the brunt of the burdens of climate change despite its relative innocence in causing it¹⁸.

The impacts of climate change are undermining equity, justice and human rights in the Global South. Countries and communities in the Global South are facing worsening climatic events such as extreme droughts, more intense storms, greater heat extremes, bigger wildfires, and rising sea levels¹⁹. In particular, it has been observed that the impacts of climate change on the environment and communities in the Global South are

¹³ Climate research in the Global South. *Nat Commun* 16, 8286 (2025). Available at <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-025-63884-3> (Accessed on 28/08/2026)

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ United Nations Environment Programme., 'Responding to climate change' Available at <https://www.unep.org/regions/africa/regional-initiatives/responding-climate-change> (Accessed on 28/08/2026)

¹⁶ African Development Bank Group., 'Climate Change in Africa' Available at <https://www.afdb.org/en/cop25/climate-change-africa> (Accessed on 28/08/2026)

¹⁷ United Nations Environment Programme., 'Responding to Climate Change' Op Cit

¹⁸ Giles. M., 'The Principles of Climate Justice at CoP27.' Op Cit

¹⁹ Hill. A., & Babin. M 'Why Climate Finance is Critical for Accelerating Global Action.' Available at <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/why-climate-finance-critical-accelerating-global-action> (Accessed on 28/08/2026)

extensive and include food and water scarcity, environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, impact on livelihoods and health risks²⁰. Further, climate-induced disasters in the Global South have led to an increase in climate refugee with many people and communities displaced from their lands and territories²¹. This situation has socio-economic and cultural impacts including loss of livelihoods and destruction of cultural practices and ways of life²².

Climate change therefore has adverse and destructive impacts on nations, communities and individuals in the Global South. It contributes to poverty, destruction of property and infrastructure, loss of lives and livelihoods, food and water insecurity and displacement of communities²³. Consequently, effective climate action in the Global South is key towards promoting equity, justice, fairness and human rights.

3.0 Combining Indigenous Traditional Science, Law and Modern Technology towards Effective and Holistic Climate Action Frameworks in the Global South

Due to the adverse and disproportionate impacts that countries, communities and individuals in the Global South face from the climate crisis, effective climate action is crucial towards protecting both people and planet for Sustainable Development. In particular, utilising appropriate tools including indigenous traditional science, law and modern technology can promote effective and holistic climate solutions for people and planet in the Global South. For example, it has been observed that the Global South is a rich reservoir of indigenous traditional science and knowledge systems that can strengthen climate action for Sustainable Development²⁴. Indigenous peoples and local communities who primarily live in the Global South have developed, maintained, applied and evolved knowledge systems, philosophies and practices via direct experience interacting with landscapes, ecosystems, habitats and species over millennia enabling them to effectively confront environmental threats including climate change²⁵.

²⁰ The Unequal Costs of Climate Change and Destruction of the Global South: What are the solutions?., Available at <https://sites.manchester.ac.uk/global-social-challenges/2025/01/15/the-unequal-costs-of-climate-change-and-destruction-of-the-global-south-what-are-the-solutions/> (Accessed on 28/08/2026)

²¹ Ibid

²² Ibid

²³ How climate colonialism affects the Global South., Available at <https://www.fairplanet.org/story/how-climate-colonialism-affects-the-global-south/> (Accessed on 28/08/2026)

²⁴ United Nations Development Programme., 'Indigenous knowledge is crucial in the fight against climate change - here's why' Available at <https://climatepromise.undp.org/news-and-stories/indigenous-knowledge-crucial-fight-against-climate-change-heres-why> (Accessed on 28/08/2026)

²⁵ Jessen. T et al., 'Contributions of Indigenous Knowledge to ecological and evolutionary understanding' Available at <https://esajournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/fee.2435> (Accessed on 28/08/2026)

Indigenous traditional science encompasses a deep understanding of local ecosystems, the behavior of wildlife, the medicinal properties of plants, weather patterns, and the complex interconnections between nature and human society among other phenomena and is therefore well-suited to ensure sound environmental conservation²⁶. It has been argued that indigenous traditional science including Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) can make an important contribution to climate change policy and Sustainable Development Goal 13 on climate action; by enhancing observation of changing climates, evolving methods to convert observation and knowledge into relevant data, adapting to impacts and contributing to global mitigation efforts²⁷.

Harnessing indigenous traditional science can therefore strengthen climate action in the Global South. It has been observed that with climate change disproportionately affecting poor and marginalized populations especially indigenous and local communities in the Global South, these communities rely on indigenous traditional science and knowledge to adapt and build resilience in the face of climate variability and disasters²⁸. Indigenous traditional science is deeply embedded in cultural, ecological, and spiritual relationships with the environment and offers valuable contributions to sustainable climate adaptation strategies²⁹. For example, traditional farming, agriculture and resource management systems including agroforestry, inter cropping, cover cropping, use of drought resistant and climate-resilient crops, biological management of pests and diseases, water management and conservation of vital ecosystems including forests have ensured that indigenous peoples and local communities harness the power of nature towards achieving food security, conserving water, mitigating climate change and fostering biodiversity conservation³⁰. Consequently, it has been argued that due to their indigenous traditional science including TEK, which is intergenerational and

²⁶ The Role of Indigenous Knowledge in Environmental Conservation., Available at https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/role-indigenous-knowledge-environmental-conservation-eurasia-carbon?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_android&utm_campaign=share_via (Accessed on 28/08/2026)

²⁷ United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization., 'Harnessing Indigenous Knowledge for Climate Risk Management' Available at <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/harnessing-indigenous-knowledge-climate-risk-management> (Accessed on 28/08/2026)

²⁸ Understanding how Indigenous Knowledge contributes to climate change adaptation and resilience: A systematic literature review., Available at <https://weadapt.org/knowledge-base/community-based-adaptation/understanding-how-indigenous-knowledge-contributes-to-climate-change-adaptation-and-resilience-a-systematic-literature-review/> (Accessed on 28/08/2026)

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ Latief. A., 'Harnessing Indigenous Knowledge for Climate Change Resilience in Africa' Available at https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/harnessing-indigenous-knowledge-climate-change-africa-aatifah-latief/?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_android&utm_campaign=share_via (Accessed on 28/08/2026)

community-based, indigenous peoples and local communities in the Global South are among the first to notice the early signs of climate change³¹. With the climate crisis now intensifying all over the world, the knowledge and practices of indigenous and local communities provide valuable climate solutions that can advance mitigation efforts, enhance adaptation strategies and build resilience especially in the Global South³².

In addition to indigenous traditional science, law provides an appropriate tool towards effective climate action in the Global South. For example, law ensures the availability of legal, policy and institutional frameworks that can guide effective climate action³³. Law is an appropriate tool towards mainstreaming climate action into national development policies, identifying national climate mitigation and adaptation strategies for resilience, identifying opportunities to unlock climate finance for development, and providing a framework to pursue low-carbon and climate-resilient development³⁴. In addition, it has been observed that law can bolster climate action by empowering the most climate-vulnerable people including indigenous and local communities to realize environmental rights and actively participate in decision-making processes, strengthening policy, regulatory frameworks and institutional capacities towards sound climate action, and strengthening environmental governance towards protecting people and planet from climate change among other mounting environmental threats³⁵. In particular, it has been observed that states have an obligation under international law to prevent climate change, protect human rights and the environment from the impacts of climate change and remedy its harms, a decision that was affirmed by the International Court of Justice³⁶. Law is therefore a crucial tool towards sound climate action since it places duties and obligations upon states to take appropriate action towards confronting climate change³⁷.

³¹ United Nations Development Programme., 'Indigenous knowledge is crucial in the fight against climate change - here's why' Op Cit

³² Ibid

³³ International Development Law Organization., 'Climate Justice: A Rule of Law Approach for Transformative Climate Action.' Available at https://www.idlo.int/sites/default/files/pdfs/publications/climate_justice_policy_paper_-_climate_action_-_final.pdf (Accessed on 28/08/2026)

³⁴ Climate Change Act., No. 11 of 2016, Government Printer, Nairobi

³⁵ International Development Law Organization., 'Climate Justice: A Rule of Law Approach for Transformative Climate Action.' Op Cit

³⁶ International Court of Justice., 'Obligations of States in respect of Climate Change' Available at <https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/187/187-20250723-adv-01-00-en.pdf> (Accessed on 28/08/2026)

³⁷ Center for International Environmental Law., 'How Climate Law Is Reshaping Global Politics' Available at <https://www.ciel.org/how-climate-law-is-reshaping-climate-action/> (Accessed on 28/08/2026)

Further, by embracing modern technology, it is possible to promote sound climate action in the Global South. For example, it has been observed that modern technologies are strengthening climate action through tools and systems that enable emissions reduction which involves tackling climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions³⁸; sequestration which entails removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere into permanent geological, biological or oceanic reservoirs³⁹; adaptation through responding to and coping with climate change as it occurs, in either a planned or unplanned way⁴⁰; and solar geoengineering through large-scale engineered modifications to limit the amount of sunlight reaching the earth, in an attempt to offset the effects of ongoing greenhouse gas emissions⁴¹. By adopting modern technologies, it is possible to strengthen climate mitigation and adaptation through clean energy solutions with emphasis on renewable energy technologies, energy-efficient practices, carbon capture and storage, early warning systems and the use drought-resistant crops⁴².

In particular, Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a modern technology that can bolster climate action in the Global South. This powerful technology is being integrated across many sectors including energy systems, transportation, agriculture, buildings and cities, biodiversity conservation, climate finance, early warning systems and societal resilience towards strengthening climate action⁴³. AI technologies can aid in minimising waste, conserving energy, identifying emission hotspots, optimizing the deployment of renewable energy and strengthening early warning systems thus providing a basis for sound climate action⁴⁴.

With the Global South being disproportionately impacted by climate change, indigenous traditional science, law and modern technology provide appropriate solutions that can strengthen climate action for people and planet. It is therefore necessary to combine these

³⁸ Australian Academy of Science., 'What does Science Say About Options to Address Climate Change?' Available at <https://www.science.org.au/learning/general-audience/science-climate-change/9-what-does-science-say-about-climate-change-options> (Accessed on 29/08/2026)

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ Ibid

⁴² Climate and Technology., Available at <https://ecasiafrica.org/climate-and-technology/> (Accessed on 29/08/2026)

⁴³ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization., 'How AI Policy can Accelerate Climate Action' Available at <https://www.unesco.org/ethics-ai/en/articles/how-ai-policy-can-accelerate-climate-action> (Accessed on 29/08/2026)

⁴⁴ United Nations Climate Change., 'AI and Climate Action: Opportunities, Risks and Challenges for Developing Countries' Available at <https://unfccc.int/news/ai-and-climate-action-opportunities-risks-and-challenges-for-developing-countries> (Accessed on 29/08/2026)

powerful tools towards developing effective and holistic climate action frameworks in the Global South for Sustainable Development.

4.0 Conclusion

Strengthening climate action in the Global South is vital towards protecting countries, communities and individuals from the adverse and disproportionate impacts they face from climate change for equity, justice and human rights. In particular, indigenous traditional science, law and modern technology including AI are effective and appropriate solutions towards sound climate action in the Global South for people and planet. It is therefore crucial to combine indigenous traditional science, law and modern technology for a holistic climate action framework in the Global South towards fostering equity and justice in the new era.

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