

Peace and Harmony in a Volatile World: Addressing Climate Change as a Matter of Justice, Human Rights and Equity

Kariuki Muigua

Peace and Harmony in a Volatile World: Addressing Climate Change as a Matter of Justice, Human Rights and Equity

Table of Contents

Abstract..... 3

1.0 Introduction 3

2.0 Impacts of Climate Change on Peace and Harmony 4

3.0 Addressing Climate Change as a Matter of Justice, Human Rights and Equity 7

4.0 Conclusion 10

References 10

Peace and Harmony in a Volatile World-Addressing Climate Change as a Matter of Justice, Human Rights and Equity

Kariuki Muigua*

Abstract

This paper critically examines how climate change can be effectively addressed towards peace and harmony. The paper notes that climate change is an undesirable phenomenon that undermines global peace and harmony. It discusses how climate change threatens peace and harmony. In particular, the paper observes that the disproportionate impacts of climate change across continents, communities and individuals undermine justice, human rights and equity with negative impacts on peace and harmony. In light of these concerns, the paper posits that fostering the ideal of climate justice is crucial in protecting vulnerable regions, communities and individuals towards peace and harmony. The paper explores how climate can be effectively and adequately addressed as a matter of justice, human rights and equity.

1.0 Introduction

Climate change is a negative phenomenon that is causing long-term shifts in global, regional, national and local temperatures and weather patterns¹. It has been observed that climate change is evidenced by the long-term change in the average weather patterns that have come to define Earth's local, regional and global climates². The long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns that cause climate change can be natural, due to changes in the sun's activity or large volcanic eruptions³. However, it has been observed that human activities are the main driver of climate change globally, primarily due to the burning of fossil fuels including coal, oil and gas⁴. Fossil fuels are by far the largest contributor to global climate change, accounting for over 75 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions and nearly 90 per cent of all global carbon dioxide emissions⁵.

* PhD in Law (Nrb),SC, FCI Arb (Chartered Arbitrator),OGW, LL. B (Hons) Nrb, LL.M (Environmental Law) Nrb; Dip. In Law (KSL); FCPS (K); Dip. in Arbitration (UK); MKIM; Mediator; Consultant: Lead expert EIA/EA NEMA; BSI ISO/IEC 27001:2005 ISMS Lead Auditor/ Implementer; ESG Consultant; Advocate of the High Court of Kenya; Professor of Environmental Law and Conflict Management at the University of Nairobi, Faculty of Law; Member of the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) [February, 2026].

¹ United Nations., 'What is Climate Change?' Available at <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/what-is-climate-change> (Accessed on 20/02/2026)

² What is Climate Change?., Available at <https://science.nasa.gov/climate-change/what-is-climate-change/> (Accessed on 20/02/2026)

³ United Nations., 'What is Climate Change?' Op Cit

⁴ Ibid

⁵ United Nations., 'Causes and Effects of Climate Change' Available at <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/science/causes-effects-climate-change> (Accessed on 20/02/2026)

Climate change is undermining Sustainable Development all over the world. It has been observed that climate change affects realization of the Sustainable Development agenda across the world by affecting the sustainability of the planet's ecosystems, the stability of the global economy and the future of humankind⁶. The impacts of climate change including intense droughts, water scarcity, severe wild fires, rising sea levels, flooding, melting polar ice, catastrophic storms and declining biodiversity are being witnessed all over the world undermining sustainability⁷. The United Nations *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*⁸ acknowledges that climate change is one of the greatest challenges of our time and its adverse impacts undermine the ability of all countries to achieve Sustainable Development⁹. Consequently, Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 13 under the Agenda urges all states to take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts¹⁰. Addressing climate change and its impacts is therefore a vital global ideal if the Sustainable Development agenda is to be realised.

This paper critically examines how climate change can be effectively addressed towards peace and harmony. The paper notes that climate change is an undesirable phenomenon that undermines global peace and harmony. It discusses how climate change threatens peace and harmony. In particular, the paper observes that the disproportionate impacts of climate change across continents, communities and individuals undermine justice, human rights and equity with negative impacts on peace and harmony. In light of these concerns, the paper posits that fostering the ideal of climate justice is crucial in protecting vulnerable regions, communities and individuals towards peace and harmony. The paper explores how climate can be effectively and adequately addressed as a matter of justice, human rights and equity.

2.0 Impacts of Climate Change on Peace and Harmony

Climate change is having disproportionate impacts across regions, communities and individuals. For example, it has been observed that developing nations and communities

⁶ Climate Change., 'Meaning, Definition, Causes, Examples and Consequences.' Available at <https://youmatter.world/en/definition/climate-change-meaning-definition-causes-and-consequences/> (Accessed on 12/01/2026)

⁷ United Nations., 'What is Climate Change?' Op Cit

⁸ 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 20/02/2026)

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid

in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean Islands and the Pacific Islands which due to an unfortunate mixture of economic and geographic vulnerability, continue to shoulder the brunt of the burdens of climate change despite their relative innocence in causing it¹¹. Despite climate change being a global problem, it has a more destructive and widespread effect on communities living in the Global South, which have been marginalised and have fewer resources to adapt or respond to its adverse consequences¹². In particular, Africa has been identified as the most vulnerable region in the world to climate change and its impacts¹³. Despite having the least greenhouse gas emissions, Africa stands out disproportionately as the continent that is most impacted by climate change¹⁴. Adverse climatic events including warmer temperatures, extreme droughts and floods are worsening in Africa impacting human life, livelihoods and economic growth¹⁵.

Climate change is also having disproportionate impacts on indigenous peoples and local communities particularly in the Global South. It has been observed that due to their dependence upon, and close relationship, with the environment and natural resources, indigenous peoples and local communities are adversely impacted by climate change¹⁶. For instance, indigenous peoples depend on natural resources for their livelihoods and they often inhabit diverse but fragile ecosystems which are threatened by the impacts of climate change¹⁷. The consequences of climate change have implications for the use, protection and management of land, water, wildlife, fisheries and forests among other

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 21/02/2026)

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 21/02/2026)

¹³ African Development Bank Group., 'Climate Change in Africa' Available at <https://www.afdb.org/en/cop25/climate-change-africa> (Accessed on 21/02/2026)

¹⁴ United Nations Environment Programme., 'Responding to Climate Change' Available at <https://www.unep.org/regions/africa/regional-initiatives/responding-climate-change> (Accessed on 21/02/2026)

¹⁵ World Meteorological Organization., 'Africa faces disproportionate burden from climate change and adaptation costs' Available at <https://wmo.int/news/media-centre/africa-faces-disproportionate-burden-from-climate-change-and-adaptation-costs> (Accessed on 21/02/2026)

¹⁶ United Nations., 'Climate Change' Available at <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/climate-change.html> (Accessed on 21/02/2026)

¹⁷ Nilsson. C., 'Climate Change from an Indigenous Perspective: Key Issues and Challenges' Available at https://www.iwgia.org/images/publications/IA%201-2_08_Climate_Change_from_ind_perspective.pdf (Accessed on 21/02/2026)

natural resources, affecting the economic, cultural, spiritual and customary significance of these resources to indigenous peoples and local communities in the Global South¹⁸.

In addition, climate change has disproportionate impacts among individuals. For example, it has been observed that women and girls are more susceptible to climate change and its impacts due to their dependence on the environment and natural resources for livelihoods and due to the fact that they have access to fewer resources to adapt and cope with abrupt climatic changes¹⁹. Further, due to reduced mobility and limited access to resources, the elderly and persons with disabilities, especially those who live in developing countries, are highly vulnerable to the adverse impacts of climate change, including threats to their health, food security, access to water and sanitation, and livelihoods²⁰. Further, it has been argued that the youth are also disproportionately impacted by climate change as a result of limited participation in decision-making processes and since they are likely to live with the consequences of climate change for longer timeframes compared to older generations²¹.

From the foregoing, it is evident that climate change has disproportionate impacts on vulnerable regions, communities, and individuals. Consequently, adverse climatic events are fuelling injustices and human rights violations thus undermining peace and harmony²². For instance, adverse climatic events on vulnerable communities and individuals, especially those living in the Global South, induce forced migration, food insecurity and economic disruptions, with the potential of causing and worsening conflicts and introducing new vulnerabilities²³. Climatic change impacts human health, food and water security, and socio-economic development undermining peaceful and harmonious lives and livelihoods²⁴. The United Nations observes that climate change impacts peace and security since it acts as a risk multiplier, exacerbating underlying

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ United Nations Development Programme., 'What is climate justice and why does it matter?' Available at <https://climatepromise.undp.org/news-and-stories/climate-change-matter-justice-heres-why> (Accessed on 21/02/2026)

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Climate Change is a Youth Issue., Available at <https://www.ifad.org/en/w/opinions/climate-change-is-a-youth-issue> (Accessed on 21/02/2026)

²² Climate Change: Challenges to Peace and Security in Africa., Available at <https://amaniafrica-et.org/climate-change-challenges-to-peace-and-security-in-africa/> (Accessed on 21/02/2026)

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Ibid

vulnerabilities and compounding existing grievances²⁵. Tackling climate change is therefore key towards fostering peace and harmony.

3.0 Addressing Climate Change as a Matter of Justice, Human Rights and Equity

Climate change is affecting the attainment of peace and harmony. Climate change disproportionately impacts developing countries in the Global South, indigenous peoples and local communities, women and girls, the youth, the elderly, and persons with disabilities among other vulnerable populations. Through this, climate change affects food, water and energy supplies, increases competition over dwindling natural resources, causes loss of livelihoods, and causes human mobility including forced migration and displacement due to climate-related disasters²⁶.

Addressing climate change is therefore a matter of justice, human rights and equity in order to protect the vulnerable from adverse climatic impacts for peace and harmony. This ideal is envisaged under the concept of climate justice. The idea of climate Justice recognizes the disproportionate impacts of climate change on the people and places least responsible for the climate crisis including developing countries, low-income communities, indigenous peoples, local communities, women and the youth²⁷. It has been observed that climate justice involves focusing on how climate change impacts people differently, unevenly, and disproportionately, as well as redressing the resultant injustices in fair and equitable ways²⁸. This concept is based on the understanding that the adverse impacts of climate change are not felt equitably among people, communities and nations²⁹. Climate justice posits that although climate change is a global crisis, its effects are not evenly felt around the world³⁰. By recognising the disproportionate

²⁵ United Nations., 'Addressing the Impact of Climate Change on Peace and Security' Available at <https://dppa.un.org/en/addressing-impact-of-climate-change-peace-and-security> (Accessed on 21/02/2026)

²⁶ United Nations Environment Programme., 'Climate Change and Security Risks' Available at <https://www.unep.org/topics/disasters-and-conflicts/environment-security/climate-change-and-security-risks> (Accessed on 21/02/2026)

²⁷ What is Climate Justice?., Available at <https://centerclimatejustice.universityofcalifornia.edu/what-is-climate-justice/> (Accessed on 21/02/2026)

²⁸ Sultana. F., 'Critical Climate Justice.' Available at <https://www.farhanasultana.com/wp-content/uploads/Sultana-Critical-climate-justice.pdf> (Accessed on 21/02/2026)

²⁹ Aliozi. Z., 'Climate Justice and Human Rights, in a World in Climate Emergency' Available at <https://repository.ghumanrights.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/2eba3de1-1427-481b-a2d6-07818e00a53b/content> (Accessed on 21/02/2026)

³⁰ 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-

impacts of climate change, the concept of climate justice seeks solutions that address the root causes of climate change and in doing so, simultaneously address a broad range of social, racial, and environmental injustices caused by the climate crisis³¹.

Fostering climate justice is therefore key towards addressing climate change as a matter of justice, human rights and equity. For example, it has been observed that climate justice links climate change to human rights and development and seeks to achieve a human-centred approach, safeguarding the rights of the most vulnerable people and sharing the burdens and benefits of climate change and its impacts equitably and fairly³². Climate justice puts equity, inclusivity, fairness and human rights at the core of decision-making and action on climate change for effective responses³³.

It is therefore necessary to foster climate justice for peace and harmony. This requires all countries to put in place effective mitigation and adaptation strategies in order to tackle the root causes of climate change. It has been observed that measures such as transitioning from fossil fuels to clean sources of energy including renewables such as wind, solar and geothermal energy³⁴; enhancing energy efficiency across all sectors³⁵; greening economies³⁶; reducing consumption and waste³⁷; and restoring ecosystems especially carbon sinks can enable countries to tackle the climate crisis and protect the vulnerable for justice, human rights and equity³⁸.

Unlocking climate finance is also crucial towards addressing climate change as a matter of justice, human rights and equity. Climate finance refers to all financial flows channeled

[3ITtgC&gclid=Cj0KCQiAo4TKBhDRARIsAGW29beo0CN5gLtHcdqr42LaywMKxO5VVBWiMDiQQaj-Bj3eLN4oXC55Ah0aAkN1EALw_wcB](https://centerclimatejustice.universityofcalifornia.edu/what-is-climate-justice/) (Accessed on 21/02/2026)

³¹ Center for Climate Justice., 'What is Climate Justice?' Available at <https://centerclimatejustice.universityofcalifornia.edu/what-is-climate-justice/> (Accessed on 21/02/2026)

³² Mary Robinson Foundation Climate Justice., 'Principles of Climate Justice.' Available at <https://www.mrfcj.org/principles-of-climate-justice/> (Accessed on 21/02/2026)

³³ 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 21/02/2026)

³⁴ United Nations Development Programme., 'What is climate change mitigation and why is it urgent?' Available at <https://climatepromise.undp.org/news-and-stories/what-climate-change-mitigation-and-why-it-urgent> (Accessed on 21/02/2026)

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ Ibid

towards addressing the causes and effects of climate change³⁹. Climate finance covers local, national or transnational financing, drawn from various sources including public, private and alternative sources of financing, that seeks to support mitigation and adaptation actions towards confronting climate change⁴⁰. Climate finance is vital in confronting climate change due to the large-scale investments that are needed across different sectors in order to transition to a low-carbon global economy and help societies build resilience and adapt to the impacts of climate change⁴¹. In particular, access to climate finance is vital for developing countries, indigenous peoples, local communities, and women among other vulnerable groups who are disproportionately impacted by climate change⁴². It is therefore vital to enhance access to climate finance for the Global South towards supporting mitigation and adaptation actions for justice, human rights and equity⁴³.

It is also vital to involve vulnerable groups including indigenous peoples, local communities, women and the youth in decision-making processes on climate change⁴⁴. Through this, it is possible to understand the unique vulnerabilities they face as a result of the climate crisis towards putting in place adequate and effective responses for justice, human rights and equity⁴⁵. This approach is also key towards harnessing the contribution of key stakeholders such as indigenous peoples, local communities and rural women whose Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) can provide valuable insights on tackling climate change⁴⁶.

³⁹ United Nations Environment Programme., 'Climate Finance' Available at <https://www.unep.org/topics/climate-action/climate-finance> (Accessed on 21/02/2026)

⁴⁰ United Nations Climate Change., 'Introduction to Climate Finance' Available at <https://unfccc.int/topics/introduction-to-climate-finance> (Accessed on 21/02/2026)

⁴¹ United Nations Development Programme., 'What is climate finance and why do we need more of it?' Available at <https://climatepromise.undp.org/news-and-stories/what-climate-finance-and-why-do-we-need-more-it> (Accessed on 21/02/2026)

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ Ibid

⁴⁴ Mary Robinson Foundation Climate Justice., 'Principles of Climate Justice.' Op Cit

⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁶ 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 21/02/2026)

4.0 Conclusion

Climate change is undermining peace and harmony globally. In particular, the disproportionate impacts of climate change on vulnerable populations affect food, water and energy supplies, increase competition over dwindling natural resources, cause loss of livelihoods, and fuels human mobility including forced migration and displacement due to climate-related disasters leading to peace and security threats⁴⁷. Tackling climate change is therefore a matter of justice, human rights and equity towards protecting vulnerable nations, communities and individuals for peace and harmony. This ideal requires effective climate mitigation and adaptation strategies at all levels, access to adequate and timely climate finance for the Global South, and meaningful involvement for all stakeholders in climate action⁴⁸.

Addressing climate change as a matter of justice, human rights and equity is an achievable global ideal towards ensuring peace and harmony in a volatile world.

References

African Development Bank Group., 'Climate Change in Africa' Available at <https://www.afdb.org/en/cop25/climate-change-africa>

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>

Bandera. G., 'How climate colonialism affects the Global South' Available at <https://www.fairplanet.org/story/how-climate-colonialism-affects-the-global-south/>

Center for Climate Justice., 'What is Climate Justice?' Available at <https://centerclimatejustice.universityofcalifornia.edu/what-is-climate-justice/>

Climate Change is a Youth Issue., Available at <https://www.ifad.org/en/w/opinions/climate-change-is-a-youth-issue>

⁴⁷ United Nations Environment Programme., 'Climate Change and Security Risks' Op Cit

⁴⁸ Mary Robinson Foundation Climate Justice., 'Principles of Climate Justice.' Op Cit

Climate Change., 'Meaning, Definition, Causes, Examples and Consequences.' Available at <https://youmatter.world/en/definition/climate-change-meaning-definition-causes-and-consequences/>

Climate Change: Challenges to Peace and Security in Africa., Available at <https://amaniafrica-et.org/climate-change-challenges-to-peace-and-security-in-africa/>

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>

Mary Robinson Foundation Climate Justice., 'Principles of Climate Justice.' Available at <https://www.mrfcj.org/principles-of-climate-justice/>

Nilsson. C., 'Climate Change from an Indigenous Perspective: Key Issues and Challenges' Available at [https://www.iwgia.org/images/publications/IA%201-2 08 Climate Change from ind perspective.pdf](https://www.iwgia.org/images/publications/IA%201-2%2008%20Climate%20Change%20from%20indigenous%20perspective.pdf)

Sultana. F., 'Critical Climate Justice.' Available at <https://www.farhanasultana.com/wp-content/uploads/Sultana-Critical-climate-justice.pdf>

United Nations Climate Change., 'Introduction to Climate Finance' Available at <https://unfccc.int/topics/introduction-to-climate-finance>

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>

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>

United Nations Development Programme., 'What is climate change mitigation and why is it urgent?' Available at <https://climatepromise.undp.org/news-and-stories/what-climate-change-mitigation-and-why-it-urgent>

United Nations Development Programme., 'What is climate finance and why do we need more of it?' Available at <https://climatepromise.undp.org/news-and-stories/what-climate-finance-and-why-do-we-need-more-it>

United Nations Environment Programme., 'Climate Change and Security Risks' Available at <https://www.unep.org/topics/disasters-and-conflicts/environment-security/climate-change-and-security-risks>

United Nations Environment Programme., 'Climate Finance' Available at <https://www.unep.org/topics/climate-action/climate-finance>

United Nations Environment Programme., 'Responding to Climate Change' Available at <https://www.unep.org/regions/africa/regional-initiatives/responding-climate-change>

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>

United Nations., 'Addressing the Impact of Climate Change on Peace and Security' Available at <https://dppa.un.org/en/addressing-impact-of-climate-change-peace-and-security>

United Nations., 'Causes and Effects of Climate Change' Available at <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/science/causes-effects-climate-change>

United Nations., 'Climate Change' Available at <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/climate-change.html>

United Nations., 'What is Climate Change?' Available at <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/what-is-climate-change>

What is Climate Change?., Available at <https://science.nasa.gov/climate-change/what-is-climate-change/>

What is Climate Justice?., Available at <https://centerclimatejustice.universityofcalifornia.edu/what-is-climate-justice/>

Peace and Harmony in a Volatile World: Addressing Climate Change as a Matter of Justice, Human Rights and Equity

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=Cj0KCQiAo4TKBhDRARIsAGW29beo0CN5gLtHcdqr42LaywMKxO5VVBiMDiQOaj-Bj3eLN4oXC55Ah0aAkN1EALw_wcB

World Meteorological Organization., 'Africa faces disproportionate burden from climate change and adaptation costs' Available at <https://wmo.int/news/media-centre/africa-faces-disproportionate-burden-from-climate-change-and-adaptation-costs>