

*Addressing the Impact of Climate Change on Vulnerable Communities*

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**Kariuki Muigua**

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## **Addressing the Impact of Climate Change on Vulnerable Communities**

**Kariuki Muigua\***

### **Abstract**

*Climate change is an undesirable phenomenon that undermines the ability of all countries to achieve Sustainable Development. Taking urgent and transformative action on climate change is therefore necessary for sustainability. However, in responding to climate change, it is imperative to note that it impacts people, communities, and nations differently, unevenly and disproportionately. Addressing the impact of climate change on vulnerable communities is therefore key for effective climate action and achieving the ideal of climate justice. This paper critically examines the impact of climate change on vulnerable communities. The paper asserts that the effects of climate change are being felt unevenly with some people, communities, and nations being adversely impacted. It argues that addressing the impacts of climate change on vulnerable communities is necessary to achieve climate justice for development. The paper suggests approaches towards addressing the impact of climate change on vulnerable communities towards sustainability.*

### **1.0 Introduction**

The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development<sup>1</sup> acknowledges that climate change is one of the greatest challenges of our time whose adverse impacts undermine the ability of all countries to realise Sustainable Development. It has been noted that climate change is hindering the realisation of the Sustainable Development agenda across the world by affecting the sustainability of the planet's ecosystems, the stability of the

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<sup>1</sup> 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>

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global economy and the future of humankind<sup>2</sup>. Its impacts 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 sustainability<sup>3</sup>. Further, it has been noted that as climate change accelerates, its impacts worsen existing social, economic, and environmental challenges in many contexts, which can contribute to insecurity at local, national, regional, and global levels<sup>4</sup>. Security concerns linked to climate change include impacts on food, water and energy supplies, increased competition over natural resources, loss of livelihoods, climate-related disasters, and forced migration and displacement<sup>5</sup>.

Climate change therefore has significant implications on energy, food and water security as well as health and safety for countries and people around the world<sup>6</sup>. In light of these concerns, responding to climate change has become an urgent priority at all levels. The United Nations notes that if left unchecked, climate change will undo a lot of the development progress made over the past years and will also provoke mass migrations that will lead to instability and wars<sup>7</sup>. Urgent and transformative action on climate change is therefore key if the Sustainable Development agenda is to be achieved by all

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<sup>2</sup> Climate Change., 'Meaning, Definition, Causes, Examples and Consequences.' Available at <https://youmatter.world/en/definition/climate-change-meaning-definition-causes-and-consequences/> (Accessed on 31/08/2024)

<sup>3</sup> United Nations., 'What is Climate Change?' Available at <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/what-is-climate-change> (Accessed on 31/08/2024)

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Environment Programme., 'Climate Change and Security Risks' Available at <https://www.unep.org/topics/fresh-water/disasters-and-climate-change/climate-change-and-security-risks#:~:text=Key%20to%20building%20resilience%2C%20the,to%20climate%2Drelated%20security%20risks> (Accessed on 31/08/2024)

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> United Nations Environment Programme., 'Responding to Climate Change' Available at <https://www.unep.org/regions/europe/regional-initiatives/responding-climate-change> (Accessed on 31/08/2024)

<sup>7</sup> United Nations., 'Goal 13: Take Urgent Action to Combat Climate Change and its Impacts.' Available at <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/climate-change/> (Accessed on 31/08/2024)

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countries<sup>8</sup>. Sustainable Development Goal 13 calls upon all countries to take urgent actions towards combating climate change and its impacts<sup>9</sup>.

Climate change impacts people, communities, and nations differently, unevenly and disproportionately<sup>10</sup>. Addressing the impact of climate change on vulnerable communities is therefore key for effective climate action and achieving the ideal of climate justice<sup>11</sup>.

This paper critically examines the impact of climate change on vulnerable communities. The paper asserts that the effects of climate change are being felt unevenly with some people, communities, and nations being adversely impacted. It argues that addressing the impacts of climate change on vulnerable communities is necessary to achieve climate justice for development. The paper suggests approaches towards addressing the impact of climate change on vulnerable communities towards sustainability.

### **2.0 The Impact of Climate Change on Vulnerable Communities**

Climate change brings enormous injustices since it affects everyone, but not equally<sup>12</sup>. It has been noted that people and communities who have contributed least to climate change are being affected by it the most, and are likely to be less able to protect themselves from its impacts<sup>13</sup>. While climate change is global, the poor are disproportionately vulnerable to its effects<sup>14</sup>. This is because they lack the resources to

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> United Nations General Assembly., 'Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.' 21 October 2015, A/RES/70/1., Op Cit

<sup>10</sup> Sultana. F., 'Critical Climate Justice' Available at <https://www.farhanasultana.com/wpcontent/uploads/Sultana-Critical-climate-justice.pdf> (Accessed on 31/08/2024)

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> Oxfam., 'Climate Justice.' Available at <https://www.oxfam.org.au/what-we-do/climate-justice/> (Accessed on 31/08/2024)

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> United Nations Environment Programme., 'Responding to Climate Change' Available at <https://www.unep.org/regions/africa/regional-initiatives/responding-climate-change> (Accessed on 31/08/2024)

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afford goods and services they need to buffer themselves and recover from the effects of climate change<sup>15</sup>.

It has been noted that people and communities in developing nations in places such as 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 Climate change; while Africa has contributed negligibly to climate change, with just about two to three percent of global greenhouse gas emissions, it stands out disproportionately as the most vulnerable region in the world<sup>16</sup>. This vulnerability is driven by the prevailing low levels of socioeconomic growth in Africa<sup>17</sup>. Climate change is posing systemic risks to Africa affecting economies, infrastructure investments, water and food systems, public health, agriculture, and livelihoods, threatening to undo the continent's modest development gains and slip into higher levels of extreme poverty<sup>18</sup>. In addition, it has been noted that increases in global temperature, sea level rise, ocean acidification and other impacts of climate change are seriously affecting coastal communities and low-lying coastal countries, including many least developed countries and small island developing states<sup>19</sup>. Despite their little contribution to climate change, sea level rise, increasing temperatures and frequency and intensity of tropical cyclones, and storm surges are some of the climate change impacts facing island nations, some of which are in low-lying areas of just 5 meters above sea level at the highest point making them more vulnerable to these impacts<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> United Nations Environment Programme., 'Responding to Climate Change' Op Cit

<sup>17</sup> Ibid

<sup>18</sup> African Development Bank Group., 'Climate Change in Africa' Available at <https://www.afdb.org/en/cop25/climate-change-africa> (Accessed on 31/08/2024)

<sup>19</sup> United Nations General Assembly., 'Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.' 21 October 2015, A/RES/70/1., Op Cit

<sup>20</sup> 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 31/08/2024)

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In addition, it has been pointed out that since every person has different capabilities to survive and is impacted by the climate crisis differently, climate change especially affects children, young people, women, the elderly, indigenous peoples, and persons with disabilities disproportionately<sup>21</sup>. For example, children are more susceptible to the effects of climate change than adults, with immediate and lifelong impacts on their physical and mental health<sup>22</sup>. The effects of climate change such as food insecurity, water scarcity, conflicts, and forced migration are more detrimental to the growth and well-being of the younger generation<sup>23</sup>. Further, although climate change is predominantly caused by the current generation of adults, its worst consequences will occur during the lifetimes of today's children and young people<sup>24</sup>. The impacts of climate change such as heatwaves, droughts, water scarcity, food insecurity, and wildfires are expected to become more severe with time therefore exposing young generation to increased risks in the future<sup>25</sup>.

Climate change also disproportionately affects women<sup>26</sup>. It is estimated that the majority of people displaced by climate change are women or girls facing heightened risks of poverty, violence or unintended pregnancies as they migrate to safer locations<sup>27</sup>. Further, in Africa, many women rely primarily on climate-sensitive livelihoods, such as small-

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<sup>21</sup> United Nations Development Programme., 'Rising Up: How Youth are Leading the Charge for Climate Justice' Available at <https://www.undp.org/blog/rising-how-youth-are-leading-charge-climate-justice> (Accessed on 31/08/2024)

<sup>22</sup> Sanson. A., Van Hoorn. J., & Burke. S., 'Responding to the Impacts of the Climate Crisis on Children and Youth' Available at <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdep.12342> (Accessed on 31/08/2024)

<sup>23</sup> Ibid

<sup>24</sup> Sanson. A., & Bellemo. M., 'Children and Youth in the Climate Crisis' *BJPsych Bull.* 2021 Aug; 45(4): 205–209

<sup>25</sup> Chow. D., 'Triple Jeopardy: Children Face Dark Future of Climate Disasters' Available at <https://www.nbcnews.com/science/environment/triple-jeopardy-children-face-dark-future-climatedisasters-rcna2304> (Accessed on 31/08/2024)

<sup>26</sup> World Economic Forum., 'Climate Change Impacts Women More. We must Legislate to Protect their Health' Available at <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2024/01/women-health-climate-change/#:~:text=A%20report%20launched%20at%20COP28,to%20leave%20their%20homes%20worldwide>. (Accessed on 31/08/2024)

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

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scale farming<sup>28</sup>. This makes them highly exposed to the impacts of extreme weather events such as recurring droughts and floods which damage crops and kill livestock upon which their livelihoods depend<sup>29</sup>. Further, since women in Africa among other regions depend more heavily on natural resources like water and firewood, they may need to travel further to access them when they become scarce due to climate change exposing them to many risks including insecurity<sup>30</sup>. In addition, gender inequalities within communities may leave women more vulnerable to the immediate aftermath of natural disasters occasioned by climate change, or excluded from the decision-making table when disaster risk reduction solutions and other climate change responses are designed and implemented<sup>31</sup>.

Persons with disabilities are also at risk of being disproportionately affected by climate change due to difficulty in accessing vital resources in case of food insecurity and water scarcity and difficulties in responding to emergencies in case of disasters associated with climate change especially floods<sup>32</sup>. Persons with disabilities are often among those most adversely affected in emergency situations, sustaining disproportionately higher rates of morbidity and mortality, and at the same time being among those least able to have access to emergency support<sup>33</sup>. In addition, the elderly are more vulnerable to extreme weather events due to weakening immune systems<sup>34</sup>. The elderly are at the risk of respiratory

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<sup>28</sup> United Nations Development Programme., 'Women are Key for the Future of Climate Action in Africa' Available at <https://climatepromise.undp.org/news-and-stories/women-are-key-future-climate-actionafrica> (Accessed on 31/08/2024)

<sup>29</sup> Ibid

<sup>30</sup> Pearse. R., 'Gender and Climate Change.' *WIREs Climate Change*, 2016

<sup>31</sup> Ibid

<sup>32</sup> Almomani. S., 'Climate Justice for People with Disabilities.' Available at <https://www.worldforgottenchildren.org/blog/climate-justice-for-people-with-disabilities/154> (Accessed on 31/08/2024)

<sup>33</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights., 'The Impact of Climate Change on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities' Available at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/climate-change/impact-climate-change-rights-persons-disabilities> (Accessed on 31/08/2024)

<sup>34</sup> Kriebel-Gasparro. A., 'Climate Change: Effects on the Older Adult' *The Journal for Nurse Practitioners*. Volume 18, Issue 4, April 2022, pp 372-376



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illnesses as a result of climate change<sup>35</sup>. Climate change may increase outdoor air pollutants, such as ground-level ozone and particulate matter in wildfire smoke and dust from droughts<sup>36</sup>. Air pollution can increase the risk of heart attacks for older adults, especially those who are diabetic or obese<sup>37</sup>. In addition, older adults are at risk of both physical and mental health problems if they must evacuate during an extreme event such as flooding from heavy rains, hurricanes, and coastal storms<sup>38</sup>.

Indigenous peoples are also among those who are highly vulnerable to climate change<sup>39</sup>. According to the United Nations, Indigenous peoples are among the first to face the direct consequences of climate change, due to their dependence upon, and close relationship, with the environment and natural resources<sup>40</sup>. Indigenous communities have special connection to the natural environment<sup>41</sup>. However, climate change is threatening natural resources and ecosystems that are essential to indigenous people's livelihoods, food sources, and cultural practices<sup>42</sup>. In addition, it has been noted that many indigenous populations lack reliable infrastructure and therefore experience challenges in accessing essential services, such as transportation, drinking water, sanitation, disaster response, and health care<sup>43</sup>. This limits their capacity to plan for and respond to climate-related

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<sup>35</sup> United States Environmental Protection Agency., 'Climate Change and the Health of Older Adults' Available at <https://www.epa.gov/climateimpacts/climate-change-and-health-older-adults#:~:text=Climate%20change%20may%20increase%20outdoor,smoke%20and%20dust%20from%20droughts.&text=Air%20pollution%20can%20increase%20the,who%20are%20diabetic%20or%20obese.&text=It%20can%20worsen%20conditions%20like%20asthma%20and%20COPD>. (Accessed on 31/08/2024)

<sup>36</sup> Ibid

<sup>37</sup> Ibid

<sup>38</sup> Sarkar. S. M et al., 'Climate Change and Aging Health in Developing Countries' Available at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10448126/> (Accessed on 31/08/2024)

<sup>39</sup> United Nations., 'The Effects of Climate Change on Indigenous Peoples' Available at <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/climate-change.html> (Accessed on 31/08/2024)

<sup>40</sup> Ibid

<sup>41</sup> United States Environmental Protection Agency., 'Climate Change and the Health of Indigenous Populations' Available at <https://www.epa.gov/climateimpacts/climate-change-and-health-indigenous-populations> (Accessed on 31/08/2024)

<sup>42</sup> Ibid

<sup>43</sup> Ibid

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threats<sup>44</sup>. Climate change is also worsening the difficulties already faced by indigenous communities including political and economic marginalization, loss of land and resources, human rights violations, discrimination and unemployment<sup>45</sup>.

Climate change is therefore disproportionately impacting certain individuals, communities, and nations especially developing countries, small island nations, the youth, women, the elderly, persons with disabilities, and indigenous peoples. It is imperative to address the impact of climate change on these groups in order to achieve climate justice and foster sustainability.

### **3.0 Addressing the Impact of Climate Change on Vulnerable Communities**

Climate change is affecting every person on the planet. However, some people are more vulnerable to the impact of climate change owing to factors including geography, poverty, gender, age, indigenous or minority status, national or social origin, birth or other status and disability<sup>46</sup>. Poor people, people in developing countries and small island nations, the youth, women, the elderly, persons with disabilities, and indigenous peoples may experience heightened exposure and vulnerability to climate-induced human rights harms<sup>47</sup>. It is imperative to address the impact of climate change on vulnerable communities in order to foster sustainability.

In order to address the impact of climate change on vulnerable communities, there is need to foster climate justice<sup>48</sup>. Climate justice is an ideal that connects the climate crisis to the social, racial and environmental issues in which it is deeply entangled<sup>49</sup>. It recognizes the

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid

<sup>45</sup> United Nations., 'The Effects of Climate Change on Indigenous Peoples' Op Cit

<sup>46</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights., 'The Impact of Climate Change on the Rights of People in Vulnerable Situations' Available at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/climate-change/impact-climate-change-rights-people-vulnerable-situations> (Accessed on 01/09/2024)

<sup>47</sup> Ibid

<sup>48</sup> Muigua. K., 'Fostering Climate Justice for Sustainable Development' Available at <https://kmco.co.ke/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Fostering-Climate-Justice-for-Sustainable-Development.pdf> (Accessed on 01/09/2024)

<sup>49</sup> University of California Center for Climate Justice., 'What is Climate Justice?' Available at <https://centerclimatejustice.universityofcalifornia.edu/what-is-climate-justice/>

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disproportionate impacts of climate change on the people and places least responsible for the problem<sup>50</sup>. Climate justice acknowledges the unequal historical responsibility that countries and communities bear in relation to the climate crisis<sup>51</sup>. This concept suggests that the countries, industries, businesses, and people that have become wealthy from emitting large amounts of greenhouse gases have a responsibility to help those affected by climate change, particularly the most vulnerable countries and communities, who often are the ones that have contributed the least to the crisis<sup>52</sup>. Climate justice therefore entails putting equity, inclusivity and human rights at the core of decision-making and action on climate change<sup>53</sup>.

Through Climate Justice, it is possible to achieve the meaningful inclusion and participation of persons in vulnerable situations within disaster risk management and climate-related decision-making at the local, national, regional and global levels<sup>54</sup>. This concept is key in ensuring equity, non-discrimination, equal participation, transparency, fairness, accountability and access to justice for vulnerable communities in relation to the adverse impacts of climate change<sup>55</sup>. Climate justice is also an important aspect of just transition toward a sustainable future<sup>56</sup>. It is therefore necessary to embrace climate justice at all levels in order to tackle climate change through processes that are participatory, accessible, fair and inclusive<sup>57</sup>. Ensuring access to climate information and

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[justice/#:~:text=Climate%20justice%20connects%20the%20climate,least%20responsible%20for%20the%20problem.](#) (Accessed on 01/09/2024)

<sup>50</sup> Ibid

<sup>51</sup> 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 01/09/2024)

<sup>52</sup> Ibid

<sup>53</sup> Ibid

<sup>54</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights., 'The Impact of Climate Change on the Rights of People in Vulnerable Situations' Op Cit

<sup>55</sup> United Nations Environment Programme., 'UN Resolution Billed as a Turning Point in Climate Justice' Available <https://www.unep.org/cep/news/story/un-resolution-billed-turning-point-climate-justice> (Accessed on 01/09/2024)

<sup>56</sup> United Nations Development Programme., 'Climate Change is a Matter of Justice - Here's Why' Op Cit

<sup>57</sup> Monica. T & Bronwyn. L., 'Community Lawyering and Climate Justice: A New Frontier.' *Alternative Law Journal* (47) 3 pp 199-203

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participation in decision making processes by vulnerable persons and communities including the poor, the youth, women, the elderly, persons with disabilities, and indigenous peoples is key in achieving climate justice<sup>58</sup>.

It is also necessary to enhance climate finance in order to address the impact of climate change on vulnerable people and communities<sup>59</sup>. Climate finance refers to local, national or transnational financing drawn from public, private and alternative sources of financing that seeks to support mitigation and adaptation actions that will address climate change<sup>60</sup>. Climate finance therefore entails all financial flows towards addressing the causes and consequences of climate change<sup>61</sup>. Climate finance is needed for mitigation since large-scale investments are required to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions<sup>62</sup>. It is also equally important for adaptation since significant financial resources are needed to adapt to the adverse effects and reduce the impacts of a changing climate<sup>63</sup>.

The global climate change framework including the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement call for financial assistance from parties with more financial resources to those that are less endowed and more vulnerable<sup>64</sup>. It has been pointed out that in accordance with the principle of '*common but differentiated responsibility and respective capabilities*' set out in the UNFCCC, developed country Parties are to provide financial resources to assist

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<sup>58</sup> Muigua. K., 'Fostering Climate Justice for Sustainable Development' Op Cit

<sup>59</sup> International Rescue Committee., 'Why is Climate Finance so Important?' Available at <https://www.rescue.org/article/why-climate-finance-so-important> (Accessed on 01/09/2024)

<sup>60</sup> United Nations Climate Change., 'Introduction to Climate Finance' Available at <https://unfccc.int/topics/introduction-to-climate-finance> (Accessed on 01/09/2024)

<sup>61</sup> United Nations Environment Programme., 'Climate Finance' Available at <https://www.unep.org/topics/climate-action/climate-finance#:~:text=Climate%20finance%20refers%20to%20all,and%20consequences%20of%20climate%20change.> (Accessed on 01/09/2024)

<sup>62</sup> United Nations Climate Change., 'Introduction to Climate Finance' Op Cit

<sup>63</sup> Ibid

<sup>64</sup> Ibid

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developing country Parties in implementing the objectives of the UNFCCC<sup>65</sup>. Climate financing serves as a critical pathway to invest in the climate adaptation and resilience efforts for vulnerable people and communities<sup>66</sup>. Without adequate climate action, these communities become increasingly vulnerable to climate shocks like floods and droughts<sup>67</sup>. It is therefore imperative for developed countries to enhance financial support to developing countries in order to address the impact of climate change on vulnerable communities.

Operationalising the Loss and Damage Fund is also vital in unlocking climate finance in order to address the impact of climate change on vulnerable communities<sup>68</sup>. The Loss and Damage Fund was established at COP 27 and sets out new funding arrangements for assisting developing countries that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change, in responding to loss and damage associated with climate change<sup>69</sup>. This fund is crucial in helping vulnerable nations and communities to address the impact of climate change including extreme weather events and slow onset events such as sea level rise, increasing temperatures, ocean acidification, glacial retreat and related impacts, salinization, land and forest degradation, loss of biodiversity and desertification<sup>70</sup>. At COP 28, parties of the UNFCCC reached an agreement on the operationalization of the Loss and Damage Fund<sup>71</sup>. It is imperative to ensure that the COP 28 decision is

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid

<sup>66</sup> International Rescue Committee., 'Why is Climate Finance so Important?' Available at <https://www.rescue.org/article/why-climate-finance-so-important> (Accessed on 01/09/2024)

<sup>67</sup> Ibid

<sup>68</sup> Muigua. K., 'Climate Finance beyond COP 28: Operationalizing the Loss and Damage Fund' Available at <https://kmco.co.ke/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Climate-Finance-Beyond-COP-28-Operationalizing-the-Loss-and-Damage-Fund.pdf> (Accessed on 01/09/2024)

<sup>69</sup> 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](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cma4_auv_8f.pdf) (Accessed on 01/09/2024)

<sup>70</sup> United Nations Climate Change., 'Loss and Damage.' Available at <https://unfccc.int/topics/adaptation-and-resilience/the-big-picture/introduction#loss-and-damage> (Accessed on 01/09/2024)

<sup>71</sup> United Nations Climate Change., 'Operationalization of the New Funding Arrangements, including a Fund, for Responding to Loss and Damage referred to in Paragraphs 2-3 of Decisions 2/CP.27 and 2/CMA.4.' Available at <https://unfccc.int/documents/636558> (Accessed on 01/09/2024)

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implemented in order to ensure funding towards addressing the impact of climate change on vulnerable communities.

Finally, it is imperative for all countries to take urgent action and confront climate change<sup>72</sup>. Countries should strengthen climate action by reducing greenhouse gas emissions through pursuing sustainable practices including renewable energy, climate-resilient agriculture, and sustainable transport and infrastructure<sup>73</sup>. Further, climate action should be designed towards building the resilience of vulnerable communities to adapt to the effects of climate change, such as improving infrastructure and providing access to resources like water and food<sup>74</sup>. Empowering vulnerable people and communities to take action on climate change can be an effective way to build their resilience and reduce vulnerability<sup>75</sup>. This entails providing education and training on climate change, as well as involving community members in the development of strategies and policies on climate change<sup>76</sup>.

In tackling climate change, it is also imperative to adopt a holistic approach that takes into account the impact of climate change on vulnerable people and communities<sup>77</sup>. For example, it has been noted that children and pregnant women, older adults, certain occupational groups, persons with disabilities, and persons with chronic medical conditions are more vulnerable to health stressors, such as extreme heat, floods, poor air

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<sup>72</sup> Muigua. K., 'Taking Urgent Action to Combat Climate Change' Available at <https://kmco.co.ke/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Taking-Urgent-Action-to-Combat-Climate-Change.pdf> (Accessed on 01/09/2024)

<sup>73</sup> Ibid

<sup>74</sup> Impacts of Climate Change on Vulnerable Communities., Available at <https://billionbricks.org/blog/impacts-of-climate-change-on-vulnerable-communities/> (Accessed on 01/09/2024)

<sup>75</sup> Ibid

<sup>76</sup> Ibid

<sup>77</sup> National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences., 'People who are Vulnerable to Climate Change' Available at [https://www.niehs.nih.gov/research/programs/climatechange/health\\_impacts/vulnerable\\_people](https://www.niehs.nih.gov/research/programs/climatechange/health_impacts/vulnerable_people) (Accessed on 01/09/2024)

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quality, and other climate-related events<sup>78</sup>. Therefore, a holistic approach to address the effects of climate change on human health starts with an understanding of people who are at increased risk<sup>79</sup>. It is therefore vital to undertake vulnerability assessments that examine the intersection of environmental and social impacts of climate change in order to improve adaptation and resilience and reduce the health impacts from climate change on vulnerable people and communities<sup>80</sup>. Addressing the impact of climate change on vulnerable communities therefore requires a holistic approach towards confronting climate change.

### **4.0 Conclusion**

The climate crisis is deeply intertwined with global patterns of inequality<sup>81</sup>. The poorest and most vulnerable people bear the brunt of climate change impacts yet contribute the least to the crisis<sup>82</sup>. Millions of vulnerable people and communities including poor people, people in developing countries and small island nations, the youth, women, the elderly, persons with disabilities, and indigenous peoples face disproportionate challenges due to climate change in terms of extreme events, health effects, food, water, and livelihood security, migration and forced displacement, loss of cultural identity, and other related risks<sup>83</sup>. This vulnerability is caused by a combination of factors including their geographical locations; their age, financial, socio-economic, cultural, and gender status; and their access to resources, services, decision-making power, and justice<sup>84</sup>. Addressing the impacts of climate change on vulnerable communities is key in achieving a just transition toward a sustainable future<sup>85</sup>. In order to achieve this goal, it is vital to foster climate justice<sup>86</sup>; achieve the meaningful inclusion and participation of

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid

<sup>79</sup> Ibid

<sup>80</sup> Ibid

<sup>81</sup> World Bank Group., 'Social Dimensions of Climate Change' Available at <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/social-dimensions-of-climate-change> (Accessed on 01/09/2024)

<sup>82</sup> Ibid

<sup>83</sup> Ibid

<sup>84</sup> Ibid

<sup>85</sup> United Nations Development Programme., 'Climate Change is a Matter of Justice – Here's Why' Op Cit

<sup>86</sup> Muigua. K., 'Fostering Climate Justice for Sustainable Development' Op Cit

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persons in vulnerable situations within disaster risk management and climate-related decision-making at the local, national, regional and global levels<sup>87</sup>; unlock climate finance including operationalising the Loss and Damage Fund<sup>88</sup>; and confront climate change through holistic approaches that build the resilience of vulnerable people and communities<sup>89</sup>.

Addressing the impacts of Climate Change on vulnerable communities is key towards ensuring just transition to a sustainable future.

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<sup>87</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights., 'The Impact of Climate Change on the Rights of People in Vulnerable Situations' Op Cit

<sup>88</sup> Muigua. K., 'Climate Finance beyond COP 28: Operationalizing the Loss and Damage Fund' Op Cit

<sup>89</sup> Impacts of Climate Change on Vulnerable Communities., Op Cit



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