

Climate justice – a new narrative informing development and climate policy

This special issue of the *International Journal of Climate Change Strategies and Management* focuses on the issue of climate justice – a new narrative informing development and climate policy.

Our changing climate presents significant challenges and threats to people, society, the environment and our ecosystems. According to the IPCC Climate Change Report 2014 (IPCC 2014), the influence of anthropogenic activity on the climate system is clearly a result of greenhouse gas emissions being the highest in history. Projected changes in the climate system are likely to be [...] “that heat waves will occur more often and last longer, and that extreme precipitation events will become more intense and frequent in many regions. The ocean will continue to warm and acidify and global mean sea level to rise”. The onslaught of these predicted changes by the IPCC will present themselves in many ways but most significantly from food and nutrition insecurity and the right to a decent quality of life from lack of clean drinking water, clean source of energy and safe shelter. As a result, this may exacerbate the migration of people, poverty and deepening gender inequality, which is likely to be felt most by the poorest and the most vulnerable in society.

There is now a pressing and overwhelming need to identify and develop the right policies, strategies and mechanisms to minimise and manage these impacts. A climate justice approach could be one concept that bridges the gap between climate change science and social justice to bring “people” and “social” dimensions to address climate change challenges with issues of justice and equity at its core.

The aim of this special edition is to provide a holistic understanding of climate justice as a new way of thinking about how to deal with the challenges of climate change and sustainable development. It provides a focussed discussion, debate and critical thinking on the key elements that underpin a climate justice approach and how this can inform development and climate policy. Climate justice incorporates many disciplines, thereby enabling a multi-disciplinary approach to issues of development and action on climate change.

The articles in this special issue consider the facets of climate justice ranging from its contested discourse (Scandrett), the injustices of climate change (Meikle *et al.*), the role of rights, risks and responsibilities (Shaw), a club good perspective (Platje and Kampen), gender and justice (Ahmed) and gender sensitive climate policy (Jafry).

In his article, Scandrett argues that the nature of its contested discourse could be used as a source of analysis for delivering climate justice. He presents the need for a narrative of climate justice to be rooted in the popular struggles of oppressed groups who share an experience of exploitation by the hydrocarbon industry. He discusses the need for a transformational discourse which is based on the interests of those currently excluded or exploited in the current system and who have the most to gain from changing it. To achieve this, he describes, two cultures of resistance arguing for a social movement process that contributes to such a transformation.

Meikle *et al.* aim to address the injustices of climate change and its impacts and introduces the concept of a climate justice checklist. Reaching a consensus on climate

justice is juxtaposed by the fact that “there is no clear definition”. With this in mind, they offer that it is possible that the term “climate justice” cannot be defined in a way on which all will agree. To operationalise climate justice, Meikle *et al.* present a climate justice checklist as a methodological way to operationalise climate justice from an idealistic paradigm to a real-world expression.

The article by Shaw explored that the idea “Foundational Climate justice” is a relatively complex matter and is not well-suited as an engagement strategy intended to educate diverse lay audiences in becoming climate stewards. He suggests that educating people for climate stewardship might be better done through a framework of rights, risks and responsibilities interestingly by focusing initially on obligations within nation states to reduce carbon emissions. In this framework, he considers “stewardship” as a partnership between the public and the state.

A club good perspective is presented by Platje and Kampen – a club of countries or regions to support climate justice and/or mitigate climate change as well as the threats, a club which voluntarily provides a common good where costs and benefits are shared among members. However, they question whether the most developed countries and affluent people are interested in climate justice? They also indicate the difficulty in defining climate justice but support the principles of the Mary Robinson Foundation and Amartya Sen in that the poorest should be supported the most, addressing their rights and freedoms. They warn that although creating a club of countries may have spill-over effects, increasing injustices will lead to various disasters, increased conflict and migration.

A practical paper by Ahmed addresses gender and justice in Sudan’s Savannah belt. She presents a practical approach to ensure women and local community participation at all levels and interaction of policy and programme development, and in doing so, she is addressing current failures to recognise potential gendered implications of climate change. Ahmed considers that climate justice can be understood as a mechanism for securing the rights of vulnerable groups from climate risk, but not specifically ensuring gender equity. She, therefore, advocates that gender and climate justice approaches should be implemented as mutual and complimentary processes.

Staying on the theme of gender and justice, Jafry attempts to unpack the inter-linkages between gender inequality-food security-climate change through a climate justice lens using South Asia as a regional case study and wheat as the food source. After consideration of the different definitions of climate justice and its contested nature, Jafry concludes that building on people’s rights, strengths and vulnerability to climate change can help target development to the poorest and deliver climate co-benefits, but that gender inclusivity is critical in the roll out of programmes of support.

Cross-cutting observations

The range of articles in this special issue discusses different aspects of climate justice lending itself to two main cross-cutting observations.

The complexity and contested nature of climate justice is clear, and it may be that an agreeable definition of climate justice may not be possible. What is clear is the need to protect the poorest, most vulnerable and with special consideration for gender issue from the impacts of climate change, whether this is through a rights-based approach, gender inclusivity, a club good or social transformation.

The need to “operationalise” climate justice is evident. Authors suggest the needs for climate justice to move from its conceptual nature to reality via the development of climate justice methodology/framework/checklist/lens.

Outlook

The aim of this special issue is to highlight climate justice as a new narrative informing development and climate policy. The articles in this issue emphasise that due to the lack of an “agreed narrative”, there are many challenges ahead particularly in supporting developing countries in building resilience to climate change impacts.

At the Paris Climate Conference (COP 21) in December 2015, 195 countries adopted the first ever agreement which sets out a global action plan to avoid dangerous climate change by limiting global warming to below 2°C. This agreement is due to come into force by 2020. In addition, governments have agreed to come together every five years to report on their progress on emission reductions and also to strengthen society’s ability to deal with the impacts of climate change. Notably, the developed nations have agreed to continue to support developing countries in building that resilience to climate change impacts. In this context, we hope that this special issue promotes future research and development into some of the contested issues discussed so that the poorest and most vulnerable people in society do not disproportionately suffer the impacts of climate change.

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Reference

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