

Plenary Session [Plenary Session II]

Climate Justice at the Heart of Inclusive and Sustainable Cities

Oct 11, 2022 (Tue) 16:00-18:00

Organizers: Gwangju Metropolitan City, UNESCO

Background

The climate crisis, like that of the Covid-19 pandemic and ongoing armed conflicts, is not only expected to disproportionately affect disadvantaged groups within given contexts, but also to influence forced migration, displacing thousands of communities from their homes worldwide. Ethnic minority groups are said to breathe 46% more nitrogen dioxide in the US, and 85% of the urban poor worldwide are exposed to flood risk compared to 60% of urban population at large. These impacts are increasingly becoming experienced and embodied by our communities and even more so by the most vulnerable of us all, including ethnic minorities, women and youth. Individuals facing racism are also disproportionately impacted by climate-related injustices making racism and climate change inextricably linked and to be jointly addressed.

In aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals to ensure that “no one is left behind”, cities, at the forefront of these contemporary challenges, must remain a central focus for climate justice in order to recognize the disproportionate impacts of climate change on marginalized groups, especially among women and girls, across the world. Cities should not only serve as sites in which climate impacts are directly experienced and embodied by communities, but also as spaces in which these impacts are both quantifiable and qualitatively observable. Cities host more than half of the world’s population, they also count 52% of the nearly 300 million international migrants. Between and within cities, the adaptation capacity of some is disproportionately unequal to others. These outcomes are expected to increase as climate change becomes ever more urgent to address.

In this regard, cities must also continue to foster strong synergies with the federal level and ensure a global and robust approach to climate justice. In recent decades, the international community has found inextricable linkages between climate change and human rights, including through the Local Governments Climate Roadmap by UCLG in 2007 and the Paris Climate Accord (COP 21) in 2015. In 2021, the Human Rights Council recognized a clean, healthy and sustainable environment as a fundamental human right, and the IPCC – Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Sixth Assessment Report in 2022 raised that climate change is worsening water shortages, food insecurity, health deterioration, housing and infrastructure.



In building inclusive and sustainable societies, cities must be viewed as unique spaces for harnessing the fruits of diversity in ensuring climate justice. To achieve this, UNESCO’s city network initiatives have enabled it to develop synergies with stakeholders at the local level. Amongst these, ICCAR – UNESCO’s International Coalition for Inclusive and Sustainable Cities has grown to become an active global front against racism and discriminations with over 500 members across the globe for the promotion of inclusive urban development free from all forms of discrimination.

When achieving goals for a ‘just’ ecological transition, it is also key to disseminate and promote the application of the ethical principles proclaimed in UNESCO’s Declaration of Ethical Principles in relation to Climate Change. This must imply prioritizing the needs of vulnerable groups, including through UNESCO’s Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (LINKS) which aims to strengthen indigenous peoples and local communities and pilot novel methodologies to further understand climate change impacts, adaptation and mitigation. Advancing gender equality is also necessary through the promotion of feminist and youth-led principles and financing mechanisms in climate action, improvements in gender-disaggregated data and evidence bases and better awareness-raising on women’s and youth leadership.

In response to the Global Call against Racism, the Roadmap against Racism and Discrimination should continue to inspire to strengthen the global contribution to the fight against racism and discrimination, including actions to foster climate justice.

From here, in bringing together social justice challenges with those of climate change, the actions must continue to foster comprehensive approaches to ensure that climate change adaptation, mitigation and advocacy strategies address fundamental human rights across local, national and global levels. Cities should be encouraged to share their expertise and good practices for the promotion of socially inclusive climate action.

Objective & Main agenda

1. Analyze the repercussions of climate change on social issues, including discrimination
2. Raise awareness on climate justice by highlighting the legal and institutional frameworks adopted by governments
3. Share good practices, strategies and capacity-building initiatives enhancing climate justice

