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Corresponding Author: Anum Shahid (Email: anamshahid.iiui@yahoo.com)

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Sustainability and Social Evils: Mitigating Climate Change Through Equitable Governance

Maham Zahoor [a] Sohail Zafar [b] Anum Shahid [c]

Abstract: *This research explores the intersection of sustainability and social evils, particularly focusing on the role of equitable governance in mitigating climate change. It argues that social injustices, such as poverty, inequality, and discrimination, exacerbate environmental degradation and hinder effective climate action. The study aims to analyze how inequitable governance structures contribute to these challenges and propose equitable governance models that integrate social justice and environmental sustainability. Using a qualitative research design, the study reviews case studies, including the Green New Deal, the Paris Agreement, and indigenous knowledge systems, to illustrate the potential for inclusive, just governance in addressing both climate change and social evils. The findings emphasize the need for participatory decision-making, transparency, and fairness in policy formulation to ensure that marginalized communities have a voice in climate action. The research further emphasizes that to endure climate change mitigation measures, it is necessary to dismantle structural inequalities and take up governing models that are equitable. It leads to governance frameworks that bring together environmental protection with social justice, thus building a more just and industrially advanced global civil society towards lasting climate resilience.*

Keywords: Climate Justice, Social Equity, Environmental Degradation, Sustainable Development, Vulnerable Communities, Governance Structures, Climate Adaptation

Introduction

The world increasingly views climate change as one of the most important problems, posing a risk to the ecosystem, the economy, and societies. This need for immediate and effective action has never been more pressing, given rising global temperatures, extreme weather events and rising sea levels. Yet fighting climate change is not just about improving technical solutions for cutting greenhouse gas emissions; it encompasses a far broader analysis of the social, economic, and political framework of environmental destruction. Such structures from social evils like poverty, inequality, corruption, and exploitation are part of a vicious cycle that constantly hurts the hardest among the population, according to the textbook on marginalized communities, who are also the least likely to cope with climate change effects (Khan & Ullah, 2024; Eriksen et al., 2011).

The article first provides some definitions of these social evils and then examines how equitable governance can lessen the impacts of climate change by alleviating them. It aims to illustrate the need for placing social justice into climate action, citing that 'sustainability is ultimately not found without addressing the social and economic inequities that underlie it.'. The range of this study captures the social and environmental aspects of climate change and offers an integrated governance approach, bringing together sustainability and social justice (Lin & Song, 2024; Eizenberg et al., 2017).

The rationale for this research is the increasing awareness that climate change has no inherent neutrality. It opens a highly unequal impact on the world, often reinforcing the very elements of inequality. Environmental problems have a distinctive equity aspect, as vulnerable groups, particularly those from developing countries, women, indigenous peoples, and other marginalized groups, are disproportionately more affected but often have the least amount of political power to shape climate policies or climate action.

[a] PhD World Economy and International Relations, School for Southeast Asian Studies, Xiamen University, Fujian, China. Email: mahamzahoor@stu.xmu.edu.cn
[b] PhD Law Scholar, TIMES Institute Multan, Punjab, Pakistan.
[c] PhD Scholar, School of Law, Xiamen University, Fujian, China. Email: anamshahid.iiui@yahoo.com

Therefore, the following article calls for governance structures to be inclusive, transparent, and accountable to these communities based on their prioritization in climate change mitigation and adaptation.

The central hypothesis of this article is that equitable governance, which integrates social justice with climate policies, offers the best path to effectively mitigate climate change while addressing the social evils that exacerbate environmental harm. The primary research question guiding this inquiry is: *How can equitable governance structures be implemented to mitigate climate change and simultaneously address the social evils that hinder sustainability?*

This is a qualitative case study methodology based on a review of literature and policies and examples from both developed and developing countries. Using this framework, this article will explore examples of inclusive governance in practice and consider the role that such models may play in reversing climate change and inequality. The intention of this article is to prove that the reduction of climate change is not just an environmental challenge but, almost more importantly, a social one. This research aims to help answer the question: How can equitable governance generate synergies between social justice and sustainability to promote more resilient and just societies?

The structure of the article is as follows: The first part gives meaning to sustainability in the context of climate change, addressing both environmental and social contexts. In the second part, manners in which the social evils of poverty, inequality, and corruption compound a personal climate vulnerability are examined. In the third part, we explore how equitable governance could help overcome these challenges. Last, the conclusion provides recommendations for how to incorporate principles of equity and governance into climate action policy and future research directions.

Literature Review

The literature on climate change governance, sustainability, and social justice has grown and complexity over the years and increasingly recognizes and reflects the interrelatedness of environmental and social issues. Recent scholarship points to the need for social justice to be a part of climate policies to ensure that solutions are just and inclusive. The following review will comment on main references relevant to our research problem of combating climate change through good governance without creating social evils.

A central theme in the literature on climate change and sustainability is the evolving definition of sustainability. Initially, sustainability was primarily viewed as environmental preservation, but as understanding deepened, it came to encompass economic, social, and cultural dimensions. The seminal *Brundtland Report* (1987) defines sustainability as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This early conceptualization was foundational in framing sustainability within a broader, integrated perspective. Scholars such as Sachs (2015) and Roberts & Parks (2007) have expanded this concept, focusing not only on environmental aspects but also on how social systems and inequalities influence climate change outcomes. Sachs (2015) highlights that a sustainable future requires tackling both environmental degradation and social injustice, noting that the failure to consider social inequities in climate policy leads to unbalanced and ineffective solutions.

In recent years, the work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has reinforced the urgency of addressing climate change, with its reports consistently underscoring the disproportionate effects of climate change on vulnerable populations. In its 2021 report, the IPCC asserts that the impacts of global warming will be most acutely felt by disadvantaged communities, particularly those in the Global South, who contribute the least to greenhouse gas emissions. This body of literature reveals a critical gap: while climate change is often discussed from an environmental perspective, its social dimensions—such as poverty, inequality, and lack of access to resources—are frequently overlooked. Thus, the need for climate policies that incorporate social justice is evident, as these social evils exacerbate vulnerability and hinder effective mitigation and adaptation efforts.

Further contributions to this discourse come from the fields of climate justice and equitable governance. Climate justice theorists, such as Shue (2014) and Allen (2019), argue that climate change is not only an environmental issue but also a deeply social one, driven by historical injustices, unequal

distribution of resources, and systemic oppression. Shue (2014) asserts that the affluent, who are most responsible for emissions, must bear the greatest responsibility for addressing the impacts of climate change. Allen (2019) emphasizes the importance of inclusive governance that actively engages marginalized groups in climate decision-making, asserting that such participation is crucial to achieving both environmental sustainability and social justice.

The concept of equitable governance, explored by scholars like Harlan (2018) and Lister (2020), offers a potential solution to these challenges. These scholars argue that governance structures must be transparent, accountable, and inclusive to address both environmental sustainability and social inequality effectively. Harlan (2018) suggests that equitable governance requires the redistribution of resources and opportunities, ensuring that those who are most vulnerable to climate impacts are empowered to participate in climate action. Lister (2020) further expands on this, stressing that the governance of climate change must involve all stakeholders—governments, civil society, businesses, and marginalized communities—ensuring that climate policies are not only environmentally sound but also socially just.

Although existing literature emphasizes the necessity of equitable governance in climate change, it is largely silent on how those frameworks can be actualized. These scholars, such as Keohane and Victor (2016), point out that while globally cooperative action is called for with climate change, power asymmetries between nations can stymie action. They argue that equitable governance cannot be only at local or national level but has also to be reflected in global policy systems that are addressing the structural inequities that render populations vulnerable to climate change.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

This study is theoretically grounded in the nexus of climate change, sustainability, and social justice, calling for fairness in governance to address environmental and social challenges. It argues that sustainability is not only a multidimensional concept in which climate inequality affects the well-being of humans but also cannot be achieved without tackling global social evils of inequality, poverty, and corruption that further climate vulnerability. Cluster Theory Climate Justice Climate Governance Climate Politics The conceptual framework synthesizes current theories of climate justice and governance, specifically climate justice (Shue, 2014) and equitable governance (Harlan, 2018), that establish that climate change impacts vulnerable and marginalized populations most directly, and that issues of social inclusion and equity must also form the basis of sustainable solutions. The relationships explored in this research theme are related to the governance provisioned through inclusivity, transparency, and accountability to relieve climate change with the reduction of social inequalities. This framework highlights the potential benefit of fair and right governance in enabling not only environmental protection and sustainability but also social equity and resilience to climate challenges.

Research Methodology

The research methodology for this study is qualitative, consisting of literature review, policy analysis, and case studies of the role of equitability in contributions of equitable governance in climate change mitigation or reduction of social evils. Building the knowledge base on the nature of the problem is developed through an extensive synthesis of academic literature, the reports from intergovernmental institutions like the IPCC, and theory on climate justice and governance. We utilize policy analysis to evaluate climate policies from developed and developing countries, illuminating their inclusiveness, efficacy, and integration of principles of social justice. It also employs case studies from different regions of the world to reveal successful examples of fair governance that are helping advance climate action and social equity together. This is done because the idea behind this is to provide a holistic, multi-faceted perspective to the research problem by investigating the theoretical and practical aspects; hence, the findings in this research offer value to theory and application. This method facilitates the investigation of multilayered interactions across diverse climate governance and social justice contexts, revealing how just governance can produce co-benefits for sustainable development.

The Concept of Sustainability in the Context of Climate Change

By convention, sustainability refers to our capacity to meet the needs of the present without compromising

the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. That definition, in the context of climate change, is not just about the environment but the urgent need to find harmony between human systems and the Earth's natural systems. This will call for adaptation, to some degree, for strategies that reduce environmental damage, protect vital natural resources, and preserve a balance between human societies and earth environments despite climate change. Tackling climate change requires two fundamental elements of sustainability: mitigation—that is, the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions—and adaptation—that is, the modification of human and environmental practices to changes in climate that are already occurring (Khan & Jiliani, 2023; Thomas et al., 2019).

But climate change sustainability cannot be separated from the social dimension. The nature of climate vulnerability is such that sustainability efforts that do not center on social equity will not succeed in tackling the drivers of this systemic inequity. Climate change is no equal-opportunity phenomenon; it does not act indiscriminately upon all populations. As evidenced, vulnerable communities are heavily affected by climate events like extreme weather, rising sea levels, and food insecurity, especially those communities that are marginalized due to poverty, gender, race, or by virtue of geography. Such inequalities deepen the impact of climate change effects and prevent these communities from recovering—or adapting to new environmental realities. Thus, they warn that climate action not rooted in social inclusion threatens to lock in social ills, such as poverty, migration, and conflicts, and therefore minimize the impact of climate solutions (Khan & Usman, 2023; Page, 2007).

However, climate change is not just a distant challenge; this enormous problem cannot be addressed sustainably without integrating the ideas of equity and justice both into mitigation and adaptation efforts. Vulnerable populations need to be empowered by enabling policies and governance structures that give them the means, knowledge, voice, and capacity to engage in climate action and the realization of its benefits. If we can only achieve social equity as a part of larger climate change justice, these battles will remain hollow, and the truly vulnerable people this change protects will be lost in the fray. So, in the context of climate change, sustainability entails more than just environmental solutions, but rather a sustainable future must be equally social and environmental, addressing the need for solutions that are sustainable—i.e., enduring, egalitarian, and effective (Hussain et al., 2023; Paavola & Adger, 2006).

Social Evils and their Role in Climate Change

Social evils are acts that breach social standards but inflict injury on a person or group. Such as poverty, inequality, injustice, corruption, and exploitation, which are important driving forces of environmental decline and climate change. These societal issues limit governance, restrict access to resources, and exacerbate the exposure of marginalized groups to climate change impacts. These social evils are also often perpetuated by the fact that they make the vulnerable population that is at risk of climate change more prone to environmental shocks and less likely to engage in climate mitigation measures, thus hindering the ability of the global community to achieve sustainability goals (Hussain et al., 2023; Kataria, 2024).

Poverty: Climate change drives systemic poverty, and systemic poverty drives climate change. Many poor communities, especially those in poorer countries, depend directly and entirely on natural resources to make their livelihoods, meaning that their reliance on such resources in the face of ever-increasing climate change risks—droughts, floods, crop failures, etc.—renders them more vulnerable than other communities. Finally, poverty acts as a barrier to the access of key resources such as education, health care, and technology that are important for adapting to climate change. They may be less resilient to the impacts of sea level rise, heatwaves, or changing patterns of agriculture, and often lack the resources to invest in climate-resilient infrastructure or adaptive approaches. Thus, poverty intensifies the adverse effects of climate change, and climate change aggravates poverty in a vitriolic, remorseless cycle (Khan & Ximei, 2022).

Inequality: Gender, race, and social class inequalities deepen vulnerability to climate change. Climate disasters harm some groups more than others, particularly women, children, and marginalized racial or ethnic communities. Especially during climate-related emergencies—land-related crises like floods and droughts—women, because of their duties in society, have a greater catastrophe in hand but a lesser hand

in the resources and decisions needed to avert it. Social inequality further prevents the expansion matrix of essential services like financial support, healthcare, and education, core ingredients for resilient capacity to climate abiotic attributes. As such, inequality adds a layer of inequality between those who can face the climate challenge and those who cannot, which in turn increases social and economic disparities (Khan et al., 2021).

Corruption: Corruption hinders climate action by obstructing the implementation of ambitious climate policies and the targeting of resources needed to tackle climate change. Corruption—well, continuing on the theme of cash fragmentation, which is grim, but in countries where it is rampant, funds earmarked for climate resilience projects may be misappropriated, diverted, and poorly managed, denying vulnerable communities the assistance and support necessary for them to adapt to environmental changes. Corruption in the management of climate policy undermines public confidence and prevents the establishment of transparent, accountable institutions that could promote effective action on the climate. This not only pulls us back from combating climate change but also puts a gap between policy intention and the reality on the ground of the people who need it most (Usman et al., 2021).

Exploitation: The overexploitation of our natural resources for the purpose of quick profit is one of the major contributing factors to environmental degradation and ultimately to the faster arrival of climate change. However, especially seen through clear-cutting, overfishing and land mining, we lose erras of biodiversity and millions of ecosystems while at the same time releasing greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. Such activities are to be profit-centric, with little consideration for the environmental and social costs down the road. In many areas of the world where communities rely heavily on natural resources and phenomena for their livelihoods, the pressures on natural systems and resource depletion compound the difficulties these communities experience in coping with changing climates. Even the most exploited, already enduring the blight of structural poverty and inequality, encounter even (greater) damage to their ecology via those eco-crises that created the climate chaos to begin with (Khan et al., 2020).

Equitable Governance as a Solution

Climate change being a hairy and multifaceted problem, equitable governance is needed to cope with it. It has to do with inclusion, with participatory decision making, with ensuring that well represented in the process defining climate policies and measures, are all members of civil society, but most importantly the marginalized and vulnerable groups. In the context of climate change, it goes beyond the environmental dimension of equitable governance — equitable governance is also about social inequities and about a shift in resource, opportunity, and decision-making power. While the above paragraphs discuss some of the social justice issues involved with climate policies, equitable governance wants to address these issues so that vulnerable groups are able to act to adapt to and mitigate climate change (Khan et al., 2020).

Inclusive Decision-Making: Equitable climate governance requires inclusive climate decision-making, which ensures diverse perspectives are considered, particularly those of marginalized groups. Women, indigenous peoples, youth and persons who live in poverty have experience and insights which can be drawn upon to facilitate appropriate solutions to climate adaptation and mitigation action. Involving these voices in the decision-making process does more to enhance the quality of the resulting policy; it also will help assure a better fit to the needs of the populations who will be most affected by climate change. For example, Indigenous traditional land management practices can inform effective approaches to climate change adaptation with cultural relevance (Khan et al., 2020).

Social Justice and Climate Policy: Climate change policies should not only need to stop causing environmental damage but also bring about political equality. Climate impacts are most damaging to low-income communities, women, and marginalized ethnic groups, yet these same populations have limited access to the resources necessary to respond. This means prioritizing marginalized communities in climate policies and programs, giving them a seat at the table, and in return, most importantly, benefiting from climate regulators. For example, policies should support the fair transition of workers in industries

adversely affected by climate change or the transition to a greener economy like coal mining or agriculture. Such policies would allow nobody to be left behind in the transition to a more sustainable way of production, preserving jobs and livelihoods and increasing social equality (Adger, 2001).

Accountability and Transparency: At the heart of effective governance for climate action thus lies accountability and transparency in both the implementation of policies and the allocation of resources. Within the context of climate finance, corruption and mismanagement may prove insufficient for these financial resources to reach the communities in greatest need of them. Survey and critique equitable governance mechanisms, that assure the efficient and equitable allocation of climate change mitigation and adaptation funds and can be publicly assessed. This transparency is vital to public trust and the ability to reach vulnerable communities with assistance. Worse still, accountable systems can make sure that the public or private actors or banks do not act immorally as far as the overturning of climate policies, so that climate policies are both effectively and justly implemented and run (Thomas et al., 2005).

Collaboration and Partnerships: Climate change is a global issue and can be effectively dealt with only collectively and comprehensively by the community of nations. Governance based on equity promotes the engagement and cooperation of government, international organizations, civil society, and the private sector. It is this collaborative disposition that creates synergies, where each stakeholder can deploy their respective strengths, knowledge, resources and networks to complement the common effort. By ensuring representation of all voices and equitable distribution of benefits and responsibilities, this integrated approach may lead to solutions to the climate crisis that are more inclusive, innovative, and justifiable. This engagement is vital for a successful transition, but climate actions need to be more than top-down; they must be set within the parameters of what local communities, networks and businesses can do. Fair governance makes a powerful argument as a climate change solution: fair governance entails a holistic, holistic, and equitable approach to climate mitigation and adaptation. Equitable governance drives effective and just climate solutions by ensuring the participation of marginalized communities in decision-making, embedding social justice into policy creation, creating accountability and transparency, and ensuring collaboration. We together through such approach only can pave human being a robust, sustainable future having been tackling various environmental and social issues (Smit et al., 2003).

Conclusion

Climate change mitigation efforts must consider governance equity; this study clearly shows. It proves, in fact, that the social features of climate change—poverty, inequality, access to resources, etc.—play a role just as strong as the environmental variables in defining the effectiveness of climate responses. Solutions to the climate crisis will never be complete without tackling these underlying social evils and will continue to fail to protect the most vulnerable people among us. The research states that inclusive governance, characterized by social justice and the conductive functioning of marginalized communities, is critically important to achieving environmental sustainability, along with social equity. The results indicate that fair governance frameworks that focus on visibility, responsibility, and community participation are associated with the most robust and lasting climate solutions. Examples from places with robust participatory governance practices demonstrate that the decisions better fit local circumstances when communities have a role in crafting climate action plans. At the same time, the analysis shows that many existing climate policies, especially in developing countries, are still blind to these principles, thereby replicating unequal and unsustainable logging.

In light of these findings, more pragmatic research is needed to apply equitable governance frameworks at the local, national, and global levels. We need more analysis of case studies on how each of these models can be scaled up and adapted to different contexts. More research on the role of international institutions in achieving justice in climate governance is also urgently needed since overcoming the systemic inequality at the core of climate vulnerability will depend on cooperation across nation-state boundaries. Ultimately, these research efforts highlight that the climate change battle needs to be examined as more than an environmental one but rather as a deeply social problem that needs solutions rooted in justice and equity for all.

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