

# CLIMATE CHANGE, SOCIAL INEQUALITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS: A Path to Environmental Justice

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**[Abstract:** *Climate change is an important environmental challenge nowadays, that changes the conditions of future generations. The impact of climate change is not uniform with marginalized communities and vulnerable populations bearing a disproportionate burden. There are some issues of climate change, such as extreme weather events, sea-level rise, and food insecurity that threaten the health and well-being of all generations. To address these challenges, it is important to promote and initiate environmental justice, which is that all people regardless of race, ethnicity, or socio-economic status, have access to a safe and healthy environment. This paper analyses the connection between climate change, social inequalities, and the well-being of future generations, highlighting the need for a path to environmental justice regarding future generations' health.]*

## I

### Introduction

Climate change is a result of human activity on a global scale, and it poses a significant threat to humankind and the existence of future generations. Every organism, regardless of birth or living situation, has the right to life, which includes the right to a healthy environment. Every reaction to climate change has the potential to cause environmental injustice everywhere. Environmental justice provides a method of living in a healthy environment without interruption, and Mother Earth must be protected from all of the repercussions of climate change.

In a global context, all future generations are deprived of social equity concerning environmental justice as a result of unjust global environmental breakdowns such as the industrial revolution, urbanization, scientific and technological developments, population growth and poverty, extortion, and resource exploitation. Because of the climate catastrophe, future generations are becoming the most susceptible. The health of all living animals, including humans, is being jeopardized by the many pathways of climate change. Heat waves are exacerbated by rising temperatures, which can lead to heat-related illnesses and deaths. Changing rainfall patterns and extreme weather events cause food scarcity, an increase in malnutrition, and an increase in waterborne infections, while also exacerbating respiratory and cardiovascular disorders caused by air pollution.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Nick Watts *et al.*, *The 2018 report of the Lancet Countdown on health and climate change: shaping the health of nations for centuries to come*, *Lancet*, 392, 2479- 2514. (2018).

Climate change exacerbates socioeconomic inequity by disproportionately affecting vulnerable communities such as the poor, disadvantaged groups, and rural people. It has a negative influence on livelihoods, especially in agricultural regions, resulting in economic disparities and higher poverty rates. Environment justice refers to the unbiased allocation of environmental costs and benefits in the purview of climate change. Environmental justice originated as a result of the disparate impact on disadvantaged communities as a result of social inequality to current and future human generations. This difference is frequently linked to socioeconomic reasons, unequal access to resources, and historical marginalization patterns.

This article will investigate the impacts of climate change on the environment that underline the critical importance of environmental justice in tackling difficulties and delivering social equity to current and future generations.<sup>2</sup> It also delves into the multifaceted connection between climate change, societal inequality, and future generations' well-being, highlighting the importance of environmental justice. It identifies the main tactics and policies that can advance environmental justice and benefit future generations. It dives into the systematic origins and manifestations of climate-induced socioeconomic disparities and offers a framework for attaining environmental justice while protecting the well-being of current and future generations. It investigates the relationship between climate change, socioeconomic inequality, and future generations' well-being, emphasizing the necessity for a road to environmental justice in terms of future generations' health.

## II

### **Evolution and Relevance of Environmental Justice Concerning Climate Change**

Environmental justice arose from community groups in the United States protesting polluted companies and dump yards primarily in areas of black and indigenous peoples' <sup>3</sup>reservations in the 1980s. This trend then spread to the United Kingdom and Europe. Their primary concern is social inequality, notably the differences in environmental circumstances encountered by the richest people and the poor people of society.<sup>4</sup>

This concept gained traction in the White House in 1994 when President Clinton issued an executive order addressing vulnerable income groups in general. It reaffirmed the requirement of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to do environmental

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<sup>2</sup> Seema Rani, CLIMATE, LAND-USE CHANGE AND HYDROLOGY OF THE BEAS RIVER BASIN, WESTERN HIMALAYAS, 177-202 (2023).

<sup>3</sup>Erica Douglas, *Environmental Justice Topics*, ERICA DOUGLAS SMALL BUSINESS MARKETING, available at: <http://www.ericadouglas.com/stephanie-nogueras-vnhqeih/510dca-environmental-justice-topics> (last visited Jun 20, 2023).

<sup>4</sup>U. N. Development Programme. *Environmental Justice: Securing our Right to a Clean, Healthy and Sustainable Environment*. New York, US: UNDP, (2022).

justice, which was later accepted by the United States Environmental Protection Agency in 2003.<sup>5</sup>

Environmental justice advocates for the fair conduct and participation of various races, cultures, income levels, and educational levels of people in the establishment, implementation, and enforcement of environmental programs, laws, rules, and policies<sup>6</sup>. It is concerned with the equitable distribution of environmental quality among social groupings. It is distributive justice that necessitates a fair sharing of environmental risks and benefits across demographic and geographical scales.<sup>7</sup> There are three distinct expressions associated with environmental dispersal. There are three distinct terms under the heading "environmental justice distribution." One is environmental justice, another is environmental equality, and yet another is environmental racism. They describe the key elements of the disproportionate impact of hazardous dump stations and other polluting amenities located in ethnic minorities and economically disadvantaged areas. The notion of environmental justice shifts throughout time due to its complexities and multidimensionality. Globalization, urbanization, environmental degradation, and climate change are some of the obstacles to distributional justice, and it has a broader perspective that incorporates generational international environmental justice. The concept of generational environmental justice discusses the concept of sustainability and the responsibility of current generations to ensure a healthy and safe environment for future generations. Future generations will bear the cost. Future generations will be held accountable for the faults of the present. The current generation's short-term economic advantages are an injustice to future generations.<sup>8</sup>

Because of the poorer marginalized populations, there is a trade and distribution rooted in underlying disparities in power with disproportionate costs that are raised in an international context in terms of social and economic inequalities affecting health, well-being, and the environment under globalization. Agriculture, pesticides, food security, asbestos, air pollution from waste ignition, e-waste, and climate change disasters are some examples of global environmental injustice. A vision of environmental justice as linked to issues of development, human rights, and independent responsibility provides a larger framework for achieving toxicant protection by emphasizing the agency of vulnerable groups to change their conditions of vulnerability in a context of global correctness.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Carolyn Stephens *et al.*, *Environmental Justice and Health*, Elsevier sci. 373 (2008).

<sup>6</sup> Definition given by Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

<sup>7</sup> Gordon Mitchell, *Environmental Justice: An Overview*, Elsevier sci. 569 (2019).

<sup>8</sup> G. Bolteet *et al.*, *Environmental Justice: Social Disparities in Environmental Exposures and Health: Overview*, 2 Elsevier sci. 459 (2011).

<sup>9</sup> L. Londonet *et al.*, *Environmental Justice: An International Perspective*, Elsevier sci. 553 (2019).

### III

#### Climate Change Implications and, the Challenge to Environmental Justice

Climate change is the most depressing planetary concern. Recent calamities are unequivocal evidence of accelerating Climate Change. It impacts farming and endangers food sanctuaries, causes coastal erosion, and increases the intensity of natural calamities, species extinction, and the spread of vector-borne diseases. It is a natural process in which temperatures, rainfall, wind, and other variables vary through time. Human activity has caused temperature variations on a global scale for millions of years. The health of the world's living species is most adversely affected by the usage of fossil fuels and the production of greenhouse gas emissions. The most significant environmental impacts of climate change are higher temperatures, which cause Heat-related sickness to future generations, extreme storms, greater droughts, warming, rising oceans, species extinction, food scarcity, health concerns, poverty, and relocation are all possible outcomes.<sup>10</sup>

Climate change has wide-ranging and substantial impacts on societies around the world, influencing different aspects of human life such as the economy, public health, food security, and stability. Climate change has some significant societal consequences. These are economic disruptions: Climate change brings significant economic hazards, such as infrastructure damage, decreased agricultural output, increased insurance costs, and interruptions to supply chains and trade.<sup>11</sup> The public health concerns that affect human health include increased heatwaves, extreme weather events, changing disease patterns, and decreased air and water quality. Third, food and water insecurity have an impact on crop productivity, water availability, and food production systems, resulting in food and water insecurity, particularly in vulnerable locations. It interrupts agriculture, jeopardizes food supplies, and worsens malnutrition and famine. Fourth, displacement and migration: increasing sea levels, increased frequency of catastrophic weather events, and loss of usable land can displace communities and cause people to relocate in search of safer living circumstances and livelihoods.<sup>12</sup> There is also a loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services that are crucial for human well-being, including pollination, purification, and carbon sequestration. Furthermore, it affects social inequality and

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<sup>10</sup> Climate Action Fast Facts, UNITED NATIONS (2023), available at: <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/science/key-findings#physical-science>. (last visited Jun. 21, 2023).

<sup>11</sup>Chris Field *et al.*, 2014. *Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Part A: Global and Sectoral Aspects. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom and New York, NY, USA, 1132 pp.

<sup>12</sup> Robert McLeman *et al.*, *Migration as an Adaptation to Climate Change*, *Clim. Change*, 76(1-2), 31-53 (2006).

vulnerability, and it disproportionately affects vulnerable communities such as the poor, indigenous peoples, women, and children, as well as future generations.

Environmental justice is the equitable action and expressive participation of all people, irrespective of race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic background, in environmental issues.<sup>13</sup> Environmental laws, rules, and policies are developed, implemented, and enforced. Numerous problems continue in resolving environmental disparities. Here are some challenges: First, marginalized communities frequently endure a disproportionate weight of environmental pollution, resulting in poor health effects and a lower quality of life. Environmental resources are in short supply. Communities that are primarily socioeconomically poor may encounter challenges in accessing critical natural resources such as fresh air, water, and flora and fauna. Finally, there is a cumulative Environmental impact because of the concentration of various pollution sources in their neighborhood, vulnerable communities frequently endure cumulative environmental impacts. Unequal distribution of environmental dangers many marginalized populations frequently lack the political and economic power to affect the location of environmental hazards or require proper safeguards, resulting in continuous environmental injustice. Because of erroneous data on ethnicity and socioeconomic class, one of the problems for environmental justice are data and information gaps, limited access to information, and environmental education.<sup>14</sup>

## IV

### **Addressing Social Injustice in the Light of Environmental Justice**

Social bias occurred due to Climate change disrupts human existence in various ways, including torrential rains, floods, storms, heat waves, and other undesired and unwanted events that no person or creature wants to experience. All of this has resulted in widespread destruction and relocation of humans and other creatures. Extreme weather events have the potential to aggravate socioeconomic inequality and affect future generations in a variety of ways. So, who are the next generations? In the future, all people, including future generations, have to live on the planet. Considering future generations' interests and well-being is a significant ethical and moral precept in a variety of circumstances, including environmental sustainability, policymaking, and intergenerational justice. It highlights the current generations' obligation to make decisions that support a sustainable and equitable future for those who will inherit the earth. While some repercussions result in inequity for future generations, others are described here.

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<sup>13</sup>*Supra* note 3

<sup>14</sup>Paul Mohai *et al.*, *Annual Review of Environment and Resources*, EJ 34, 405-430(2009).

First, unequal access to resources and opportunities: this includes water availability, food production, and natural resources, all of which can exacerbate the availability of basic resources such as clean water, nutritious food, health care, education, and economic opportunities. It may be more difficult for disadvantaged communities to adjust. Adapt and thrive in a changing atmosphere, resulting in expanding inequities and limited opportunities for upward mobility. This can lead to a cycle of social inequity that lasts into the future.<sup>15</sup>Second, intergenerational equality and climate debt: there is an intergenerational issue where the activities and decisions of the current generation have long-term consequences for future generations. Catastrophe to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate change successfully might result in climate debt.

Third, environmental refugees and migration are caused by environmental disruptions such as sea-level rise, droughts, and natural disasters, which can lead to mass migrations and displacement. Future generations may face greater issues when communities seek refugees from uninhabitable or badly affected areas. This puts pressure on social systems. Conflicts over resources arise, and social disparities within host communities worsen. The burden of resettlement and integration rests disproportionately on underprivileged populations, sustaining socioeconomic inequality for future generations.<sup>16</sup> Climate change has the greatest impact on marginalized and vulnerable populations, particularly low-income communities. Thus, serious climate change is the evil that causes socioeconomic disparity for future generations. Though serious climate change is a recurring difficulty in the present, it is a concern for future generations.

The Earth, like a mother carrying a kid, protects every life and natural resource. Humans, on the other hand, take everything for granted and abuse every convenience afforded to them. destroying everything Human activity is destroying every corner of the globe. Aside from worldwide business investors and trade and scientific investors, everyone is directly or indirectly responsible for environmental difficulties and changes such as global warming, the greenhouse gas effect, and climate change. Using multi-dimensional elements of multi-national authorities to implement mitigation and adaptation activities. Most first-grade nations adopt third-grade nations to build them environmentally resourceful enough to compete with other nations.

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<sup>15</sup> Neil Adger, FAIRNESS IN ADAPTATION TO CLIMATE CHANGE(2006).

<sup>16</sup>Robert McLeman *et al.*, *Migration as an Adaptation to Climate Change*, 76(1-2) *Clim. Change* 31-53 (2006).

## **International and National Principles for Environmental Justice**

Since its inception in 1965, the United Nations Development Programme has taken experience with the rule of law, human rights, and access to justice, including legal empowerment and legal assistance into account. Environmental and climate justice problems, such as constitutional reform and financial support for the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment, as well as other environmental rights; development and implementation of environmental and climate change laws, as well as policies such as Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs); support for national human rights institutions (NHRIs) on environmental issues; and increased access to information, public participation, and access to justice on environmental issues.<sup>17</sup> Three types of propaganda approach UNDP's Environmental Justice. The first is to establish domestic and international laws, as well as human rights-based approaches to recognizing, safeguarding, and realizing environmental rights. The second step is to strengthen public-interest NGOs to make environmental rights available to all populations. Last but not least, improving access to justice and legal empowerment in the fight against the global crisis.

The National Environmental Policy Act of 1970 compels federal agencies to examine the environmental consequences of their planned actions before making judgments. Under the National Environmental Policy Act of 1970, federal agencies must include environmental justice in their work. Making permission decisions, implementing federal land management activities, and constructing highways and other publicly owned facilities. NEPA created the President's Council on Environmental Quality. The NEPA's requirements include the compilation of Environmental Impact Statements, addressing procedural provisions, and administering the process. Creating a lead agency and a cooperating agency to follow the NEPA criteria.

Now, in brief, the NEPA Process's environmental justice aspects are described. Federal agencies designated under the NEPA play an important role in promoting to achieve this goal, NEPA formed an Environment Justice Interagency Working Group (EJIWG) to develop reports on the most promising practices for Environment Justice Methodologies in NEPA Reviews, as well as a community guide to Environment Justice and NEPA Methods. Executive Order 12898 (February 1994) requires federal agencies to take measures to address environmental justice in minority and low-income groups. Federal agencies are directed to "make achieving environmental justice part of their mission by identifying and addressing, as appropriate, disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of their programs, policies, and activities on minority and low-income populations, including tribal populations." The agencies' guidelines and methodologies are

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<sup>17</sup>*Supra* note 5.

provided below. To begin, select the affected area and people from marginalized groups, second, consider data on environmental hazards that have affected the population in multiple exposures, third, recognize the interrelated social and economic factors that apply the natural and physical environmental effects, fourth, effective public participation strategies, fifth, assurance of community representation, and also seek tribal representation in the process. Prescribed methodologies include the use of Health Impact Assessments and online tools to promote Environmental Justice Analyses.

## VI

### **A Policy-Based Legal Framework for Environmental Justice in the Face of Climate Change**

As previously noted, there are numerous challenges associated with environmental imbalances; nevertheless, to address all of them and make the world a sustainable place for the future, some policy-based framework is required. To begin, the Stockholm Declaration, adopted in June 1972, where the concept of "only one planet" developed, is the most important for resolving all environmental challenges. It is the first worldwide convergence on the planetary environment, with 122 participants and 26 principles. Its action plan is to investigate the earth's environmental threats and to construct the Global Environmental Assessment Program and the United Nations Environment Program.

The "United Nations Conference on Environment and Development" (UNCED), convened in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, reflected the international consensus on how to handle the challenge of climate change. During the summit, the "United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change" (UFCCC) was established, which was initially signed by 166 countries and was eventually signed by 166. It finally came into force on March 21, 1994, with 197 signing countries. Which attempts to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions, as well as the usage of fossil fuels and excess carbon dioxide production. It also established the UFCCC's Conference of the Parties (COP).<sup>18</sup>

A synopsis of Indian environmental legislation. Following the Stockholm Declaration, India placed provisions in the Indian Constitution for the preservation of the environment as well as citizens' socioeconomic rights. Article 21 of the Indian Constitution guarantees residents the right to live in a pollution-free and healthy environment. Whereas the Indian constitution included some provisions based on

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<sup>18</sup>*International Agreements on Climate Change*, IBERDROLA available at: <https://www.iberdrola.com/sustainability/international-agreements-on-climate-change> (last visited Jun. 23,2023).



the Stockholm Declaration in 1976, the 42nd Amendment Act was approved in which important insertions were made to safeguard the environment and climate change under the directive principles State policy principles Article 48A of the Indian Constitution, Fundamental Duties 51A(g), was enacted. India also passed some environmental legislation through parliament.<sup>19</sup> Nothing was provided especially for climate change. However, before 2008, there was no rule or notification specifically addressing climate change. The question now is if India, as a firm supporter of the Kyoto Protocol, will implement any climate change legislation or policies. As a response, on June 6, 2008, a climate change council was formed under the leadership of the Prime Minister, and on June 30, 2008, the Prime Minister unveiled the National Action Plan on Climate Change, which seeks to gradually shift toward a less carbon-intensive growth pattern, increased reliance on renewable energy resources, and higher levels of sustainability. of energy efficiency. The term "national climate change" refers to eight national missions: the National Solar Mission, the National Mission for Improved Energy Efficiency, the National Mission for Sustainable Habitat, the National Water Mission, the National Mission for Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem, the National Mission for Green India, the National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture, and the National Mission for Climate Change Strategy Knowledge.<sup>20</sup>

The primary goal of these policies is to protect sustainable strategies for poor and vulnerable groups, to mitigate greenhouse gases and to change the direction of change for ecological sustainability, to devise cost-effective strategies for demand side management, to deploy adaptation and mitigation technologies, to engineer innovative market mechanisms, and to welcome redevelopment. but in some ways, this plan does not allow for targeted emission reductions, and no timetables for correcting some problems were provided. On August 24, 2009, the Prime Minister approved a national mission on enhanced efficiency, including the Performing, Achieve, and Trade (PAT) mechanism, which covers facilities that account for more than half of India's fossil fuel use and has helped to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 20 million tons per year by 2014-15.

Not only for climate change but also for environmental protection, the Indian government has created legislation and national policies. Here are several laws: the Environment Protection Act of 1986, the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act of 1974, the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act of 1981, and one Tribunal was established in the centre of India to administer justice. It is the National Environmental Tribunal, which was established in 1995. The Indian Government has enacted the above-said laws.

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<sup>19</sup> Arun Kumar, *Environment Justice in India*, 7 SCC, J-13(2002).

<sup>20</sup> *Supra* note 3

## VII

### **The Future of Humanity on Earth! And the Problems That Must be Solved**

Climate change consequences are increasing in all regions of the world, posing new problems for water availability, food production, and the livelihoods of millions of people. If significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions are postponed further, the repercussions will worsen, hurting the lives of today's children. However, environmental science is clear: with prompt intervention, grave consequences can still be avoided only by the reduction of natural resources.

Individual 1986s are the future generations of the earth's inhabitants of especially future generations. By the end of the century, all future generations will be subjected to lethal heat waves ranging from 30% to 48-76%. If this occurs, the world will warm by up to 4°C. By 2100. The following example depicts how the future will be affected by an increase in temperature.

Temperatures in the climate could rise to 4°C by 2100. For example, if a child is born in 2020, he or she will be 40 by 2050, and the temperature will climb to 3°C. If the child reaches the age of 80 by 2100, the temperature would rise to 4°C. Where all current and future generations, as well as unborn children, are at great risk of extreme heat waves.

It is a climatic risk that the future will be miserable unless current generations' acts of greenhouse gas emissions, burning fossil fuels, radar activities, and mining are stimulated to some extent. Climate change will exacerbate poverty and inequality, as well as involuntary migration. This can cause wildfires, greater floods and droughts, and an increase in temperature-related incidences of vector-borne, water-borne, and food-borne diseases.<sup>21</sup>

The climate problem exacerbates inequality, poverty, and displacement, and may raise the chance of violence. The climatic crisis has resulted in a 90% increase in sickness. By 2040, one in every four children would live in places with severe water scarcity. Every year, 38 million children's education is disrupted. It also harms productivity, water scarcity, and air pollution. Not only that, but the situations of families and the socioeconomic disparity they encounter will put the child in dire straits, with less food, less water, lower income, and declining health. Children's futures will be ruined due to a lack of immunity, malnutrition, body sensitivity, and vitamin inadequacy. This does not stop there; it also has an impact on their education, livelihood, infrastructure, and well-being. Human conditions in the future will be more like choosing between starvation and migration; it will be more

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<sup>21</sup>IPCC, 2022: Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge, UK and New York, NY, USA, 3056pp.

like surviving or dying. It appears that if one wants to live, one must migrate, but if one wants to starve, one will automatically die.

## VIII

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

“Do justice to the environment, so that it can do justice to the future”. To do that one must minimize utilizing natural resources by undertaking deforestation, soil degradation, and spoiling water and air through pollution. To combat the inequalities that occur in society due to environmental disasters and injustice that happened to future generations can only be addressed by providing Environmental justice.

Environmental justice is attempting to address the unequal distribution of environmental hazards among the poor and minorities. It advocates the belief of all people “the right to live in a clean and safe environment free of industrial waste and pollutants that can harm their health”. Environmental justice, from a policy perspective, ensures that all citizens receive equal protection from environmental risks from the government and that minority and disadvantaged populations do not suffer inequitable environmental responsibilities.

To address social inequality for future generations under the concept of environmental justice that considers various aspects of society. There are some suggestions prescribed by UNDP, NEP, and IPCC they are promoting education and awareness, ensuring access to Green spaces, investing in sustainable infrastructure projects, empowering future generations with knowledge and skills needed in environmental and climatic action, fostering an inclusive community engagement, promoting job training and economic opportunities in green sectors, address environmental health by reducing pollutants disparities in marginalized communities, developing strategies and investments to enhance the resilience of vulnerable communities to climate change impacts and advocates for policy and legal reforms that explicitly address environmental justice and social equity concerns.

With this, the concluding section summarizes the key findings of the paper and underscores the urgent need for climate change through an environmental justice lens. It highlights the importance to recognize the dimensional effects of Climate change on marginalized communities and outlines potential pathways for achieving equity, resilience, and sustainability in our responses to this global crisis and providing justice to socially unequal communities and future generations.