

HUMAN RIGHTS- BASED APPROACHES TO CLIMATE ACTION

Incorporating human rights into climate policies and actions is known as a human rights-based approach. Human rights-based approaches ensure public inclusion and promote fairness, leading to more coherent, legitimate and sustainable policy outcomes. Whilst some countries resist human rights, human rights-based approaches ensure that climate action is approached as both a technical effort to cut emissions and as an effort to address human rights and social inequality. This 2-sider offers a brief introduction to the topic alongside inspiring examples from all over the world of what is being done to protect people and planet.

WHAT IS IT?

Human rights are the universal standards to uphold the safety and well-being of everyone. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights ensures the “recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family [as] the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.” Incorporating human rights into climate policies and actions is known as a rights-based approach.

The preamble of the Paris Agreement states that countries “should, when taking action to address climate change, respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights.” Rights-based approaches are based on the duties and responsibilities countries are already committed to under the human rights system. People are more likely to support climate action when their rights – such as the right to life, the right to education, and the right to safe and adequate housing - are promoted, respected and protected. This is because climate **mitigation and adaptation** that takes into account peoples’ human rights is likely to be fairer and more inclusive. Failure to incorporate rights can result in ambitious climate projects being challenged or rejected by the communities whom they directly impact. Any decision maker, organisation or company that is carrying out projects that affect people has the power to take a rights-based approach. Enabling communities to participate inclusively and equally in projects can pre-empt human rights violations at the stages of:

- design
- implementation
- evaluation



Ensuring the meaningful participation of communities affected by climate action may in turn result in a shared sense of ownership and mutual benefit be that financial or otherwise. Overall, human-rights based approaches are a means towards the inclusion and empowerment of affected communities.

Human rights-based approaches also take into consideration the following:

▶ **Gender** shapes how people are impacted by and respond to climate change. Women and girls have distinct experiences and opportunities to lead and strengthen climate action.

▶ A **just transition** ensures protection for livelihoods impacted by necessary economic changes to shift to an economy based on renewable energy, equality, and sustainability.

▶ The inclusion of **intergenerational equity** ensures the security and health of future generations, understanding that our current decisions are part of longer timelines of change-making and healing

▶ **Food security** is essential to supporting a growing population. It engages head-first with the reality that we already produce enough food, but that we do not yet produce it sustainably or distribute it in ways that feed us all.

▶ Climate change impacts **displacement and peacebuilding**, and climate action must be planned in connection with these topics, to ensure climate action is an opportunity for stability and sustainable development rather than scarcity, instability, and conflict.

▶ As climate action and policy affects all members of the community, especially those already vulnerable, **public participation** ensures that all voices are heard.

▶ **Indigenous peoples** protect the most biodiverse lands on Earth. They also possess invaluable knowledge on how to respond to climate change and how to imagine different ways of living on this planet justly and sustainably. Their voices and leadership are vital.

Mitigation: the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions that cause climate change.

Adaptation: adapting to climate change impacts, such as what crops we can grow, where to safely live, work and play, and to build resilience.

This page is an excerpt from QUNO’s “People’s Climate Empowerment Series”, a publication that explains international efforts on climate change and how these can help us support fair, ambitious and inclusive climate action.

To find out more visit:

<https://quno.org/resource/peoples-climate-empowerment-series>

EXAMPLES OF RIGHTS-BASED APPROACHES

- 1 The Friends' Church in **Burundi** organized workshops to teach farmers and other vegetable growers to make organic insecticides and organic fertilizers to reduce pollution of the environment and erosion of the soil: **Food Security, Biodiversity and Ecosystems**
- 2 In **Samoa**, after the government banned plastic bags, the Samoa Women's Association of Growers started weaving and selling traditional and eco-friendly baskets made from coconut leaves: **Just Transition, Gender**
- 3 In **Russia**, the Indigenous Altai and their organization Ttengri protect the biodiversity, permafrost, and archaeological wealth of the sacred Golden Mountains. Indigenous stewardship has a proven track-record of supporting more robust and biodiverse ecosystems: **Indigenous Peoples, Biodiversity and Ecosystems**
- 4 As part of **Scotland's** Climate Action laws, a Just Transition Commission has been established to ensure the creation of new green jobs while committing the Scottish government to eliminating poverty and reducing emissions without leaving workers in pollutive industries behind: **Just Transition**
- 5 In the **Central African Republic** climate change paired with ongoing conflict is making already limited access to drinking water more difficult. UNICEF partnered with former child soldiers to build new water wells in environmentally sound and sustainable ways: **Displacement and Peacebuilding**
- 6 In **Uruguay** the government has a website enabling citizens to submit complaints about pollution and other types of environmental degradation from anywhere in the country. Each complaint is evaluated by a technical team and, if well-grounded, an investigation is carried out: **Public Participation**
- 7 In **Ecuador**, the Indigenous Sápara, are working with Land is Life and Ashiñwaka—Association of Sápara Women of Ecuador, to protect Indigenous knowledge in order to share it with future generations, so that they can continue to live in and protect one of the most biodiverse places on the planet: **Intergenerational Equity, Indigenous Peoples**
- 8 In the **United States**, the Mycelium Youth Network provides climate resilience education in the Bay Area drawing from ancestral knowledge practices, and tailored to low-income communities to empower and inspire climate action: **Intergenerational Equity, Human Rights**
- 9 In Rajshahi, **Bangladesh**, the local government bought a fleet of battery powered rickshaws for public transit, built sidewalks and the country's first bike lane, planted tens of thousands of trees, cleaned up the polluting brick kiln industry and banned large trucks from the city centre. Dangerous levels of air pollution, unsafe traffic, and greenhouse gas emissions rapidly declined: **Human Rights**
- 10 In Vancouver and Toronto, **Canada**, Greenpeace and local volunteers advocated successfully for the city governments to adopt new resolutions in favour of holding fossil fuel companies accountable for the costs of climate change: **Public Participation, Just Transition**
- 11 A group of Ipili women from **Papua New Guinea** has documented their disproportionate suffering of environmental degradation, economic suffering, and sexual violence due to extraction of minerals from the nearby Porgera mines. The Ipili women organized to raise awareness and collaborate and, as a result, the mining company has instituted a mechanism focused on sexual violence and is under continued scrutiny from the different Ipili women's organizations: **Gender, Human Rights**



The Quaker United Nations Office (QUONO) is an expert observer of the UNFCCC, IPCC and Human Rights Council. QUONO has been supporting work on climate change at the international level through diplomacy, advocacy and education initiatives since 2012. Please consider making a donation to help us continue with this work.