

Global Practices of Climate Justice

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On the global level, the problem of climate change is not only about reducing emissions – it is also about confronting deep-rooted inequalities embedded in global power asymmetries, supply chains, economic dependencies, and historical injustices. As climate impacts intensify, especially in vulnerable regions like coffee-producing areas of the Global South, justice demands more than incremental responses: it calls for systemic change. Drawing on academic literature, real-world case studies, and insights from a panel that brings together perspectives from academia, practice, and activism, this summary highlights the contradictions of current efforts. It emphasizes the need for equitable solutions that move beyond technocratic fixes toward genuine transformation.

Some of the readings we covered explore climate justice through the lens of global value chains (GVCs), particularly in sectors like coffee and critical minerals. This is exemplified in Gail Hochachka's study of a Guatemalan coffee chain. The lead firm in this case employs "relational governance" – an approach built on trust, long-term partnerships, and collaborative problem-solving, rather than control through top-down standards and audits. The author argues that this governance model allows for more generative responses to overlapping crises such as climate change and economic precarity. However, while the paper offers a hopeful example, it also highlights a persistent challenge: such models often remain isolated and reliant on exceptional actors. Without systemic shifts in power relations or market incentives, transformation remains the exception, not the rule.

Grabs et al. take these ideas further by examining how resilience is defined across the sector. Using a multi-scalar framework and data from both global interventions and fieldwork in Ethiopia and Tanzania, they show that actors at

different levels – farmers, national governments, global firms – often pursue conflicting goals. To delve deeper into these dynamics, the authors propose four guiding questions: resilience of what, to what, for what, and due to what. These invite us to consider which systems are being protected, what types of shocks are prioritized, what outcomes are pursued, and what kinds of capacities – absorptive, adaptive, or transformative – are being strengthened.

Their findings reveal that most interventions focus on maintaining supply chains, often sidelining farmers' actual needs. The authors argue that context-specific, farmer-centric approaches that combine all three strategies (adaptive, absorptive, and transformative) are essential. They also stress that one-size-fits-all approaches are unlikely to succeed; instead, climate strategies must be flexible and sensitive to local contexts. Designing resilience together with producers, rather than for them, is crucial to avoiding a new wave of externally imposed solutions that replicate older patterns of inequality. Their findings reveal that most interventions focus on maintaining supply chains, often reflecting the priorities of global markets rather than farmers themselves. The authors stress that one-size-fits-all approaches are unlikely to succeed; instead, climate strategies must be flexible and sensitive to local contexts. They argue for participatory, farmer-led solutions that combine absorptive, adaptive, and transformative capacities – allowing farmers to "hang in," "step up," or "step out" depending on their circumstances. Designing resilience together with producers, rather than for them, is essential to avoiding a new wave of externally imposed solutions that replicate older patterns of inequality.

Similar patterns are also seen in other

sectors – for example, in the extraction of critical minerals. Thea Riofrancos critiques the growing trend of “green onshoring” – efforts by wealthy nations to relocate mining for critical minerals like lithium and cobalt from the Global South to the Global North. While framed as a move toward energy independence and ethical sourcing, she argues that such strategies often ignore the deeper structures of extractivism. Simply relocating mining sites does not address the social and ecological harms of resource extraction, nor does it challenge the unequal distribution of risks and benefits. Instead, it reproduces a familiar pattern: prioritizing industrial growth over community consent and environmental justice. For climate justice to be meaningful, Riofrancos emphasizes, transitions must be democratic and rooted in the needs and rights of affected communities – not just cleaner in appearance.

These critiques of green extractivism are expanded in the Manifesto for an Ecosocial Energy Transition from the Peoples of the South. The manifesto offers a sharp collective critique of the dominant approaches to decarbonization. While much of the global discourse focuses on technological solutions and securing mineral supply chains, the authors argue that such strategies often reinforce historical injustices. They call for a transition that is not only ecological but also reparative – acknowledging the ecological debt owed by the Global North and centering the sovereignty of communities in the South. The manifesto rejects green colonialism in all its forms, insisting that any truly just transition must challenge extractivist models, redistribute power, and prioritize social well-being over corporate profit. In this framing, climate justice is inseparable from anti-colonial and democratic struggles for systemic transformation.

This call for structural change also applies to global trade systems. In the article “Supply Chain Justice,” Lee Matthews and Minelle E. Silva argue that dominant sustainability initiatives often fail to address the deeper inequalities embedded in global trade. Rather than treating justice as a matter of certification or efficiency, they call for a more fundamental transformation of supply chains – one that prioritizes agency, fair compensation, and participatory governance. Current models, they suggest, frequently leave global hierarchies intact while outsourcing responsibility to producers. A justice-oriented approach must move beyond market logics to center labor rights, living incomes, and structural change. In this framing, justice is not a supplement to sustainability – it is its foundation. These theoretical and structural critiques came into sharp focus during the panel discussion featuring Philipp Schallberger, Janina Grabs, Max Bergman, and Alexandra Gavilano. Centered on the coffee value chain, the conversation revealed how climate justice plays out in both policy and practice. Schallberger offered a practitioner’s view from within the coffee industry, highlighting the possibilities and limitations of building more equitable relationships with producers. Grabs and Bergman emphasized how well-intentioned sustainability frameworks can reproduce existing hierarchies if they ignore local contexts. Gavilano, speaking from activist experience, challenged the audience to see climate justice not as a technical fix, but as a political struggle rooted in everyday life. The panel did not offer easy answers – but underscored the need for cross-sector collaboration that centers local voices, redistributes power, and moves beyond symbolic action.

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