

REGIONSADAPT COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE
BRIEF FOR ACTION N°4

Addressing vulnerabilities: Including climate justice dimensions into adaptation planning

Introduction

This document summarizes the key insights from the RegionsAdapt Community of Practice session titled "Addressing vulnerabilities: Including climate justice dimensions into adaptation planning," held on November 8th, 2023.

The session featured presentations by guest experts Elisa Sainz de Murieta and Noelia Calvo Zafra from the Basque Centre for Climate Change (BC3), whose valuable insights inform the background section and recommendations of this summary.

Additionally, members from Minas Gerais and KwaZulu Natal shared their experiences, innovations, and challenges on the topic.

Marília Melo, Secretary of Environment and Sustainable Development – State of Minas Gerais (Brazil), presented the Vulnerability Index and the recently published Climate Action Plan.

Noyoliso Walingo, Director of Climate Change & Environmental Planning, Governance & Information Management – KwaZulu-Natal Province (South Africa), shared actions taken to address vulnerable communities in the province.

Furthermore, insights from an Adaptation Futures 2023 session held in Montreal, one month prior to the community of practice, were also incorporated into the session.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Addressing Vulnerabilities with Climate Justice: Integrating climate justice into adaptation planning is crucial for addressing vulnerabilities and inequalities exacerbated by climate change, particularly among marginalized groups.

Linking Climate Justice and Adaptation: Despite calls for climate justice, it is often overlooked in adaptation debates and policies. While progress has been made in integrating procedural justice principles, there are still areas for improvement in including climate justice dimensions in regional policy planning. Shared Experiences from Regional Governments showcase efforts in innovative adaptation actions to empower vulnerable groups.

Adaptation Justice Index: A practical tool for assessing climate justice integration into policy planning, providing indicators and scoring metrics as a checklist for adaptation planning.

Agents of Change: Community-based adaptation, from design to implementation, empowers citizens and vulnerable communities to mitigate disasters and find local solutions to environmental challenges.

Key Enablers: Effective governance, social dialogue, community engagement, disaggregated data, diversity of perspectives, and dedicated finance are essential for successful climate adaptation efforts.

Background

Climate change exacerbates existing vulnerability and inequality, disproportionately impacting marginalized groups such as women, children in low-income households, Indigenous communities, and small-scale producers. Regions facing poverty, governance issues, and limited resources are particularly vulnerable. Marginalization worsens susceptibility to climate-related challenges, compounded by limited adaptive capacities due to socio-economic factors.

The roots: environmental justice

The **environmental justice movement** emerged in the United States in the 1980s, when community groups started to fight against the siting of polluting factories and waste sites in predominantly **black neighbourhoods and indigenous people's reservations**. The protestors highlighted the disproportionate distribution of adverse environmental impacts to the most vulnerable societal groups.

When the environmental justice movement reached the European continent, the focus shifted towards social inequality, particularly the reality of massive disparities between environmental conditions experienced by the richest and poorest groups (Stephens & Willis, 2017).

Defining Climate Justice

While there isn't a singular definition of climate justice, it can be effectively summarized by Carman et al. (2023):

"Climate justice focuses on considering the needs of everyone and addressing these inequities head-on. The goals of climate justice include reducing the unequal harms of climate change, providing equitable benefits from climate solutions, and involving affected communities in decision-making" (Carman et al., 2023).

Linking climate justice and adaptation

Despite calls for climate justice dating back two decades, it remains absent from many adaptation debates and policies. While climate adaptation currently advances in Europe and beyond, experts argue that the planning phase is significantly biased towards the technocratic approaches lacking social and human rights data and assessment, resulting in overlooking the questions of equity and justice (Araos et al., 2021; Meerow & Newell, 2019).

Lesnikowski et al. (2016) pointed out that the first generation of adaptation plans usually focuses on developing knowledge and data, while the second and third generations start improving the process of adaptation planning and monitor the adaptation progress.

As reminded by the IPCC AR6 report, to improve inclusion of social justice and equity, climate plans or programmes should look at integrating three main justice dimensions:

1. **Recognitional justice:** recognises past and current disadvantages in society, acknowledging the plurality of societal actors and their different needs, desires, and ability for adaptation
2. **Distributive Justice:** identifies the potential unequal way in which climate impacts and costs and benefits of adaptation measures are distributed
3. **Procedural justice:** is based on inclusive processes throughout planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. This means considering who can participate in the planning process either as a decision maker or participant, how decisions are made and based on who's information or ideas.
4. *Another key dimension, not mentioned by the IPCC but often cited in research is* **Restorative justice:** restores past inequalities through adaptation, by first acknowledging harm, identifying the offenders and victims, and considering compensation and reparations.

Adaptation Justice Index (Juhola et al., 2022)

One valuable research methodology for assessing the incorporation of Climate Justice dimensions into policy planning is the [Adaptation Justice Index](#) (Juhola 2022). This index offers indicators with scoring metrics, serving as a practical checklist for integrating justice considerations into adaptation planning. It serves not only as an evaluation tool but also prompts reflection on various climate dimensions prior to strategy development.

A collaborative effort between BC3 and Regions4, involving desk research on Regions4 European members and interviews with Catalonia, Flanders, and Wales, has yielded insightful findings:

Procedural Justice: Regions have made clear progress in integrating procedural justice principles, involving stakeholders and the public in preparation phases, as well as implementing evaluation and monitoring tools.

Distributive Justice: Some progress has been observed regarding distributive justice, with risk assessments being prevalent in most cases. However, there are gaps in vulnerability assessments.

Recognitional Justice: Further development is needed, both conceptually and practically, in the area of recognitional justice. While regional plans show recognition of various climate impacts and adaptation needs in society, implementing recognitional justice, especially in empowering vulnerable groups, remains a challenge.

Restorative Justice: Significant development is required in restorative justice, although concepts like maladaptation are gaining attention. Improvement in considering restorative justice is anticipated, but there is still considerable ground to cover.

These findings underscore the ongoing efforts and areas for improvement in integrating Climate Justice dimensions into policy planning at the regional level.

Adaptation Justice Criteria that can be used to develop or assess a climate adaptation plan or strategy

1. Recognitional justice

- 1.1. The strategy acknowledges that adaptation needs are different across groups in society
- 1.2. The strategy acknowledges the impact of existing societal structures on vulnerable groups in adapting to the impacts of climate change
- 1.3. The strategy acknowledges adaptation as a way to secure basic rights

2. Distributional justice

- 2.1. A risk mapping/assessment is conducted
- 2.2. Vulnerability assessment is conducted and there is a process for identifying vulnerable groups
- 2.3. There is a process that assesses the distribution of benefits from adaptation
- 2.4. There is a process that assesses how costs of adaptation are divided
- 2.5. The strategy identifies the possibility of the distribution of negative impacts, i.e., maladaptation, of adaptation measures

3. Procedural justice

- 3.1. Adaptation plan details who participates in the strategy process
- 3.2. The adaptation strategy has involved participation during different phases of the process
- 3.3. The strategy allocates responsibilities related to adaptation
- 3.4. The adaptation strategy has a structured plan for participation in the implementation.
- 3.5. The adaptation strategy has a plan for updating and evaluating the strategy

4. Restorative justice

- 4.1. The strategy acknowledges the need to compensate for the diverging impacts of climate change
- 4.2. The strategy has compensation measures to deal with maladaptation
- 4.3. The unequal distribution of resources for adaptation is compensated by redistribution

More information on Scoring Methodology in [summary note](#) here.

Shared experiences from regional governments

State Climate Action Plan



KEY INFORMATION:

Location: Minas Gerais, Brazil

Thematic Axes: Water security, Food and nutrition, Biodiversity and ecosystems, Population and vulnerable populations, Health, Disaster Risk Management and Climate Vulnerability, Industry, Waster, Energy, Farming, Transport and mobility

Published: 2023

More information [here](#)

Minas Gerais, the second-largest industrial economy in Brazil, has prioritized its Climate Agenda, particularly since its commitment to the Race to Zero campaign in 2020, becoming the first Latin American state to do so.

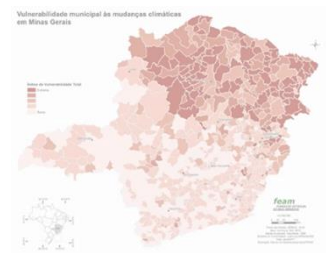
In 2023, the Government of Minas Gerais in Brazil, in collaboration with UKPACT, CDP, ICLEI, UFRJ, and the State Foundation of Environment (FEAM), launched its innovative State Climate Action Plan (PLAC-MG) after extensive public input.

The plan presents four transversal axes: mitigation, adaptation, innovation and climate justice. The plan aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and aims for net-zero emissions by 2050, focusing on land use and agriculture as well as transports as its energetic matrix is already essentially consisting of clean energy.

With 29 sectoral actions, 102 sub actions, and 315 sector goals to be achieved between 2023 and 2050, the plan is ambitious. Currently, a monitoring system is being developed to support its implementation.

The presentation highlighted the timeline and key components of Minas Gerais’ Climate Agenda, notably the recently published State Climate Action Plan. This plan stands out by incorporating Climate Justice as a core element, linking climate issues to development and human rights, and spotlighting social concerns related to the climate agenda. Another noteworthy aspect is its alignment with various sectoral instruments in critical areas like water, food and agriculture, disaster risk reduction, and energy.

Another strength of this Climate Action plan is its foundation on the findings of the Minas Gerais Index of Climate Vulnerability (IMCV). Developed in partnership with the French government in 2015, this index evaluates sensitivity, exposure, and adaptation capacity across the state's 853 municipalities. It plays a vital role in defining priorities and guiding policy development tailored to local characteristics and priority sectors such as water resources, biodiversity, agriculture, institutional capacity, and health. Strengthening the institutional capacities of municipalities is notably essential for Minas Gerais, enabling them to develop their adaptation agendas effectively.



The Climate Justice pillar actively addresses the protection of human rights for marginalized communities, confronting socioeconomic and territorial disparities directly. Additionally, it provides a set of actions aimed at reducing vulnerability and enhancing adaptive capacities, focusing on promoting the reduction of climate vulnerability, strengthening civil defence and disaster risk reduction monitoring systems, mitigating health effects of climate change, integrating indigenous knowledge, enhancing capacity (governance, finance, environmental education), and prioritizing areas such as water, food, and nutrition security. Importantly, the plan also considers intersectional aspects of gender, race, or class inequalities for all listed actions, marking a significant move towards a more equitable approach to climate action.

The implementation of the PLAC-MG involves the active participation of communities, traditional groups, and vulnerable populations in achieving neutrality by 2050 and advancing protection, adaptation, and resilience against the main threats and risks posed by future climate scenarios.

Transformative River Management Project



In the eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality, the demonstration of well-maintained rivers in good condition highlights their ability to mitigate flood and human health risks associated with climate change, benefiting the municipality, citizens, and businesses. The project emphasizes ecosystem and community-based adaptation, along with disaster-risk reduction. It creates employment opportunities and provides skills training for locals through activities like waste collection, invasive plant removal, and indigenous tree planting. Additionally, it educates municipal officials, project participants, and communities on climate and environmental matters.

In the Palmiet Catchment area, a significant innovation involved piloting an early-warning system for floods in the Quarry Road West informal settlement. This project facilitated community-based hazard mapping, enhancing local understanding of risks and improving communities' ability to respond effectively. It also established flood early warning communication systems to reach vulnerable communities through a network of key stakeholders, including community members, government bodies, social mobilizers, volunteers, and NGOs. During the deadly floods of April 2022, this program demonstrated its effectiveness by ensuring the survival of more than 500 vulnerable people. This success underscores the importance of involving communities in the assessment and implementation of solutions to their vulnerabilities.

KEY INFORMATION:

Location: KwaZulu Natal, South Africa

Sector: Water, Ecosystem restoration, Waste Collection Disaster Risk Reduction

Implementer: KwaZulu-Natal Department of Economic Development, Tourism, and Environmental Affairs (EDTEA)

Impacts: 1,186 individuals directly employed in the projects.
109 t of waste collected
98 hectares of land freed from invasive alien flora species.

More information [here](#)

Climate change exacerbates South Africa's triple challenges of poverty, unemployment, and inequality, disproportionately affecting vulnerable populations. Marginalized communities often bear the brunt of these impacts, facing barriers to essential services and infrastructure. Economic shifts toward a low-carbon economy raise concerns about job losses, particularly among already vulnerable groups.

In response, KwaZulu-Natal has integrated climate justice into its adaptation planning by conducting comprehensive vulnerability assessments to identify vulnerable groups. The province emphasizes the meaningful participation of these communities in the design, planning, and implementation of climate change projects. Notably, the province has begun implementing the Framework for a Just Transition in South Africa, focusing on the Durban South Basin.

Furthermore, KwaZulu-Natal prioritizes inclusivity in its Climate Change Strategy planning process, particularly engaging youth and civil society. These groups, including indigenous peoples, women, children, and those whose livelihoods are threatened by climate change, play a crucial role in representing diverse interests. Marginalized groups are also represented in the highest climate change intergovernmental structure, the KwaZulu-Natal Climate Change and Sustainable Development Council.

To address the vulnerabilities of these communities, KwaZulu-Natal is implementing various actions, including relocating flood-prone areas, expanding services and infrastructure, conducting environmental education programs, and establishing early warning systems. The engagement of beneficiary communities from design to implementation empowers citizens to mitigate disasters and find local solutions to environmental challenges with support from multiple stakeholders.

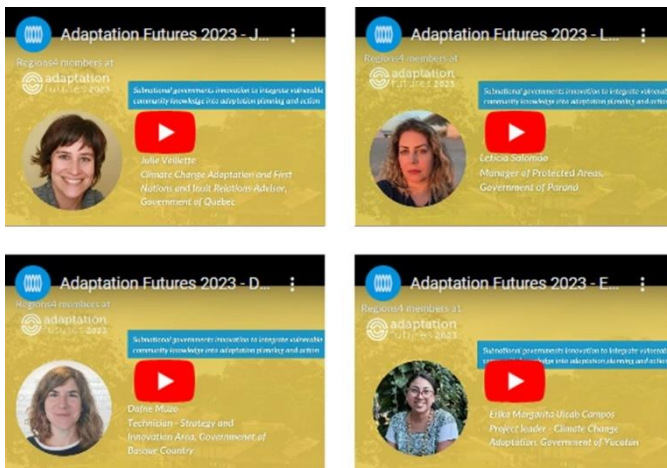
Adaptation Future 2023 Recap: Insights and Videos

The Adaptation Futures Conference series, a premier event on climate change adaptation since 2010, convened from October 2 to 6, 2023. Co-organized with Ouranos, the 7th edition spotlighted climate justice and equity. A session by Regions4 and the Government of Quebec on October 3rd addressed climate change impacts on vulnerable communities, stressing the importance of ethical and inclusive adaptation efforts.

The roundtables included presentations from Makivvik (Canada) shedding light on Nunavik Climate Strategy—an Inuit-led adaptation plan, as well as from the Joint Research Programme from the European Commission) share its CDP Cities questionnaire analysis, which underscored the profound impacts of multilevel governance and the pivotal role of States and regions as catalysts for change.

Effective Governance Inlusiveness
Transversal approach
Give voice to everyone
Diversity of perspective
Intelligible Adaptation Language
Capacity-building and knowledge
Assessment of vulnerabilities
Community Engagement
Alliances, Partnerships
Social Dialogue Space for leadership
Disaggregated data Dedicated Finance

Key topics addressed during the session



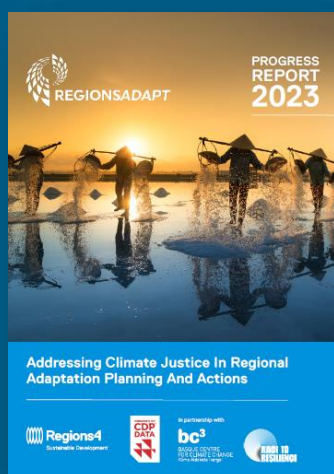
Members of Regions4 also delved into the innovative strategies their regional governments are pursuing to incorporate vulnerable communities into adaptation planning and actions. Dive in the video playlist across or in the document below to explore how :

- >> Québec's is committing to climate justice and adaptation finance [[VIDEO](#)] [[Just Transition Brochure](#)]
- >> The Basque Country is integrating a gender perspective in its climate change approach [[VIDEO](#)] [[Executive Summary](#)]
- >> Yucatan is strengthening adaptation capacities of Milpa Maya farmer [[VIDEO](#)] [[CASE STUDY](#)]
- >> And Parana is co-managing the Metropolitan State Forest with indigenous communities [[VIDEO](#)]

References and useful links

- [Carbon Brief \(2021\) In-depth Q&A: What is 'climate justice'?](#)
- [Juhola and al \(2022\) Connecting climate justice and adaptation planning: An adaptation justice index](#)
- [Jandova A. \(2023\) A Decent Environment For All: Climate Justice Assessment of European Regional Adaptation Plans \[Master's thesis, Utrecht University\]](#)
- [UNFCCC \(2018\) Considerations regarding vulnerable groups, communities and ecosystems in the context of the national adaptation plans](#)
- [Yale Climate Connections \(2020\) What is 'climate justice'?](#)
- [European Environment Agency \(2022\) Briefing no. 09/2022: Towards just resilience: leaving no one behind when adapting to climate change](#)
- [Breil et al \(2018\) Social vulnerability to climate change in European cities – state of play in policy and practice](#)

Content shared by speakers and panelists during our webinar can be access here: [Bibliography - Reference](#)



To explore further this subject, explore **RegionsAdapt 2023 Report**. The report features 16 short stories exemplifying how regional governments navigate the intricate landscape of climate justice and inclusion. From innovative policies to community-driven initiatives, each focus is a testament to the transformative power of resilience. [Read more here.](#)

ABOUT THIS BRIEF FOR ACTION

This brief for action is part of a series aiming to inform Regions4 members on key results and recommendations based on Regions4 research and Community of practice sessions.

RegionsAdapt is Regions4 climate initiative gathering more than 75 regional governments. It mobilizes ambition and action on climate adaptation by facilitating access to the latest innovations, tools, and best practices at the regional level.

RegionsAdapt Community of Practice offers a space for regional governments to present their expertise and to learn from each other, discuss and engage, on a series of learning session on focused topics on adaptation, so as to help them gain capacity and improve their own policies and activities on adaptation.

For more information on the initiative, please visit: <http://www.regions4.org/project/regions-adapt/>

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