

Regional Leadership for Just Resilience

**Advancing Climate Justice and Biodiversity Action with
Indigenous Peoples, Local Communities and Stakeholders**



A learning session for Regions4 Biodiversity Learning
Platform, RegionsAdapt and Regions4 SDGs Communities
of Practice

Regional Leadership for Just Resilience: Advancing Climate Justice and Biodiversity Action with Indigenous Peoples, Local Communities and Stakeholders

Introduction

The workshop "Regional Leadership for Just Resilience: Advancing Climate Justice and Biodiversity Action with Indigenous Peoples, Local Communities and Stakeholders" brought together diverse participants from across the Regions4 and RegionsAdapt memberships to explore the critical intersection of resilience, equity, and environmental action. Hosted by the Regions4 Biodiversity Learning Platform (R4BLP), RegionsAdapt, and the Regions4SDGs Communities of Practice, this collaborative session aimed to strengthen regional approaches to climate and biodiversity challenges with a focus on justice and inclusion. The workshop provided a platform for sharing innovative practices, exploring frameworks for action, and collectively refining the concept of just resilience at the regional level.

Participants engaged in interactive discussions that highlighted the unique position of subnational governments in advancing climate justice and biodiversity action. The session emphasized that solutions must emerge from inclusive dialogue and genuine partnership with local communities, particularly Indigenous Peoples and vulnerable communities.

Background

The concept of "Just Resilience" has emerged as a key framework within Regions4, representing a commitment to strengthening capacities to withstand environmental shocks while placing equity, social justice, and community well-being at the center. This approach acknowledges that the intertwined crises of climate change, biodiversity loss, and ecosystem degradation disproportionately affect those who have contributed least to these problems and who have the fewest resources to adapt. The development of this framework has been made possible through the generous voluntary contribution of the Scottish Government, whose commitment to climate justice continues to inspire Regions4 members, along with valuable support from CONGOPE.

Subnational governments occupy a unique position in advancing just resilience. While national governments establish broad policies, it is at the regional level where these policies meet local realities. Regional authorities understand their territories' specific vulnerabilities and strengths, enabling them to work directly with local communities and integrate traditional and local knowledge systems, which offer profound insights for addressing environmental challenges. This positioning also exemplifies the importance of multilevel governance, as regional actions can be aligned with international frameworks like the Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Agreement, and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Just Resilience is relevant despite terminological differences:** While regions use varying terminology, the core principles of Just Resilience are widely implemented.
- **Financial sustainability and governance fragmentation present significant barriers:** Regions struggle with financial dependency, limited budgets, and difficulties accessing national and international-level climate funds, undermining long-term sustainability.
- **Technical solutions often fail to address social dimensions and community realities:** Many regions report an overemphasis on technocratic approaches that disconnect climate and nature-based solutions from community needs. Technical gaps include the need for methodologies that integrate equity considerations into climate impact assessments and better data monitoring systems.
- **Vulnerable communities face persistent barriers to meaningful participation:** Women, Indigenous peoples, and displaced communities consistently lack access to decision-making structures. These equity gaps highlight the need for more inclusive governance structures and targeted approaches that prioritize marginalized groups.
- **Community leadership and early involvement drive successful implementation:** Regions that prioritize community ownership from the outset report more sustainable and effective outcomes. The experiences shared in the session underscore the value of locally led adaptation strategies tailored to specific contexts.
- **Integrated approaches and knowledge exchange offer paths forward:** A shift toward governance models incorporating both ecological and social dimensions is emerging. Opportunities exist in developing sustainable financial models, strengthening preventive rather than reactive climate policies, and investing in capacity building.
- **Regulatory coherence and cross-sectoral coordination are essential:** Regions need to work toward breaking down institutional silos, enhancing coordination between climate and biodiversity policies, and establishing methodologies that effectively measure the equity impacts of climate and biodiversity actions.

“ True resilience isn’t just about adapting to climate shocks or preparing for uncertainties—it must also be just, ensuring adaptation benefits are shared equitably so that no community is left behind. Just resilience ensures that communities are not only protected but also empowered in the face of change. (...) As subnational governments, we share a unique responsibility. By embedding just resilience into our governance, we are not only protecting our people and economies but also setting a global example of how fairness and climate action must go hand in hand. ”

Gharib Murbe, Head of International Climate Change, Scottish Government



“ At CONGOPE, we firmly believe in the need to work collaboratively and inclusively with local communities and vulnerable groups, who are the most affected by climate change and biodiversity loss. We also recognize the importance of strengthening cooperation networks and strategic partnerships—both at regional and international levels—to ensure access to financing that enables the implementation of solutions on the ground. ”

Diana Carolina Estrella, Director of Environmental Management at CONGOPE



BREAKTHROUGH WORKSHOP ON INDIGENOUS ECONOMY AND JUST RESILIENCE

During the workshop, nearly 100 participants from various sectors, including government technicians and Indigenous community representatives from Ecuador’s Amazon provinces, gathered to discuss supporting indigenous economies and their role in advancing Just Resilience. The event focused on the collaboration between subnational governments and local communities, highlighting good practices, such as agroforestry initiatives in Napo, gender action plans in Zamora Chinchipe, the development of Ecuador’s first subnational REDD+ plan in Pastaza, and the establishment of a protected natural reserve in Morona Santiago.

Key discussions centered on how Indigenous economies can contribute to climate change mitigation, forest conservation, and the preservation of ancestral knowledge. The workshop also explored the role of regional governments in designing policies that align with these goals and foster participatory governance. The outcomes of the workshop include a stronger alignment between regional governments and Indigenous communities, as well as the foundation for future actions towards COP30. These initiatives will be further developed into a project portfolio promoting Just Resilience.



Outcomes Report
available [here](#)

Just Resilience Framework Overview

The **Just Resilience** framework, developed with the support of the Scottish Government and **Regions4**, focuses on integrating social equity into climate adaptation, biodiversity conservation and sustainable development efforts. It aims to ensure that resilience strategies not only address climate impacts but also tackle underlying social inequalities that exacerbate vulnerability. This framework is designed to help subnational governments create policies and projects that are fair, inclusive, and sustainable, particularly for vulnerable populations such as youth, women, Indigenous communities, and disadvantaged groups.

A key component of the framework is the development of a **white paper**, which provides both conceptual and operational guidance for regional governments. This document outlines clear principles for embedding justice into resilience strategies, including **equity, participatory governance, and intergenerational justice**. It also aims at offering practical tools to help governments assess vulnerabilities, prioritize at-risk communities, and ensure equitable distribution of resources.

The framework encourages a **holistic approach** that incorporates environmental, economic, and social sustainability while preventing maladaptation—where climate or biodiversity actions could unintentionally worsen existing inequalities.

At the regional level, we define just resilience through key principles (see graph below and more details in the [powerpoint](#)).

These principles guide both policy development and project implementation, ensuring that resilience efforts reduce, rather than reinforce, existing inequalities.

Ultimately, the Just Resilience framework is about suggesting resilience criteria that can be tailored to local realities, ensuring that all communities are protected and empowered in the face of climate change and biodiversity loss.

All contributions to this workshop and to the survey carried out prior to this virtual session will be considered and integrated into Regions4 documents and materials developed around this topic. More specifically, a synthetic policy paper with a practical approach will be elaborated and launched at UNFCCC COP30 — a kind of checklist that regional governments can use when designing climate and biodiversity strategies or developing resilience projects.



Graphic:

[Principles of Subnational Just Resilience](#).

Elaborated by Alejandro Callejas.

Breakout room discussions

The workshop gathered representatives from various regions and organizations, with 14 regions* staying for an in-depth discussion on integrating Just Resilience into regional environmental strategies.

Relevance and Ongoing Approaches of Just Resilience in Current Regional Policies

Despite varied terminology—just transition, locally led adaptation, just and fair adaptation, or links to loss and damage—participants widely agreed on the relevance of Just Resilience to their work, confirming that states and regions are already implementing some of its principles, integrating environmental and social goals through aligned policies while emphasizing inclusivity, fairness, and equity.

Strengthening Governance and Long-term Planning

Key lessons emerged around the importance of strengthening governance and long-term planning through institutional changes, regulatory alignment, and participatory frameworks that ensure resilience is both effective and equitable. Emphasis was placed on transitioning from reactive to preventive approaches, embedding just transition and just resilience principles into climate and biodiversity agendas. This includes institutional coordination and horizontal integration, the creation of unified legal frameworks with dedicated legislation around equity and inclusive principles, and the adoption of a whole-of-society approach to ensure that no community is left behind. Structured planning that minimizes improvisation was highlighted as essential to ensure sustainability, alongside efforts to operationalize justice principles into concrete planning tools, criteria, and support mechanisms for vulnerable populations.

*Scotland, Rio de Janeiro, KwaZulu Natal, Wales, Paraná, Climate Trends/Assam State, Campeche, Yucatán, Santa Fe, CONGOPE, Québec, Hauts-Bassins, Louga, Gauteng, California, Catalonia, Lombardy, Cusco, Rabat Salé Kenitra, Basque Country

Community Leadership and Inclusivity

Ensuring the active participation of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and women in decision-making processes was consistently highlighted as a critical success factor. Co-design and shared management models empower communities to take ownership of conservation and sustainability efforts, fostering equity and long-term commitment. Experiences from Regions4 members showed that when legal and institutional frameworks recognize and support community rights—especially around land ownership and gender equity—participation becomes more meaningful and impactful. It was also highlighted that integrating gender perspectives and providing tools for informed engagement further enhances the ability of marginalized groups to contribute actively and shape resilient, inclusive strategies from the ground up.

The importance of capacity-building initiatives and collaboration

Strengthening capacities at the local level emerged as a key enabler of effective resilience planning and implementation. Capacity-building initiatives—such as mentorship programs targeting universities, municipalities, and local governments—have been implemented in several regions showing significant improvements in policy design and execution. These efforts are particularly impactful when they combine technical training with participatory planning and localized approaches, ensuring that interventions are context-specific and community-informed. Collaboration with international organizations and technical partners further enhances these outcomes, facilitating knowledge exchange and the integration of global best practices into local realities.

Diverse strategies for financing Just Resilience

Experiences highlighted the value of leveraging international funds and climate finance mechanisms to support community-centered approaches, such as promoting new economic models that align environmental protection with local development. International cooperation projects, multilateral partnerships and non-sovereign loans provide critical support for climate and biodiversity action, while subnational initiatives like carbon markets or targeted climate funds demonstrate how locally generated revenues can be reinvested into adaptation and mitigation efforts. Ensuring that financial flows reach local levels in a fair and inclusive way remains a challenge, but also an opportunity to reinforce equity and long-term impact in resilience financing.

Main Challenges Identified

Despite these promising developments, significant challenges persist in implementing Just Resilience strategies effectively:

- **Financial dependency and budget limitations** – Regions frequently highlighted financial dependency and budget limitations as major obstacles. Limited funding often undermines long-term sustainability, and the unequal distribution of resources raises concerns about fairness and equity. Regional projects face difficulties in having the fund transfer from the national government level to their level although their role is often key when looking at financial sustainability.
- **Governance and Institutional Challenges** – Regulatory fragmentation between national and subnational policies, along with shifting political context (e.g., electoral cycles or conflicts) and institutional silos, weakens the coherence and effectiveness of climate and biodiversity actions plans
- **Technocratic Approaches** – Overemphasis on technical solutions without considering social aspects of climate adaptation. The disconnect between technical climate solutions and the lived realities of communities was a recurring issue, especially in African and Latin American regions.
- **Engaging the Most Vulnerable populations** – Identifying and reaching marginalized groups remains challenging. Women, Indigenous peoples, and displaced communities are particularly impacted by the lack of access to decision-making structures.
- **Diverse Local Realities and Equity Integration** – Implementing region-wide policies that address diverse socio-environmental conditions is complex. Vulnerable populations often need more time to recover from climate disasters, and women's engagement is limited by traditional land ownership norms, particularly in male-dominated Indigenous communities. Legal reforms for equal participation are required. Ensuring fairness is also challenging, as initiatives like electric vehicle subsidies may exclude those unable to afford the upfront costs.
- **Scientific Validation and Data Monitoring** – Confidence in climate policies is often low due to a lack of robust scientific validation and the absence of a standardized framework for tracking progress on Just Resilience. Additionally, limited access to disaggregated and context-specific data hampers regions' ability to evaluate the effectiveness and equity of these efforts, making it difficult to assess their true impact.

Opportunities for Regions4 and its Members to Support Just Resilience Principles












As Regions4 focuses on empowering subnational governments to implement resilient and equitable biodiversity and climate strategies, several knowledge exchange and capacity-building opportunities emerged from the discussions:

- **Learning from Best Practices** - Regions expressed interest in exchanging knowledge on gender-sensitive adaptation, biodiversity conservation, and climate action planning.
- Focusing on **gender-sensitive, youth and IPLCs' approaches** in climate resilience and biodiversity strategies, as there is a growing opportunity with international donors to increasingly involve women, youth and IPLCs in climate and biodiversity related implementation projects.
- **Strengthening Financial Mechanisms** - Exploring sustainable financial models, such as carbon markets and targeted subsidies, to provide long-term funding for resilient projects.
- **Defining common monitoring, reporting and verification methodologies** to assess intervention effectiveness in achieving both climate resilience and ecosystem preservation outcomes with a just resilience approach.
- **Aligning Regions4 and partners' initiatives** to the promotion of Just Resilience.



Examples from the field: How Just Resilience is translated at the territorial level

Field example	Key elements	
Wetland management in Kwazulu Natal (South Africa)	A nationally funded wetland management project that employs local community members as implementation partners, fostering deeper engagement and sustainable community ownership of conservation efforts.	
Loss and Damage in Scotland (UK)	Scotland has taken a leading role in addressing "loss and damage" by becoming the first Global North government to commit funding explicitly to it, pledging and mobilizing £10 million to date.	
Multilevel alignment in Scotland (UK) for climate and biodiversity	Scotland has aligned its climate adaptation and biodiversity strategies nationally while collaborating with local councils to engage communities across rural, urban, and peri-urban areas. This approach ensures territories become both climate-resilient and nature-positive according to local priorities. Their Community Climate Action Hubs enable communities to actively participate in designing and implementing local climate adaptation projects.	
Legislation for equity and inclusion in Wales (UK)	The Well-being Act requires public bodies to work toward a more equal Wales with cohesive communities, while the Environment Wales Act provides a modern framework for sustainable management of natural resources. The Just Transition Framework protects vulnerable communities and workers in carbon-intensive industries through retraining opportunities, and equitable sharing of green growth benefits.	 
A Just transition: The core principle of Québec's (Canada) fight against climate change	As shared in its factsheet , Quebec is developing a comprehensive approach to integrating just transition into its climate policies, with an emphasis on equity, collaboration, and practical tools. This effort is part of the broader goal of ensuring that climate action is inclusive and effective, addressing both environmental and social impacts. By fostering cross-departmental coordination and incorporating sustainability and biodiversity, Quebec aims to create a more integrated and resilient approach to climate action.	
Biodiversity action in the Province of Kénédougou (Burkina Faso)	The project preserves and creates natural protected areas that benefit local communities managing 18 conservation areas . These areas contain sacred sites with cultural significance, offering potential for tourism that supports local income and heritage preservation. The Hauts Bassin administrative region positions themselves as facilitators, allowing communities to take ownership and leadership of the conservation projects.	
Adaptation plans with indigenous communities in Quebec (Canada)	The Government of Québec supports the leadership of the First Nations and Inuit in the climate transition by funding community-based projects that address the impacts of climate change and contribute to mitigation efforts. These investments also aim to strengthen their capacities and foster the development of local expertise and know-how in climate action.	
Regional Climate Risk Assessment in Public Health in Québec (Canada)	Since 2019, Québec and its partners have assessed regional climate risks to public health through a collaborative, cross-sectoral initiative. Thirteen public health authorities evaluated the impacts of climate hazards on 20 population groups, laying the foundation for regional adaptation plans. The VRAC-PARC project has proposed effective actions to support vulnerable populations affected by climate risks, including mental health and socio-economic impacts, ensuring they are better equipped to cope with climate-related challenges.	
Gender, sustainable livelihoods and economic security in Yucatán (Mexico)	This initiative supported sustainable, low-emission rural development in Yucatán's Puuc Biocultural State Reserve, where Mayan communities, archaeological sites, and diverse ecosystems coexist. Funded by the Governor's Climate and Forest Task Force (GCFTE) , the project addressed both environmental conservation and gender inequality in land ownership.	 

Field example	Key elements	
Catalonia's (Spain) approach on gender	Catalonia is developing two important gender-focused initiatives: they are creating a database of female leaders and experts in environmental science, climate change research, and the energy sector; and are integrating gender perspectives into their new environmental strategies, projects, and legislation. These efforts aim to increase female representation in environmental fields while ensuring policies address the different ways environmental issues impact men and women.	
Campeche (Mexico) water project with local communities	Campeche's Ministry of Environment, Biodiversity, Climate Change and Energy (SEMABICCE) has worked to improve access to drinking water and renewable energy (solar panels) in marginalized areas, mainly Maya indigenous communities.	
Areas Designated Voluntarily to Conservation in Yucatán (Mexico)	The Government began implementing conservation areas in four territories in Yucatán. The communities - supported and trained by the Government - now manage the conservation areas themselves.	
Paraná (Brazil) pioneers co-shared forest management with indigenous communities	A pioneering co-management model for the Floresta Metropolitana was established in 2022 between the government of Paraná and the local Indigenous community. This project ensures the Indigenous people's right to use their territory through sustainable management practices, reforestation efforts, environmental education, responsible tourism, and community development.	
Rio de Janeiro's (Brazil) <i>Ambiente Resiliente</i> Program to support municipalities	The State of Rio de Janeiro and UN-Habitat are partnering to create action plans for 92 cities, focusing on disaster prevention, capacity building, community involvement and nature-based solutions. Nine vulnerable cities will be the first to benefit. This 40-month initiative aims to strengthen sustainability and resilience across the state.	
Resilient Green Cities with support from Parana and Rio de Janeiro States (Brazil)	The Resilient Green Cities Program aims to increase the environmental quality and resilience of Brazilian cities in the face of the impacts of climate change, by integrating urban, environmental and climate policies, encouraging sustainable practices and valuing the ecosystem services of urban green spaces. The project gives priority to the most vulnerable metropolitan regions, with the aim of reducing inequalities and the risks of climate-related disasters.	
Local community monitoring, AI, and biological corridors in Yucatan (Mexico)	Tech4Nature Mexico works to accelerate the effective conservation and regeneration of biodiversity and ecosystem health, strengthening monitoring, conservation, and understanding of the impacts of climate change on ecosystems and priority species in the mangrove area of the Yucatán Peninsula. The project created a mechanism to promote community monitoring of the jaguar and is exploring the creation of biological corridors for the jaguar. Local communities and ejidos are involved, as well as Indigenous, Maya-speaking communities.	
Jalisco's (Mexico) Inclusive Approach to Climate Resilience and Governance	Jalisco advances Just Resilience by integrating inclusive and participatory approaches into climate policy and planning. Public consultations and advisory councils ensure the voices of vulnerable groups—such as Indigenous communities, women, youth, and LGBTQ+ people—are represented in decision-making. These efforts strengthen climate governance and support the co-creation of fair, sustainable solutions. Tools like the State Climate Action Program (PEACC) and the 2050 Climate Strategy help embed this inclusive vision across policies.	   

**Legend:**

Local and vulnerable populations



Youth



Indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs)



Women and girls



Vulnerable populations in urban areas

Did you miss the session?
Explore the recording
and the presentation [here](#)

ABOUT THIS BRIEF FOR ACTION

This brief for action is part of a series aimed at informing Regions4 and Regionsadapt members on key results and recommendations based on Regions4 research and Community of Practice sessions.

- The **Regions4 Biodiversity Learning Platform (R4BLP)** fosters knowledge exchange for sustainable biodiversity use and conservation, supporting global advocacy efforts.
- **RegionsAdapt** is Regions4's 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 share their expertise, learn from each other, discuss, and engage, in a series of learning sessions on focused topics on adaptation, so as to help them build capacity and improve their own policies and activities on adaptation.
- **Regions4SDGs Community of Practice** aims to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, strengthen territorial approaches, and integrate regional processes to achieve global goals. This platform offers a collaborative experience, catalyzing synergies among regions worldwide, and fostering policy coordination, collective implementation, monitoring, and follow-up.

For more information on the initiative, please visit: <https://regions4.org/our-work/what-we-do/>

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