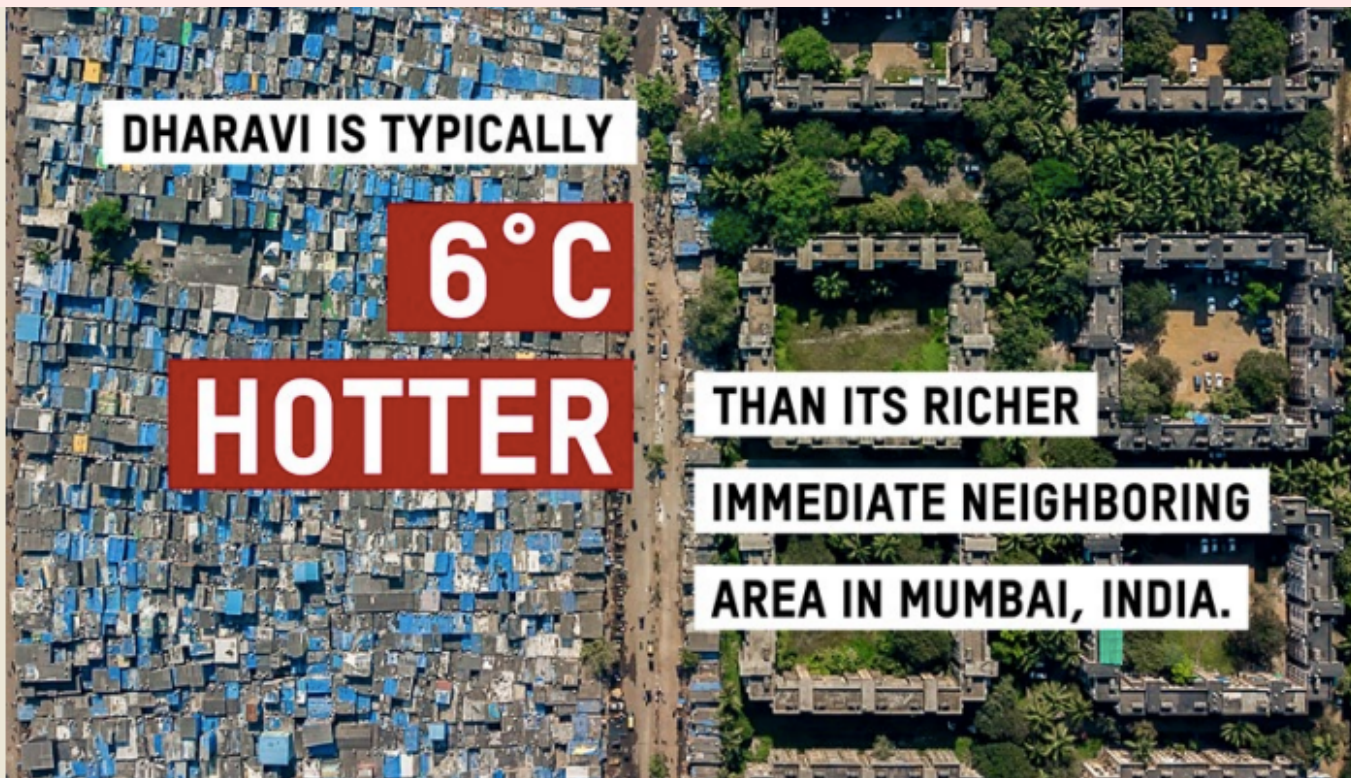


Climate justice



A photo from Mumbai, India, documenting a wealthy neighbourhood next to a poor neighbourhood. Source: Oxfam International, 2023. © Johnny Miller / Unequal Scenes

Reducing emissions by a fair share and climate reparations

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The Empowering Youth through Environmental Storytelling is a collaboration between The Environment and Human Rights Academy (TEHRA), News Decoder and the Young Educators European Association (YEEA).

The purpose of these educational materials is to help young people understand the climate crisis on a systems level through engaging with the topics and foster agency through the skills and techniques of journalism.

This project is co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union. The European Union cannot be held responsible for them.

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We cannot be held liable for how these materials are used in practice.

These educational resources have been developed to the best of our knowledge, using reliable and widely-recognized sources. While every effort has been made to ensure accuracy and clarity, we cannot guarantee that the materials are free from errors or omissions. Climate change is a field of knowledge that continues to evolve, and teachers and learners are encouraged to consult up-to-date scientific sources (e.g. IPCC, IPBES or national agencies) to complement and enrich these activities.

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Learning objectives

1. Analyse how the causes and impacts of climate change are unevenly distributed across regions, and how these injustices can be remedied

✓ **GreenComp alignment:**

- Systems thinking
- Critical thinking
- Political agency

Unit guide

Start by having students look at a photo of two neighbouring residential areas in Mumbai, India and discussing what the image is showing. Then, look over the project description before going through the Learn texts together, where you will learn about climate reparations, the loss and damage fund, and why some countries should reduce emissions more than others.

For the project, students will find one area of this topic they would like to investigate. The investigation doesn't have to go any further – the main objective is that students learn how to zoom in on specific topics within a broader topic, like a journalist does.



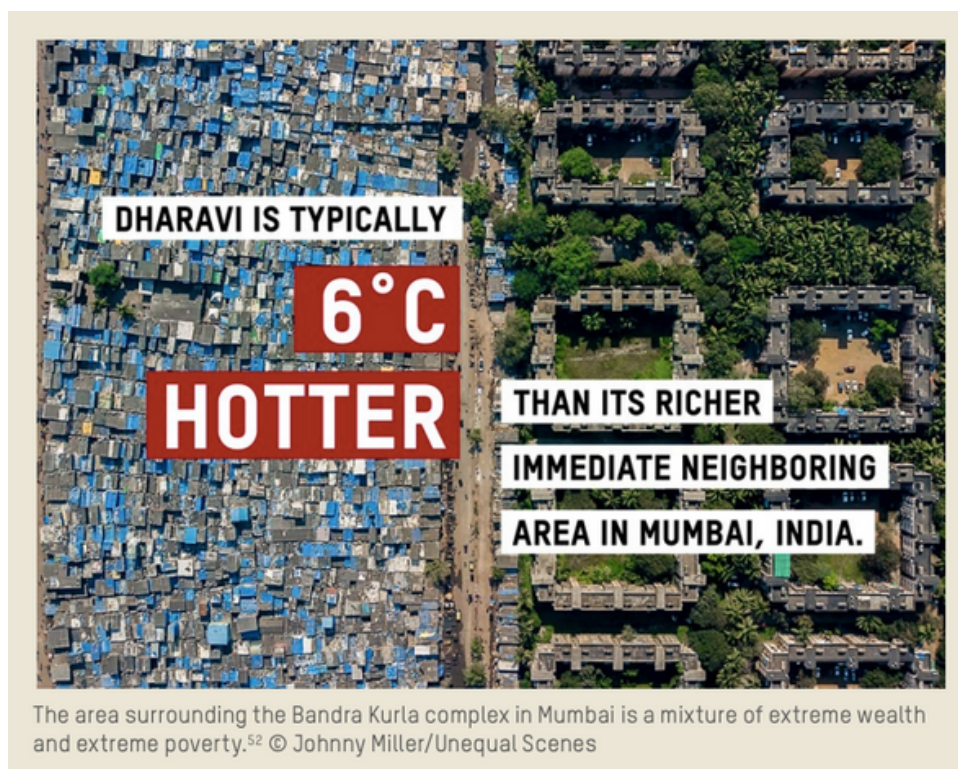
Discuss

What do you think about the below image?

(5 minutes)

The image below was taken above two neighbourhoods in Mumbai, India. The neighbourhood on the left, Dharavi, is poor, and is typically 6 degrees Celsius hotter than the wealthy neighbourhood on the right.

1. Why do you think the neighbourhood on the left is so much hotter than the neighbourhood on the right?
2. Is this fair? If not, what could be done so that the neighbourhood on the left isn't suffering the consequences of climate change on such a greater scale than the neighbourhood on the right?



A photo from Mumbai, India, documenting a wealthy neighbourhood next to a poor neighbourhood.

Source: Oxfam International, 2023. © Johnny Miller / Unequal Scenes¹



Journalism and storytelling

Find an angle

When journalists investigate a topic, they need to find an angle – a point of specificity with which they will look at the overall topic.

Your task now is to find something specific about climate justice that you'd like to investigate further.

For example, if you looked at the broader topic of tipping points, an angle a journalist might take is: how are the coral reefs in the Great Barrier Reef? If you looked at the broader topics of doughnut economics, the angle might be: how some cities are ensuring air quality meets health standards.

Your task

After going through the following pages, take note of which bits interest you, or what other questions you might have.

Then, write down what about climate justice you'd like to investigate – what questions you'd like to answer that would zone in on a specific aspect of climate justice.

If you have the time, you can then go one step further and write a pitch. You can see our resource on How to Write a Pitch on our website, eyesonclimate.org



The footballer chooses the exact angle he should kick from in order for the ball to land where he wants it to.



Climate justice highlights "the need to include issues of equity and justice in addressing climate change"².

At the international level, the climate justice movement raises two important points³:

1. Countries should reduce their CO₂ emissions by a 'fair share'.

The Paris Agreement acknowledges that countries have "common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities"⁴.

Yet, there is no official way to determine what each country's contribution should be to reduce CO₂ emissions, based on their responsibility for climate change and their capability to address and adapt to it.

The CutX Index proposes one way of calculating 'fair shares'. The CutX Index does not deal with historical CO₂ emissions, but it can be combined with climate reparations explained below.

Discuss:

What do you think could be an official way of determining what each country's reductions should be in order for it to be fair?



2. Global South countries should be supported with resources to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

There are different types of claims coming from the climate justice movement and Global South countries in relation to financial resources to deal with climate change. We will provide a brief overview of each of these:

2.1. Climate finance for mitigation and adaptation

According to the Paris Agreement, "developed country Parties shall provide financial resources to assist developing country Parties with respect to both mitigation and adaptation"⁵.

At COP21 in 2015 (when the Paris Agreement was adopted), countries agreed on a climate finance target for mitigation of and adaptation to climate change.



From 2020 to 2025, Global North or so-called 'developed' countries would provide Global South or so-called 'developing' countries with US\$ 100 billion per year to support climate action⁶.

Global North countries only met the climate finance target in 2022, and there's an argument to be made that these countries should also make up for the gap in climate finance in 2020 and 2021⁷.

These climate finance targets of hundreds of billions of US\$ may sound like a lot, but they are in fact far from what is needed.

According to the UNFCCC, almost US\$ 6 trillion is needed by 2030 to implement 'developing' countries' climate action plans, without even fully accounting for the cost of climate adaptation⁸.

So far, placing finance towards climate has been proven difficult in practice, with a huge gap in climate adaptation funding.

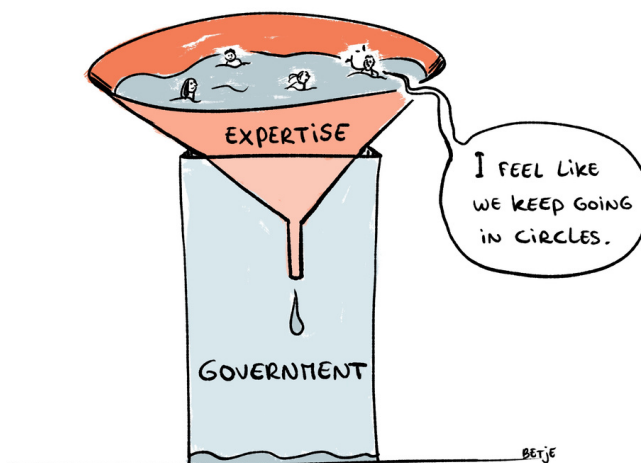
2.2. Loss and damage fund

The climate justice movement and Global South countries also highlight that not all harm arising from climate change can be avoided through adaptation: first, because certain effects of climate change have already been locked in and second, because it is not possible to prevent certain effects for social, economic or technical reasons⁹.

This is where the *Loss and Damage Fund* comes in. It refers to the harms caused by climate change that cannot be avoided or adapted to.

These include both sudden disasters, like hurricanes or floods, and slower-moving impacts, like desertification or rising seas swallowing islands. 'Loss and damage' is used in two contexts:

In general, loss and damage refers to the "negative consequences of climate change on human societies and the natural environment"¹⁰. Loss and damage can be of economic and non-economic nature.



Cartoon by Betje



Delegates from Ethiopia, host of COP32, pose for a photo at the COP30 U.N. Climate Summit, Saturday, Nov. 22, 2025, in Belem, Brazil. (AP Photo/Joshua A. Bickel)

→ Economic loss and damage includes damage to homes, crops and infrastructure.

→ Non-economic loss and damage includes "harm to human health and mobility; loss of access to territory, of cultural heritage and of indigenous and local knowledge; and loss of and damage to biodiversity and habitats"¹¹.

Depending on the extent to which we manage to mitigate and adapt to climate change, loss and damage from climate change could cause damage to Global South countries amounting to a total of US\$ 200 – 580 billion per year in 2030 and to a total of US\$ 1 – 1.8 trillion per year in 2050¹².

These prospects bring the climate justice movement and Global South countries to make claims for a loss and damage fund which is separate from climate finance for mitigation and adaptation.

In international climate negotiations, a loss and damage fund was eventually created in 2023, at COP28, despite Global North countries' reluctance to agree to one¹³.

The idea is that wealthy countries, who are historically most responsible for carbon emissions and therefore driving climate change, would contribute money to the fund. That money would then be used to help vulnerable countries recover from climate disasters and cope with long-term changes they cannot stop.

While the creation of the fund is a major step for climate justice, many details still need to be decided—such as how much money will be pledged, who will pay, how the money will be distributed, and whether communities will have a say in how it is used.



2.3. Climate reparations

2.3.1. Global North's debt

Climate change cannot be separated from the Global North's industrialization and economic growth, fuelled by fossil fuels and other raw materials appropriated from formerly colonised countries in the Global South¹⁴. Colonisation used for the pursuit of economic growth by the Global North also led to "the destruction of cultures, the exploitation of wealth and the monopolisation of land and resources"¹⁵ in the Global South.

Global South countries have been left with little space - both in terms of CO₂ emissions in the atmosphere, and in terms of material resources and available labour - to develop their economies towards meeting their population's needs and to prepare for the effects of climate change¹⁶. These disadvantages imposed on Global South countries make these countries particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change¹⁷.

The climate justice movement and developing countries therefore argue that Global North countries owe Global South countries a "historical, climatic and ecological debt of the North to the Global South"¹⁸.

Transferring these sums to Global South countries would allow them to fund their transition to renewable energy in a just way and adapt to climate change¹⁹.



A sign is displayed that reads "loss and damage fund" at the COP29 U.N. Climate Summit, Thursday, Nov. 21, 2024, in Baku, Azerbaijan. (AP Photo/Sergei Grits)



2.3.2. Global South's debts

At the same time, 136 out of 152 countries in the Global South are 'critically indebted'²⁰ to other governments, international financial institutions like the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund, and private financial actors²¹.

Governments from Global South countries which are heavily indebted but also vulnerable to climate change are trapped in a vicious circle.

On the one hand, these governments are limited in their capabilities to invest public funds to build a resilient, low-carbon economy to mitigate and adapt to climate change²² because they have to repay their debts²³.

On the other hand, because they are particularly vulnerable to climate change and have to borrow more money, these countries incur higher

borrowing costs when they take out loans to fund resilient, low-carbon infrastructure²⁴, on top of their already existing debts²⁵.

How bad are these debts?

Many small island countries like Grenada, Barbados, and the Maldives are facing a climate crisis and a debt crisis at the same time.

As repeatedly mentioned, even though these countries have done very little to cause climate change, they are being hit hard by extreme weather, rising seas, and economic shocks.

To recover from climate disasters or build safer, low-carbon infrastructure, they often have to borrow money from Global North countries, banks or international financial institutions, but the interest is high, and the loans add up fast.



Activists participate in a demonstration for the loss and damage fund at the COP28 U.N. Climate Summit, Wednesday, Dec. 6, 2023, in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. (AP Photo/Peter Dejong)



During 2016–2020, 22 island nations received \$1.5 billion in climate aid but had to repay over \$26 billion in debt — nearly 18 times more than they received.

Some, like Belize or the Dominican Republic, spend up to 40% of their national budget just to pay back loans. This means they have less money for schools, hospitals, or protecting their people from future disasters.

On top of that, more than three-quarters of island states are now in critical debt situations, and many are being told to cut public spending even though their people are still recovering from COVID-19 and climate disasters²⁶.

This shows just how unfair the international financial system is: Global South countries are being forced deeper into debt instead of getting the support they are due.

2.3.3. Climate reparations

According to the climate justice movement and Global South countries, Global North's historical, climatic and ecological debt to the Global South is much higher than the Global South's financial debts²⁷.

The first component of climate reparations would consist of a recognition by the Global North of the damage that was caused in Global

South countries, as well as a commitment to a rapid decarbonization through a fast, just and systemic transition to a low-carbon global economy oriented towards wellbeing for all and for the planet²⁸.

A second component of climate reparations would include the cancellation of Global South countries' debt to international financial institutions and Global North countries²⁹.

In the context of the historical, climatic and ecological debt that the Global North owes to the Global South, cancelling the Global North countries' debt is not an act of charity. It is simply Global North countries honouring part of their debt to the Global South³⁰.

A third component of climate reparations should include a commitment from the Global North to stop overshooting their fair share of emissions, whilst pursuing economic growth.

This can be done through Global North countries embracing degrowth (to learn more about what degrowth is, see the unit titled Beyond growth).

By shrinking harmful economic sectors, Global North countries can create space for Global South countries to develop those economic sectors which are beneficial for their people's wellbeing and for the planet.

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