

# An Urgent Call for Agenda Inclusion: Links between Social Sustainability and Climate Change

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## Social and Environmental Sustainability Issues To Consider:

- Chilean economist Max Neef highlights protection, affection, subsistence, understanding, participation, idleness, creation, identity, and freedom as **fundamental basic human needs** which exist in every culture.<sup>1</sup> The satisfaction of these human needs are dependent on natural resources and ecosystems and if one needs is systematically unmet, poverty results.
- **Humans depend on natural resources and whole systems** that are part of nature, the biosphere. If social services are based on unsustainable natural resource use, the long-term viability of these services will be limited by the ecological systems.
- The **sustainability movement** builds on the environmental movement and goes beyond its limited scope . It recognizes the interrelatedness of social, economic, cultural, and environmental needs and identifies effective social structures that strategically meet human needs and **long-term security** of these needs.
- **Climate change** is fundamentally an issue of human needs that connects local activities and natural resource use to global effects. It is a symptom of the unsustainable planning of societal structures to strategically meet human needs. Rising temperatures will affect everyone - and in particular **people of color, low-income, and indigenous communities** – in terms of health, financial burdens, and social and cultural disturbances.
- **Climate justice, among other terms like social sustainability, social justice, and environmental justice**, is a grassroots movement that seeks to realize long-term solutions to our climate and energy problems that ensure people’s basic needs.
- An **offensive** stance is a way to **diminish the vulnerability** in the populations that lack basic needs. If social organizations act as oppose to react, the sensitivity and adaptability they will have when confronting long-ranging phenomena like climate change will have unforeseen positive social, political, economic, and environmental effects.
- *The **Natural Step Framework**, used by the **City of Madison** as a guide to sustainable development, includes a vital social dimension that can further assist social organizations in identifying essential new areas to focus on. It states in the fourth sustainability principle that the framework seeks, “to eliminate our contribution to conditions that systematically undermine people’s capacity to meet their needs.” As can be seen in this fact sheet, if climate change is not an agenda issue, an organization may very well be undermining their ability to meet people’s basic needs.*

## How social sustainability relates to Climate Change: Some Facts

- The United States emits one quarter of the world's gases that cause global warming. <sup>ii</sup> Albeit the amount of emissions are varied through societal sectors, everyone plays a part in creating these emissions. One gallon of gasoline (6.3 pounds) produces 20 pounds of carbon dioxide when combusted. <sup>iii</sup>
- Potentially, climate change will reduce crop yields (thus food availability), decrease water availability for populations with inadequate management systems, increase number of people exposed to vector-borne diseases, increase number of people dying from heat stress, and increase widespread flooding for many human settlements. <sup>iv</sup>
- Climate change will reduce discretionary spending for everyone <sup>v</sup>, especially low-income families. Prices will rise for food and electricity as weather disturbs growing seasons and transportation.
- Global warming will affect the uninsured the hardest. There are at least 44 million Americans uninsured, including 11 million children. Furthermore, people of color are twice as likely to be uninsured as white people.
- Climate change harms the health of communities, especially the health of communities of color. Communities of color are exposed to poor air quality. These communities as well as others will be affected in various ways and be vulnerable to climate-change related respiratory ailments, heat-related illness and death, and illness from insect-carried diseases. <sup>vi</sup>
- Global warming will increase the number of flood, drought, fire, and storm occurrences worldwide. Wealthy homeowners are able to move, whereas low-income people (who usually rent) cannot and will be forced to face directly the resource devastation from severe weather. <sup>vii</sup> The elderly and young are particularly vulnerable to the dangers of these extreme weather patterns.
- According to John Magnuson, limnology professor at the University of Wisconsin, access to fresh water sources in Wisconsin will be more difficult as hotter weather leads to less snow to recharge streams, wetlands, lakes, and groundwater. <sup>viii</sup>
- Catastrophes like Hurricane Katrina illustrate the spiraling effects of climate change and reactive (instead of strategic action) on low income and minority families, the elderly, food supplies, transportation, shelter, poor city planning, food supplies, and shelter. "In the future, natural disasters like Katrina will be a lot more likely and a lot more devastating if we don't act on climate change immediately." <sup>ix</sup>
- When a sustainable approach incorporates climate justice, the social services that address the basic needs of families and children like education, health, housing, independence, and safety will be creating long-lasting solutions. To have the insight and proactively address climate change within a social strategy is one way to disengage the undermining effects climate change can have on social services, human basic needs, and sustaining quality of life

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<sup>i</sup> Neef, Max. "Towards A Transdisciplinary Economics." Power point presentation 2005.

<sup>ii</sup> U.S. Energy Information Administration. 2001. International Energy Annual 1999. Table H1: World Carbon Dioxide Emissions from the Consumption and Flaring of Fossil Fuels, 1990-1999. Washington, D.C.

<sup>iii</sup> Wisconsin Green Building Alliance. "Be a Jolly Green Giant in 2007 by Reducing your Carbon Dioxide Emissions"

<sup>iv</sup> Kasperson, Roger E. and Jeanne X. Kasperson. *Climate Change, Vulnerability, and Social Justice*. Risk and Vulnerability Programme, Stockholm Environmental Institute: 2001.

<sup>v</sup> Cline, William. 1992. *The Economics of Global Warming*. Washington D.C.: Institute of International Economics.

<sup>vi</sup> Miller, Ansje and Gautam, Sethi, and Wolff, Gary. 2001. "What's Fair: Consumers and Climate Change." Oakland, CA: Redefining Progress.

<sup>vii</sup> Bullard, R.D., J.E. Grigsby, III, and C. Lee, *Residential Apartheid: The American Legacy*. Los Angeles: UCLA Center for African American Studies Publication, 1994.

<sup>viii</sup> Stevens, Jim. "Climate change could alter life in and life of lakes." *Oconomowoc Focus*. February 8<sup>th</sup>, 2007.

<sup>ix</sup> Redefining Progress: [www.rprogress.org/newprojects/katrina.shtml](http://www.rprogress.org/newprojects/katrina.shtml)

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