

Environmental *Change* Institute



Climate Change – What's justice got to do with it?



Professor Benito Müller

ECI Convener, International Climate Policy Research; Philosophy Faculty;
Oxford Climate Policy;
European Capacity Building Initiative ecbi



Anthropogenic Harm to others

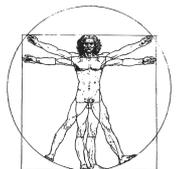
Climate change is not a natural disaster, it is not 'an act of god'.

It is 'anthropogenic', that is to say caused by humans, who can be expected to take responsibility for their actions, and be held responsible for them.

This, together with the fact that climate change can have negative impacts on humans means that we are dealing with a situation where humans can impose harm on others without their consent. Which is generally seen as being unjust.



oxford
climate
policy



Compensatory and Punitive Justice

There are different ways in which this sort of injustice can be dealt with:

- provide compensation for the harm caused ('**compensatory justice**');
- punish the perpetrators, the people who have caused the harm ('**punitive justice**')

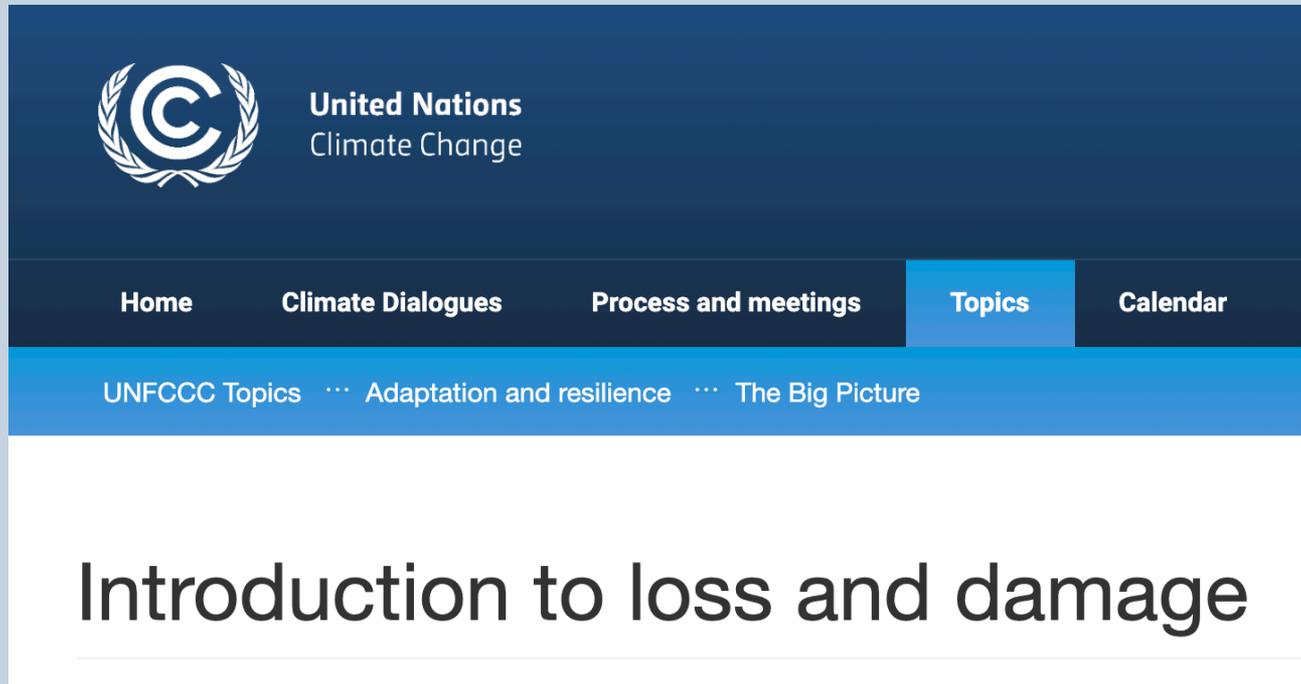
There are lots of difficult issues associated with these approaches.

For example, in the case of compensatory justice – in the context of environmental pollution also known as the '**polluter pays principle**' – some key questions arise, namely:

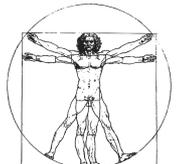
- Who decides what constitutes an adequate compensation?
- Who should provide it and how much?
- Should it be in proportion to their responsibility for the harm, or should it in proportion to what one can afford, what one is capable to provide?

Disproportionate brunt of impacts

... borne by the poor and most vulnerable: women, indigenous and tribal communities, small island states.



The image shows a screenshot of the United Nations Climate Change website. At the top left is the UNFCCC logo, a stylized 'C' inside a laurel wreath. To its right, the text reads "United Nations Climate Change". Below this is a navigation bar with five items: "Home", "Climate Dialogues", "Process and meetings", "Topics" (which is highlighted in a light blue color), and "Calendar". Underneath the navigation bar is a blue banner with the text "UNFCCC Topics" followed by three dots, "Adaptation and resilience" followed by three dots, and "The Big Picture". The main content area below the banner is white and features the title "Introduction to loss and damage" in a large, black, sans-serif font.



Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR) and Respective Capabilities

The distinction between '**responsibilities**' and '**capabilities**' also plays an important role in another climate justice issue, namely: how to share the effort or burden involved in addressing climate change in a fair manner.

This is an issue of what is called '**distributive justice**' to establish what it means to do one's '**fair share**' in combatting climate change.

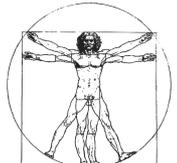


ARTICLE 3

PRINCIPLES

In their actions to achieve the objective of the Convention and to implement its provisions, the Parties shall be guided, inter alia, by the following:

1. The Parties should protect the climate system for the benefit of present and future generations of humankind, on the basis of equity and in accordance with their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities. Accordingly, the developed country Parties should take the lead in combating climate change and the adverse effects thereof.



Real consequences & Intergenerational Justice

1. The Parties should protect the climate system for the benefit of present and future generations of humankind, on the basis of equity and in accordance with their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities

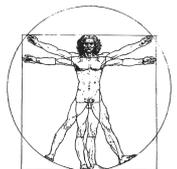
Accordingly, the developed country Parties should take the lead in combating climate change and the adverse effects thereof.

This shows how justice has very concrete and practical implications.

And it also raises another cross-cutting justice issue, namely that climate change not only affects people here and now, but also future generations.

How can we make sure they are not unfairly harmed by us, or forced to take an unfair share of the burden, given that they clearly cannot have any responsibility for the problem.

This is what is known as the issue of ‘**intergenerational justice**’.



Thank you!

benito.mueller@philosophy.ox.ac.uk



oxford
climate
policy

