

Research Article

Climate Justice within Sustainable Justice: The Power Legitimacy Dialectic in International Relations between the Global North and South

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Submitted: 21 July 2025 | Revised: 28 November 2025 | Accepted: 08 December 2025 | Published: 30 December 2025

Abstract: This study examines climate justice within the broader framework of sustainable justice to reassess the relationship between power and legitimacy in North–South climate governance. As climate change intensifies, inequalities between countries that contribute most to greenhouse gas emissions and those that suffer the greatest impacts raise fundamental questions of fairness, responsibility, and authority in global governance. While climate justice is widely discussed, it is often treated separately from wider justice frameworks and from structural power dynamics in international relations. This paper addresses that gap by integrating climate justice into a sustainable justice perspective and linking both to the power legitimacy dialectic. Using a qualitative, normative–analytical design based on document analysis of major climate agreements, scientific assessments, and climate finance reports from the post-2015 period, the study evaluates governance arrangements through four justice dimensions: distributive, procedural, recognition, and intergenerational justice. The findings reveal persistent justice deficits in burden-sharing, participation, vulnerability recognition, and long-term responsibility, which contribute to legitimacy concerns in the climate regime. The study proposes a power legitimacy analytical model connecting structural resources, norms, and institutions. It argues that aligning climate governance with justice principles can strengthen credibility, trust, and cooperation, making justice a practical foundation for more stable and effective global climate governance.

Keywords: Climate Justice, Sustainable Justice, Climate Governance, International Relations, Power–Legitimacy, North–South Relations.

1. Introduction

Climate change has become one of the defining issues of the twenty-first century as not only an ecological crisis but also as a form of worldwide governance and global justice [1]. Its effects are felt across the world, like through increased sea levels and severe weather conditions, as well as societies, albeit unequally [2]. Nations within the Global South tend to be more vulnerable and less adaptive whereas numerous nations within the Global North tend to have more technological, financial, and institutional capabilities to manage climate risks [3]. Such an uneven ability to be vulnerable and capacity has made climate change not a purely scientific and technical question, but a highly political and ethical problem [4]. Consequently, the issue of climate change has become very popular in the context of responsibility, fairness, and the legitimacy of international actions. The disproportionate effects of North and South are directly linked to the historical dynamics of industrialization and development based on carbon-intensive growth models with numerous industrialized economies reaping the long-term advantages of growth on the backs of fossil development and contributing a significant portion of the historical greenhouse gas emissions [5]. By comparison, several developing nations have contributed comparatively insignificant amounts to historical emissions but are still quite susceptible to climate-induced damages [6]. This disparity has raised arguments on how responsibility and burden ought to be distributed in the process of global climate governance.

In this respect, the topic of climate justice has become even more prominent. Climate justice points out that climate change is not a mere environmental issue, but also a moral and political issue that entails issues of equity, rights, and differentiated responsibility [1]. It focuses on the necessity to safeguard vulnerable groups and to allocate mitigation and adaptation costs in a fair and equitable way in accordance with responsibility and capacity [2]. The increasing role of this discourse is indicative of a larger-scale change in academic and policy discussions, in which climate change is increasingly discussed as a justice issue rather than as a collective action issue that is accompanied by ethical assertions and claims to legitimacy [7]. Climate justice does not only point out who pays and who benefits, but it also points out who is involved in decision-

making and whose voices are heard [8]. This broadening of the climate justice agenda has compelled researchers to consider climate governance through the lens of its performance on multiple fronts, including: fairness, inclusiveness and inequality sensitivity [9].

In spite of the increasing number of international agreements and systems of governance, there are still inequalities in the fields of climate finance, technology transfer, and institutional representation [10]. Financial obligations are usually below the committed ones, availability of better clean technologies is not well distributed and platforms of decision making are usually more inclined towards those actors who have more economic and bargaining power [11]. These trends indicate that there is an imbalance in the structure that transcends the design of technical policies and indicates other underlying frictions within the international system [12]. Specifically, they reveal a conflict between power and legitimacy in governing climate. Strong states and institutions influence the rules, agendas and standards but their hegemony may breed a sense of injustice among the less powerful actors [13]. In the case where governance arrangements are considered to be unfair, the legitimacy becomes compromised and cooperation and trust may be undermined [14]. Most of the existing research focuses on climate justice or power politics in isolation, whereas the number of studies incorporating climate justice into a framework of sustainable justice, which links environmental protection, social equity, development, and intergenerational responsibility, is smaller. Still fewer studies directly attribute concerns of justice to the dialectic of power-legitimacy in the international relations [15]. This gap constrains the holistic comprehension of how claims of fairness affects power relationships to influence claims of legitimacy in the relationships between the North and the South with regard to climate.

This paper aims to fill that gap by placing climate justice in the context of the wider concept of sustainable justice, and through this prism of understanding re-evaluate the expression of power and legitimacy in the process of governing climate between the North and the South. It tries to demonstrate that legitimacy in climate governance cannot be measured on the basis of agreement formal obedience alone but based on distributive fairness, procedural inclusion, vulnerability recognition as well as intergenerational responsibility. Based on this view, the research question is to what degree climate justice as a subset of sustainable justice is

capable of reorganizing the power-legitimacy dynamic of climate governance in the North-South and to what extent inequalities in finance, technology, and representation influence the legitimacy of the climate regime and to what extent principles of justice can redefine the relationship between power and the legitimacy. The study provides both theoretical and practical contributions to the field of international relations by combining the two dimensions and providing a type of bridging between normative and structural approaches to the subject and defining the criteria that can be used to build more fair and legitimate climate governance. By so doing, it underscores the need to put climate action into harmony with aspects of justice so as to enhance the equitability as well as the validity of the global climate regime.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Climate Justice

Climate justice has been developed as an outcome of environmental justice movements as a primary tool to examine global climate politics [16]. The initial school of thought on environmental justice concerned the predominant impact of the marginalized groups in environmental contamination and degradation [17]. With the emergence of climate change as a concern issue around the globe, the ideas were replicated to the international level where scholars and activists started to reveal disparities between nations that had contributed the most to greenhouse gas emissions, and those which were most badly affected [18]. In the course of time, climate justice evolved into a multidimensional concept that frames arguments regarding justice in climate governance [9]. One of the most popular frameworks is used to recognize four dimensions. Distributive justice lays emphasis on the just distribution of climate burdens and benefits such as the cost of mitigation, the adaptation funds, and the compensation of loss and damage [14]. Procedural justice focuses on involvement, openness and access to information in decision making on climate [14]. Recognition justice requires consideration of unique vulnerabilities, identities, and needs of communities and countries affected as opposed to considering them as homogenous groups. Intergenerational justice emphasizes the moral duty of safeguarding the rights and welfare of future-generations given the risks in climatic conditions on a long-term basis [19]. All these dimensions have altered climate justice as a moral appeal to a systematic analytical approach to assess climate policies and institutions.

2.2 Sustainable Justice

Sustainable justice is a more general normative model, which incorporates the environmental issues into social, economic, and time aspects of justice [20]. Although sustainability has been construed in the context of equilibrium between economic growth, environment and social welfare, sustainable justice raises a question of how the achievements of these aims are allocated and what interests they serve [21]. It focuses on the fact that sustainability can not be isolated of fairness, rights and equity. This school of thought correlates well with the basic human rights, such as rights to life, health, water, food and a safe environment, that degrading the environment would hinder the fulfillment of the rights [22]. It is also related to the right to development which states that developing nations must be left to make economic and social developments without incurring excessive environmental costs due to issues that they were not the main contributors [23]. Notably, sustainable justice takes into consideration a long-term outlook, which appreciates the fact that current development decisions determine the future generation development opportunities and risks [24]. Sustainable justice offers a holistic approach that climate justice can be placed in as one particular manifestation of a broader justice agenda by focusing on protecting rights, inclusive development, and other forms of intergenerational fairness [25].

2.3 International Relations and Power and Legitimacy

Power and legitimacy are fundamental concepts of the international relations theory, and various theoretical schools of thought explain the relationship between them differently [10]. According to realist theory, the nature of international politics is based on the inequity of material power of states with the survival and national interest being the major motivations [26]. It is in this light that legitimacy usually comes second and can be applied instrumentally by the powerful states to explain their actions [27]. The international rules and institutions are regarded as an expression of power relations to a great extent [28]. The liberal institutionalist theory, in its turn, focuses more on the importance of international institutions, rules, and cooperation in the context of collective problem management [29]. Liberals state that legitimacy may increase compliance and stability as it

makes the arrangements of governance seem reasonable and mutually advantageous but note that power asymmetries may influence institutional outcomes [30]. Constructivist theory emphasizes more on norms, identities and common understandings by arguing that the issue of legitimacy is socially constructed and that states are interested in being seen as proper and accountable actors [31]. Norms of fairness, responsibility and justice may thus have an impact on state action and reconstitute that which is legitimate power [15]. Combined, these views reveal that power and legitimacy are inseparable yet they vary in the extent to which legitimacy is viewed as an instrument of power or as a defining aspect of international order.

2.4 Climate Governance and North-South Relation

The North-South relations factoring in climate governance represents the manner in which historical and structural inequalities can determine the global cooperation [32]. One of the overarching themes of this literature is the idea of historical responsibility, the argument of which is that, during the industrial revolution, industrialized nations have spilled most of the cumulative greenhouse gas emissions whereas many developing nations have spilled very little [33]. This asymmetry forms the basis of differentiating responsibilities and ensuring more help to weak states. Meanwhile, institutional inequalities in wealth, technology, and institutional capacity affect the capacity of countries to influence the agenda of negotiations, receive climate finance, and employ mitigation and adaptation strategies [34]. These inequalities are observable in unequal allocation of climate finance, unequal hold of green technologies and disparity in bargaining power [35]. Thus, researchers find it more and more important that the international climate regime lacks legitimacy. Even though states are formally considered equal during negotiations, there are still substantive inequalities in influence and outcomes [12]. Climate rules and commitments are seen not to consider historical responsibility or current vulnerability by the developing countries, and this can undermine trust in the regime [6]. Climate governance is therefore also being considered as a coordination problem, as well as a justice and legitimacy concern in a stratified international system.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Conceptual Link

The paper is based on the assumption that climate justice is to be perceived as a particular manifestation of the wider model of sustainable justice. Although climate justice is concerned with equity in the sharing of the burdens, responsibility, and the authority of climate, sustainable justice offers a broader normative horizon that incorporates environmental protection with social justice, human rights, developmental requirements and sustainability over time. By placing climate justice in the framework of sustainable justice, one can begin to look beyond the confines of the environmental issue and into the ways in which climate governance can be analyzed through the prism of structural inequalities, developmental processes, and generational obligations. Climate justice, in this conceptualization, can be practically viewed as the conceptual framework whereby the ideals of sustainable justice are applied to the climate sector connecting the current climate action to the larger issues of global justice, human rights, and sustainable development between the Global North and the Global South.

3.2 Dimensions of Justice Adopted as Framework

In order to operationalize this outlook, the research is based on four dimensions of justice as the analytical tool, which include distributive, procedural, recognition, and intergenerational justice. Distributive justice is about a reasonable distribution of burdens and benefits of climate, such as emissions of targets, cost of adapting to the climate and access to finance and technology, in terms of responsibility and ability. Procedural justice is concerned with the level of fairness and inclusivity of decisions making, with the value of meaningful participation, transparency, and accountability of climate governance. Recognition justice emphasizes that states and social groups belong to various groups with differentiated vulnerabilities, identities, and circumstances that require more than social policies to take into account. The concept of intergenerational justice broadens fairness into the past and emphasizes that the current policies on climate should not undermine the rights and well being of the future generations. Collectively, these dimensions offer a systematic prism through which the justness and validity of climate governance arrangements can be assessed.

3.3 Power–Legitimacy Dialectic

In this context, the study defines power as the ability of actors, especially states and institutions, to frame agendas, to establish rules, to control resources and affect results in international climate governance. Power encompasses material resources like finance and technology, institutional and knowledge based power. In its turn, legitimacy is interpreted as an impression that rules, decisions and institutions are fitting, equitable and justified in accordance with shared norms and values. It indicates how actors perceive the governance arrangements as worthy to be supported and complied. The power-legitimacy dialectic is described as the dynamic interaction between the two factors: power may be employed to generate or maintain legitimacy, yet it may also backfire by generating disapproval on the basis of being coercive or unfair. On the other hand, legitimacy may support the power by reducing opposition and promoting compliance. This dialectic manifests in climate governance where influential actors seek to defend their role by the norms of responsibility and leadership, and less influential actors challenge the order of things that they perceive as unfair. This analysis of interaction allows one to explain why the issues of fairness are the center of the climate regime stability and effectiveness.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

The present research is based on the qualitative research design with the normative-analytical orientation to investigate the influence of the justice considerations on the relationship between power and legitimacy in global climate governance. The qualitative approach will suit the study as it seeks meanings, norms, principles and institutional practices and not quantify the variables. The normative analytical approach enables the study to evaluate the climate governance in regards to what is there and what is just and right as per the requirements of justice. The qualitative document analysis is the main method employed within this design, which allows conducting a systematic analysis of critical policy documents, agreements and reports that characterize and represent the international climate governance. This method is quite appropriate in the context of study of international relations and international governance where official reports and negotiated texts are in the centre of development of norms and expectations.

4.2 Data Sources

The discussion is based on various forms of documentary sources, which are the focus of global climate governance. To capture formal rules, principles and commitments to climate action, first, major international climate agreements and negotiation outcomes are utilized. Second, scientific and assessment reports offer authoritative information on the effects of climate, responsibilities, and capacities, which can be used as an empirical foundation to pursue claims of justice. Third, patterns of funding, pledges and disbursements are assessed through the use of climate finance reports, which is essential in measuring distributive fairness. Fourth, the wider governance documents such as the policy frameworks and institutional reports are reviewed to learn on how the governance on climate is organized and carried out.

4.3 Selection Criteria

There were three main criteria used to pick up documents. Relevance to North-South climate governance was the first criterion that was used, i.e. the chosen texts are related to the problems of responsibility, finance, adaptation, technology transfer, or representation between the developed and developing countries. The second criterion was a clear attention towards principles that had a justice related aspect, such as equity, fairness, vulnerability or intergenerational aspects. The third criterion was temporal relevance, and the main focus was made on the documents created or popular in the time frame of about 2015 to 2024, which reflects the modern climate governance environment after the signing of the Paris Agreement. These criteria were used to make sure that the data set was not broad but was up to date and relevant to the objectives of the study.

4.4 Analytical Strategy

The analysis is based on the thematic coding approach based on the four dimensions of justice, which include distributive, procedural, recognition and intergenerational justice. The documents were analyzed in the way they conceptualize duties, distribute resources, incorporate or omit

actors and think about future generations. Categories of equity, participation, vulnerability, and long-term responsibility were coded and interpreted using their categories. The second step is an assessment of power-legitimacy patterns where the interaction between resource control, capacity to shape agendas, and influence over institutions and claims of fairness and responsibility is assessed. Such twin orientation enables the study to establish the points at which climate governance arrangements meet the justice principles and where missing links might result in the deficit of legitimacy. With the help of this strategy, the study relates normative evaluation to power relations analysis, which is aligned with the theoretical framework of the research.

5. Findings

5.1 Findings on Distributive Justice

Thematic analysis of climate agreements, assessment reports and climate finance documents show there is still an imbalance in the allocation of climate related burdens and benefits between the developed and the developing nations. The rhetorical support of equity and differentiated responsibility is highly evident in the reviewed documents, but the real implementation of the principles seems to lack balance. The reports of climate finance kept on demonstrating a disparity between promised and actual finance, especially when it comes to adaptation finances to vulnerable nations. Whereas mitigation investments tend to receive more funding because of their quantifiable returns and their much more consistent position with the interests of the donors, adaptation requirements in the Global South are relatively underfunded. This establishes a tendency whereby those countries with less responsibility in the past yet greater susceptibility incur higher relative costs in dealing with the effects of climate. The analysis also suggests that the implications of the cost-sharing assumptions implicated in particular governance arrangements might implicitly presuppose the existence of comparable implementation capacities throughout the countries, even in the face of evident developmental differences. There are also a number of documents pointing at the dependence on loans instead of grants, which can cause a rise of the debt pressures of the developing countries. All these trends indicate that distributive agreements do not always go in line with the historical-capacity principle that calls on both past and current capacity in responsibilities. Consequently, distributive justice shortages arise, which supports the idea that the climate regime is not able to fully redistribute structural inequalities. In legitimacy terms, such an imbalance will add to the mistrust of the developing nations in global climate cooperation.

5.2 Findings on Procedural Justice

The discussion indicates that procedural justice on climate governance is officially stressed but not well managed in actual practice. Inclusive participation and decision-making processes are being encouraged in official documents but reports and institutional evaluations show inequality in practice. Those countries that have more representatives, experts in the negotiation process, and technical consultative services have a higher possibility of working on several tracks of negotiations simultaneously, understanding the intricate technical terms, and influencing drafts. Conversely, there is a large number of smaller or resource-constrained states struggling to maintain a steady presence throughout course of negotiation, preventing them to intervene effectively. The consistent use of thematic coding also suggests that among complex reporting structures and transparency demands, although meant to enhance accountability, may unfairly use scarce administrative resources in countries with weak administrative capacities. This can change the focus of policy execution to compliance management. Moreover, agenda-setting processes can also be affected by those actors who bring in funding, expertise, or inputs in terms of knowledge and indirectly influence priorities. The findings indicate that procedural equality does not always indicate procedural equity. The difference between formal and substantive influence is perceived as partial inclusion and this may undermine the procedural legitimacy and decrease trust in the results of the negotiation processes.

5.3 Findings on Recognition Justice

In the documents, recognition justice has been identified as a recognized yet inconsistently applied principle. Vulnerability, least-developed countries, and small island developing states are mentioned in numerous agreements and reports, meaning that normative acknowledgment of differentiated risks exists. It is however, revealed in the analysis that acknowledgement at the discursive level has not always been commensurate in form of support or policy-specific instruments. Technical

proposals, co-financing schemes or complicated vulnerability tests are often needed to access specific funds and this may disadvantage the same countries that need the funds the most. Moreover, national-level indicators do not always reveal intra-country disparities, i.e., the disadvantaged populations, indigenous people and rural communities might not be sufficiently represented in the context of funding. The documents show a tendency where vulnerability is identified in theory but subjected to standardized ways of being that would not reflect realities in the context. Such biased recognition restricts the attention of climate governance to various needs. Consequently, recognition-based legitimacy is conditional and weak, particularly where delicate groups of people feel that their unique conditions are not adequately accommodated.

5.4 Findings on Intergenerational Justice

Intergenerational justice is commonly deployed to speak about climate, specifically when it is used to allude to long-term temperature targets and sustainability pledges. Nevertheless, the discussion shows that there is a repetitive conflict between grandiose and action. Futurally-oriented objectives have been expressed in many papers and the roll-out plans and contributions defined nationally tend to be averagely adjusted, instead of revolutionized. Late mitigation means that future generations will be more likely to pay more costs in adapting to climate change, have more damaging effects of climate change, and less ability to shift their policies. The thematic coding indicates that the issue of intergenerational concerns are often addressed in aspirational words without much enforcing partners. This generates a symbolic-practical distance, with the moral significance of safeguarding future generations being recognised but not always given priority in any trade-offs in policy making. These trends cast doubts on the time equitability of the existing climate policies. Regarding the legitimacy perspective, the lack of intergenerational justice may result in the loss of moral authority of the climate regime, especially by the younger generation and future-oriented lobbying organizations.

5.5 Power–Legitimacy Patterns

By comparing the results of the four dimensions of justice, it is possible to observe a certain trend that structural power is connected to the perceptions of legitimacy. Actors who are more financially endowed, technologically dominant and institutional have disproportionate power in agenda-setting, rule design, and resource allocation. This is an element of structural power in the climatic regime. Nevertheless, the discussion indicates that power does not dictate legitimacy on its own. The enhancement of legitimacy perceptions occurs when the actions of powerful actors are consistent with the principles of justice, including the fulfillment of the promises of finance, the encouragement of capacity-building, and the inclusive involvement. On the other hand, legitimacy reduces when gaps to promises and delivery can be seen, or when the governance arrangements are seen to favor some interests. The results have shown that the principles of justice are a mediating variable between acceptance and power. That is, the exercise of power in a manner that can be considered as just is likely to create cooperation but power that can be considered self-serving creates contestation. The patterns confirm that the study argument of the dynamically constructed legitimacy in climate governance is tied closely to the expectations of justice.

6. Discussion

The results of distributive justice confirm the longstanding debates in the climate justice literature according to which global climate governance remains so incapacitated to meet the burden-sharing in the context of historical responsibility and capacity. The differences are formally acknowledged by the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, but the current disparity between the promises on climate financing and the real distributions appear to indicate a lack of connection between normative promises and financial assistance [11]. Researchers have claimed that by keeping adaptation financing to a minimum and making mitigation the primary source of funding, vulnerable nations in effect subsidize a crisis that they had little to do with causing [4; 36]. The current results confirm this criticism, by demonstrating that distributive arrangements tend to depend on loans and co-financing arrangements that may exacerbate fiscal strains in the Global South. This subverts the ethical basis of collaboration and supports the views of climate governance being asymmetrically arranged. Regarding the legitimacy lens, these distributive imbalances undermine trust and diminish the willingness of the developing nations to perceive the regime as equitable, similar to the sentiments that equity is a conditioning factor to enduring collaboration [30].

The results of procedural justice focus on the distinction between the formal and substantive influence, which is heavily stressed in the research

on environmental governance. Although the multilateral climate talks are based on consensus and universal involvement, the real negotiating capacity is conditioned by the expertise, delegation scale, and constant presence in the technical spheres [35]. This goes hand in hand with constructivist perspectives that participation in itself does not necessarily mean voice, and that power is a force of knowledge and discourse, no less than it is a force of material resources. The administrative weight of the complicated reporting and transparency systems on the administratively less powerful states is also in line with fears that global regulation might reproduce inequality by apparently neutral regulations [11]. In scenarios where participation is resource-consuming, inclusivity will only be symbolic and not transformative. Such dynamics are important to the legitimacy as actors are likely to be content with the outcome when they believe that decision-making processes are just and accessible [40]. Procedural justice is, therefore, not only a democratic ideal rather than a realistic state of affairs in order to maintain credibility of regimes.

Results of recognition justice also demonstrate that there is a mismatch between the rhetorical understanding of vulnerability and the policy implementation of vulnerability. The recognition literature is keen to point out that justice must be not only fairly distributed but also important is the recognition of differentiated identities and risks [37]. Findings of the present paper reveal that vulnerability tends to be standardized based on technical terms that fail to consider local realities, which justifies the arguments that global systems have the potential to depoliticize vulnerability by reducing it to metrics [23]. When there are vulnerable populations in need of recognition which require navigating intricate funding structures to demonstrate their susceptibility, recognition is not automatic. This undermines legitimacy in those who perceive to be heard in discourse but not beneficiaries of action. Recognition justice thus plays the key role in the process of aligning world norms with lived experiences and its partial achievement poses a threat of strengthening the same inequalities that climate governance is meant to correct.

The intergenerational dimension links the results of the study to the wider discussions on the topic of temporal justice and sustainability. Climate change is long-lived, but the policy cycles are short-term and limited by political considerations. The distortion that is found in the results, i.e. the lack of alignment between ambitious future aspirations and small steps nowadays, resembles the issues of present systems that decrease the risk of future [25]. Intergenerational justice theorists believe that delayed mitigation is actually a cost transferring to future generations who do not represent the current generation in decision-making [38]. The allegorical, yet not enforced, reference to future generations with the help of allegorical invocation is a threat to make intergenerational justice the narrative of a moral policy, as opposed to a policy. This has implications on legitimacy especially when the youth movements continue to challenge the governments in the areas of climate ambition. A government that is viewed to be selling the future to the present may still be in control of the law, but miss the morale.

Combined, these debates explain the greater power-legitimacy relationship to be found in the research. The findings substantiate the arguments by international relations that legitimacy is constructed socially and is subject to perceived fairness [20]. Financial, technological and agenda setting structural power enable some actors to influence outcomes but whether such influence is accepted by justice norms is determined. The stronger states will be more likely to be judged having a legitimate leadership when they do not default on their finance commitments, foster change through capacity-building, and allow participation of other stakeholders. In cases where the gaps are left, contestation increases. This proves that the legitimacy is a mediating variable between power and cooperation. Instead of serving as a mild moral supplement, justice comes in the form of a stabilizing influence, which reduces political opposition and the sustainability of regimes. In this regard, the discussion supports the main argument of the study, that justice is not ethically preferable but institutionally requisite to sustainable global climate governance.

7. Conclusion

This paper aimed to analyze climate justice as a subset of sustainable justice in a bid to re-evaluate the power-legitimacy correlation in North-South climate governance. Using the qualitative document analysis, the results indicate that in spite of well-established normative commitments to equity and responsibility, the distortions of distributive, procedural, recognition, and intergenerational justice do prevail in the global climate regime. Financial, technological, and agenda-setting capacity are inherently unequal, with the result that those who are powerful can affect the outcome of governance policies, and commitments made to them and actual practice only become gaps between the promise and performance undermine legitimacy among less powerful actors. Through the formulation and utilisation of analytical model of power and legitimacy, the research demonstrates that, legitimacy is not an inherent outcome of institutional authority and instead, it is a process negotiated by justice-based

expectations. The discussion demonstrates that justice is the key to the credibility, stability, and effectiveness of climate governance, which proves the claims of international relations literature that legitimacy based on fairness is a pre-condition of long-lasting cooperation.

8. Implications

The findings have significant policy and practical implications to enhance climate governance in the world. At a practical level, distributive grievances and the strengthening of trust between North and South can be resolved by improving the predictability, availability, and sufficiency of climate finance more specifically adaptation. Funding processes should also be streamlined and capacity building programs should be extended to enhance procedural inclusion by resource-constrained states. Policy-wise, this can be achieved by giving more priority to affordable technology transfer and knowledge-sharing to decrease structural dependence and empower more independent climate pathways in the Global South. Moreover, by making substantive legitimacy more firmly built into climate planning and evaluation processes by integrating the concept of differentiated vulnerability and intergenerational responsibility, it is possible to enhance substantive legitimacy. Collectively, these consequences imply that justice is not an ideal but rather a design concept to climate institutions and policies in an attempt to maintain cooperation and long-term effectiveness.

9. Limitations and Future Research Directions

This research has a number of limitations that indicate the way forward with regard to future research. Being a document based qualitative analysis it is largely based on official documents and reports, which cannot necessarily reflect the dynamics of informal negotiations, political bargaining and implementation of the dynamics on the ground. Future research would be useful in adding to such a method with interview, case studies, or mixed methods research design to understand the perception of the different actors regarding justice and legitimacy in practice [39]. What is more, although in this case the emphasis is placed on the relations between North and South on the international level, the issues of justice within states, including inequalities between social groups, could be examined empirically more thoroughly. As climate effects and governance structures change with time, comparative regional studies and longitudinal research can also investigate the relationship between power and legitimacy over time. This study would contribute to a better comprehension of operationalization of justice-based governance in a world that is more unequal and suffers climatic stress.

Funding Statement

This work was supported by the Deanship of Scientific Research, Vice Presidency for Graduate Studies and Scientific Research, King Faisal University, Saudi Arabia [Grant: KFU260548]

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