



## Confronting Global and Regional Inequalities to Achieve Equity and Climate Justice

### Policy Issue

Climate change affects populations differently. Some nations contribute more CO2 emissions than others, bearing more responsibility for increasing temperatures and changing climate patterns. Others – often the poorer nations – face the brunt of climate pressures, exacerbating underlying development challenges. Confronting global and regional inequalities is central to achieving climate justice.

### The Context

**Alternative Policy Solutions** (APS) at the American University in Cairo and the Governance and **Local Development Institute** (GLD) at the University of Gothenburg held a Policy Roundtable on 7 September to discuss climate justice and equity. Participants included Dr. **Eyad Yacoub** - Center of Excellence for Climate Change and Environmental Technologies, *Arab American University* (Palestine), **Mohamed Salih** from the Faculty of Agriculture at the *University of Khartoum* (Sudan), **Nadim Farajalla** of the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at the *American University in Beirut* (Lebanon), and **Khalifa Al-Zeidi** of the Center for Environmental Studies and Research at *Sultan Qaboos University* (Oman).

In his introductory remarks, Dr Thabit Jacob (GLD) noted, “We need to ask normative questions about who is responsible for climate change and who is most affected.” Poorer, non-oil-producing countries are disproportionately affected by the devastation brought on by climate change but have the fewest resources to adapt to its effects. Salih called for the international community to compensate these nations for the damage they have caused: “We know the [global]

northern countries are responsible for climate change, but they are not taking responsibility for it.” The participants highlighted three important factors necessary to address climate justice.

### Centering Equity Concerns

Countries in the MENA region have recently integrated climate justice and equity concerns into environmental policies. In Oman, the discussion is very new, as activism from social media and university scholars have taken the lead in highlighting the issue. The judiciary has taken on the issue in Lebanon, while in Palestine, the Ministry of the Environment signed an agreement with the UN to address these concerns; however, the country is still limited by the ongoing Israeli occupation. Finally, while climate justice is discussed in Sudan, the country has problems with policy implementation and the marginalization of poorer and peripheral populations.

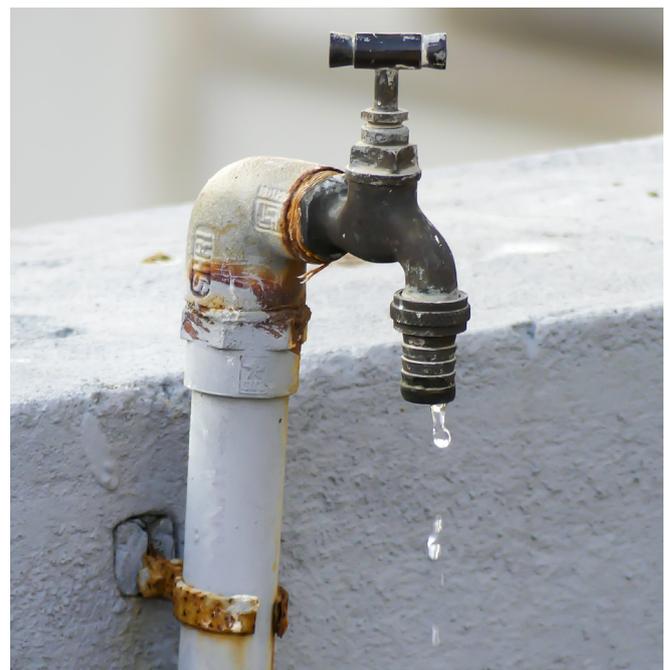


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### Accountability and Decision-Making

Addressing equity in the MENA region requires representation in global governance, domestic legal and political reforms, and local implementation efforts. Khalifa noted, “We need to take local community opinion” into account, while Salih called for greater accountability and transparency from all actors and institutions. Yaqob drew attention to the “three pillars” of domestic society working on this issue: civil society, educational institutions, and governments. Salih further called for a global fund to support climate change research in developing countries.

On the ground, civil society organizations and NGOs have direct ties to donors and are responsible for implementation, but they are not always representative of all community members. In Lebanon, for example, donors’ distribution of scarce resources to Syrian refugees created tensions between native farmers and new migrants. In addition, Farajalla stated that the question surrounding NGOs is “whether they are really representative: are they really passing along the benefits to those who are supposed to benefit, or are they keeping the benefits for themselves?” Across the region, elite capture of NGOs and local government bodies often threatens policy implementation.

Yaqob noted another challenge: “We need to convince the decisionmaker(s) to take seriously policies around climate change and justice. We have no research in our area.” More research is needed to ensure data-driven climate justice campaigns. Similarly, Khalifa suggested, “We need to raise awareness. The people need to know how to deal with these sorts of issues. They need information about how to deal with climate change.”

### Regional and International Responsibilities

The Arab League could play an important role in addressing these issues, but politics is getting in the way. Farajalla explained how the imbalance between oil-producing countries and non-oil producers threatened progress. Non-oil producers rely on OPEC countries for energy and aid and lack the power to lead reform efforts.



*The MENA According to IMF. Photo Credit: Wikimedia Commons*

Yet oil producers produce for industrialized countries, signaling another global power imbalance. Farajalla called for a “mutual willingness and acceptance that we are all going to suffer.”

He also called for an international dialogue, beginning with an apology. Only then can the world start building a fair and just society to develop a “mutually supportive framework” addressing the challenges of climate change.

### About GLD

The Governance and Local Development Institute (GLD) is a research institute based at the University of Gothenburg, originally founded in 2013 at Yale University by Professor Ellen Lust. GLD focuses on the local factors driving governance and development. The institute is dedicated to international collaboration and scientifically rigorous, policy-relevant research in an effort to promote human welfare globally. Findings are made available to the international and domestic communities through academic publications, policy briefs, public presentations, and social media, as well as on-the-ground workshops in cooperation with local partners.



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