

A large, stylized graphic of a leaf or branch, rendered in shades of blue, occupies the upper left portion of the page. The leaves are elongated and pointed, with a central vein structure.

Centering Equity in Climate Action

The Institute for Sustainable Communities at COP27



INSTITUTE FOR
Sustainable
Communities



Executive Summary

Flooding in South Africa and Pakistan, droughts in Europe and China, urban heat island effects in major metropolises worldwide¹. The global climate crisis continues to impact billions of lives economically while causing a basic struggle for survival. Where do we go from here?

The United Nations 27th Conference of the Parties (COP27) in Sharm-el-Sheikh, Egypt, marks 30 years of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and seven years since the signing of the Paris Climate Agreement. While COP26 ended with updated nationally determined contributions (NDCs), approval of international mitigation framework guidelines, and breakthroughs accelerating the scale of green technologies, many questions remained. With a theme of “Together for Implementation,” the Egyptian COP presidency looks to reconvene signatories to address climate action with a focus on finance, just transition, and greater mitigation and adaptation ambitions. A strategic combination of these approaches may yet lead to the necessary sustainable and replicable solutions.

The Institute for Sustainable Communities (ISC) approaches climate action through an equity lens focusing on communities that are most profoundly impacted by the global climate crisis. ISC’s mission is to create, implement, and scale equitable climate change mitigation and resilience solutions at a local and regional level. Through a deep understanding of and commitment to communities that are the least likely to cause global climate change yet face the highest impacts, ISC develops creative and inclusive solutions which are demonstrated in our work in the US and across Asia in China, India, the Mekong, and Bangladesh. We seek resiliency for our partners and the communities in which they lead. We actively partner with frontline organizations, subnational governments, and the private sector to co-create programs that support disinvested communities, women, and people experiencing poverty who comprise the global majority. ISC remains cognizant of communities’ varying needs, and we tailor our approach to support those needs. We believe equity and inclusion are fundamental to building healthy, prosperous, and peaceful communities and are committed to furthering equitable climate action. ISC’s dedication to this work leads us to COP27, where we will leverage our leadership, knowledge, and networks as vital instruments in furthering conversations around community-led climate action.

¹ <https://yaleclimateconnections.org/2022/10/world-rocked-by-29-billion-dollar-weather-disasters-in-2022/>



COP27 Priorities

COP26's Glasgow Climate Pact is the most ambitious climate pact since the Paris Agreement. Building from the previous agreement to accelerate climate mitigation efforts, 140 signatory countries committed to strengthening their 2030 emissions reduction targets to ensure global warming can be limited to 1.5°C by midcentury². This may be achieved through a consortium of approaches, with many countries and global corporations committing to net zero targets while others agreeing to cut methane emissions, end deforestation, and eliminate funding of fossil-fuel projects.

These commitments are laudable in theory. However, in practice, they must take into account the experience of people, communities, and nations that face disproportionate risks to the impacts of climate change. To ignore the needs of whole populations is to risk failure. At COP27, the expectations are even higher while centered around four areas of potential action:

AREAS OF ACTION	
Mitigation	Adaptation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen nationally determined contributions (NDCs) and increase ambition • Ensure compliance accountability and implementation of COP processes such as Emissions Trading Systems (ETS) and Global Stocktake (GST) of the Paris Agreement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge highest emitters not always at risk of highest impact • Recognize island/coastal communities already face disastrous impacts • Elevate adaptation and resiliency through equity lens
Climate Finance	Just Transition
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase financial and technical assistance • Drive investment in high risk and low return areas • Dedicate discussions to loss and damage mechanism introduced at Bonn Climate Talks • Deliver on financial commitments from developed countries and increase in private sector engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Center equity through the “Just Transition” theme • Center equity in all other aspects of climate action planning

² <https://ukcop26.org/cop26-goals/>



Mitigation

COP26 asked countries to attend prepared with strengthened, nationally determined contributions (NDCs) from the Paris Agreements in order to scale up mitigation ambition. One hundred and forty countries committed to the Glasgow Climate Pact, and some progress has been seen, with 27 countries publishing their enhanced NDCs in 2022. However, there is considerable evidence supporting the need for even more ambitious mitigation action across the board. Article 6 of the Paris Agreements established a global carbon market mechanism to incentivize the reduction of emissions, but the COP process has yet to fulfill mandates and act on compliance deadlines. More drastic action toward the implementation of this mechanism and other incentives is necessary to engage signatories and meet target goals by 2030. Countries must fully recommit to NDCs with goals that align with the 1.5°C pathway alongside a fully implemented Global Stocktake (GST) process. Global time frames are being outstripped by failures of mitigation, modeling, and climate finance shortfalls, leading to a need for mitigation acceleration.

Adaptation

It's increasingly clear that mitigation alone is not enough, and that adaptation must simultaneously take place to support communities combating the impacts of climate change. Climate change is transboundary. The greatest emitters do not always face the highest risk of climate change impacts, nor do the highest emitting countries always have the economic and political stability to increase resiliency despite facing enhanced risks. Coastal and island nations and communities have already been subjected to extreme weather events and rising sea levels, causing disasters in communities, many of which were previously under-resourced. Adaptation action is necessary to alleviate the stress put on communities and save lives. COP27 should elevate adaptation and resiliency through a lens of accessibility and equity, including an increase in commitment from developed countries towards key climate finance mechanisms.

Climate Finance

In coordination with efforts to scale up adaptation, we must recognize that under-resourced communities face disproportionate impacts and may need [financial](#) and technical assistance in adaptation project work. In addition to increasing funding opportunities provided by the [Adaptation Fund](#), COP27 should engage in conversations around driving investment for adaptation and mitigation efforts, especially in the often ignored high-risk and low-return areas that usually face harsher climate impacts. This includes more action-driven conversation to address the impact on communities surrounding the loss and damage mechanism introduced at COP26 and further engaged at the [Bonn Climate Talks](#) earlier this year. Parties must recognize the need for collective action and call for both delivery of previous commitments and increased financial pledges from developed countries and the private sector through financial instruments and philanthropy.



Equity

“Just Transition” has already gained traction as a buzzword at this year’s COP, but it’s essential that “equity” become part of the standard narrative in high-level discussions, recommendations, and outcomes. In shifting local, regional, national, and international economies to be non-extractive and non-emitting, approaches to manufacturing, waste management, and energy usage must be just and equitable. Again, those people most affected by climate change are also those we risk leaving behind in the transition to clean, sustainable communities unless significant caution is taken to ensure support for workers and community health at a national and/or local level. This cannot happen without centering equity in all conversations by involving community voices from the beginning, an approach that has not been prioritized by the COP delegations in the past.

ISC’s Strategic Goals at COP27 and beyond

With the climate crisis accelerating and the need for *equitable* action growing, ISC will take a more active role in COP27 and, more importantly, work to broaden the platform from which we will expand the global discussion of climate equity and just transition in the coming months.

ISC has engaged in work over the past three decades in countries throughout Asia and Europe, resulting in a unique knowledge base and a repertoire of scalable tools and/or programs. ISC, in acknowledgment of the need for building networks to facilitate the transfer of knowledge, will identify and participate in a cross-section of mission-aligned events and activities. ISC looks forward to engaging with other attendees and positioning itself as a thought leader in the space of climate equity and decarbonization by raising awareness of our program activities and knowledge tools, such as decarbonization roadmaps for megacities in China that includes a Social Impact Assessment (SIA) tool. ISC’s ongoing work and presence in three of the top emissions emitting countries also adds to its unique role in the climate equity leadership space. By disseminating knowledge and sharing useful tools and resources, ISC hopes to contribute to global progress in climate change mitigation, adaptation, and resiliency.

We will invigorate serious discussions surrounding the incorporation and elevation of community voices. To highlight a sentiment from COP26 president MP Alok Sharma during a recent speech, “to address equitable climate change, investments are needed in high-risk and low-return areas.” Previous COPs have failed to center community voices in what were already limited community conversations. ISC has long focused on supporting local leaders as they develop sustainable communities, ensuring they have access to resources and platforms enabling them to address climate resiliency. This approach is both innovative and effective because we involve diverse people and institutions in the design and implementation of our projects. At COP27, ISC looks to use its subject matter expertise and offer itself as a global resource on centering equity and elevating community voices in climate action programs.



ISC will co-host a [side event](#) focused on just transition, with ISC's Megha Nath voicing the gender equity perspective from our Accelerating Clean Equitable (ACE) Manufacturing program in India. ISC's work in India, China, and the Mekong region is elevated by the unique approaches in program design and collaborator engagement, enabling communities to be active participants. The overall goal is to bring the community perspective to the forefront of climate conversations.

We will expand the global network of partners and collaborators who have made a commitment to furthering just transition through an equity lens. We will endeavor to find alignment among similar civil society organizations, corporations, foundations, and government officials who are willing to engage in approaches to systemic change. Similar to previous years, the ISC team will navigate the complex web of official negotiations, side events, in-person and virtual panel discussions, exhibitions, and performances to identify, develop, and nurture key relationships. We hope to partner with these and other organizations in embedding equity, leveraging expertise, and expanding impact long after COP27.

We seek to gain insight to develop ISC's own strategic direction moving forward in the climate equity space. Attendance at COP27 provides ISC with the opportunity to learn from climate leaders around the world, widening and deepening our own knowledge base through attendance at key side events and pavilions as well as discussions on best practices with other thought leaders.

ISC's Themes of Work

ISC works across several core themes of implementable programs in Asia and the United States - decarbonization, supply chain sustainability, green energy and solar resilience solutions - while using a multi-partner collaborative approach with a throughline of equity. Working within themes better provides for scaling of programs across regions and sectors.

Decarbonization

ISC China has promoted sub-national climate action since 2008. Following the carbon-peaking pledge in 2015 by the Chinese government, ISC has supported cities in developing carbon-peaking roadmaps, estimated to yield more than 100 million tons of GHG reductions by 2030. As a result of this collaboration, ISC has produced the Carbon Emission Peaking Roadmaps and Actions (CEPRA) guidebook that has been used across China with applicability for regional use across Asia. Building on previous programs, the [DELTA](#) program engaged three megacities in progress towards decarbonization and assists in accelerating market readiness for the financial mechanisms and technologies necessary for decarbonization. The DELTA pilot program concluded with two major co-benefits, the SIA tool and a Guidebook for City-based Equitable Carbon Peaking & Neutrality Roadmaps, in the form of knowledge products. The SIA tool incorporates equity, social, and health benefits to the decarbonization plans, and adds a people-centered layer to the approach. These tools developed from the implementation and learnings of ISC's programs help strengthen internal and external expertise.



Supply Chain Sustainability

Launched in 2020, the Mekong Sustainable Manufacturing Alliance (The Alliance) program in Cambodia, Vietnam, and Thailand, is advancing decarbonization by partnering with multi-sector factories that supply major consumer brands in a large step towards sustainable manufacturing. Early outreach showed overwhelming interest from factories and brands to participate, leading to 10 brands and 103 factories being onboarded through two pilot programs in Vietnam and Cambodia. Factories participate in training around topics such as creating a respectful workplace, protecting foreign migrant workers, energy efficiency, and renewable energy - increasing their capacity to engage in equity and resiliency conversations. The Alliance also provides technical assistance on energy efficiency and renewable energy projects, particularly on solar rooftop projects. Partnered consumer brands VF Corporation, Adidas, and H&M are collaborating with the Alliance to create “Sustainable Biomass Guidelines” which will be a useful knowledge product in setting an industry standard across the region and sector.

Green Energy and Solar Resilience

In 2021, we worked with 39 community-based nonprofits in 30 cities and 19 states in the U.S. to center green economic outcomes, helping to create green businesses, workforce development enterprises, solar energy installation companies, and community resilience hubs in disinvested communities. In centering equity, we brought together a network of Black, brown and indigenous leaders to provide the technical assistance and capacity building necessary to not only elevate community voices but also to promote collaboration between subnational governments and these communities. In order to facilitate climate capacity building, ISC convenes stakeholders, conducts workshops, offers strategic guidance, and provides tailored technical assistance. In the United States, climate equity ties in with the history of racial discrimination in land-use planning and community investments. Therefore, the technical assistance in resiliency-building and building decarbonization is focused on communities of color. Our programs are co-created with communities to transform the urban climate resilience field by increasing the number of leaders of color, and shifting the narrative around who holds climate expertise.

Intersecting Themes

Nearly all of ISC’s programs are proactively developed at the intersection of two or more themes. ISC’s ACE Manufacturing program in India is a prime example of ISC’s combined thematic work to transition into a sustainable manufacturing sector and equitable green workforce, with a presence in about 500 factories working with small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Considering that women face disproportionate impacts to climate change and historically face barriers to entry into the workforce, ACE Manufacturing incorporates gender equity considerations in operationalizing a just transition of textile, auto, and chemical sectors in India. In creating a gender-equitable workforce, ISC performed a gender gap analysis to better understand barriers, challenges, opportunities, and motivations in manufacturing SMEs. The results were used to inform a model for gender equitable decarbonization and recommendations for policy tools.



Our [Environmental Health and Safety + \(EHS+\)](#) Center in India advances low-carbon sustainable manufacturing practices and improves the health and safety conditions inside factories and community conditions related to air, water and carbon emissions. In a strategic partnership with the Symbiosis Institute for International Business, the center offered factory-level training, tailored based on industry, to move industry standards to more proactive and holistically sustainable practices. With the program reducing projected GHG emissions at a rate of 348,202 MTCO₂e annually, air quality benefits – particularly for the people who are disproportionately affected by air pollution – are equivalent to taking more than 75,000 cars off the road each year. In the second and third phases of the program, ISC developed Clean Energy and Clean Air Accelerators, respectively, to add an additional dimension of climate adaptation, mitigation, and human health impacts.

Multi-Partner Collaboration Approach

ISC's multi-partner collaboration approach allows for unique program designs, such as The Alliance program that brings together corporations and factories in a simultaneous top-down and bottom-up approach. The Alliance uses a market-driven approach to strengthen sustainable and competitive manufacturing in the Mekong region by engaging the private sector, catalyzing market forces, and advancing innovative regional standards by manufacturers while also facilitating conversations with factories and empowering workers. ISC's effectiveness in engaging with the corporate sector allows for programs to excel in environmental and equity performance, especially in the sustainable sourcing and supply chain space.

ISC's [Women + Water Alliance](#) in India trained 17,500 farmers - including more than 5,600 women - in regenerative agriculture practices and conservation. We also emphasized training on water conservation, producing natural pesticides, and compost for sale. Women + Water is a public-private partnership improving the health, livelihoods, and well-being of women cotton farmers and communities along the apparel value chain, correlating with the goal of fostering relationships with communities most affected by climate change which often means women, farmers, and migrant populations.

In engaging multiple decision-makers, ISC prioritizes the involvement of the community leaders and organizations throughout the conception and actualization of programs and holds a strong community-first sentiment in activity programming and ongoing processes.



What's Next?

ICS's work across themes of decarbonization and equity with a multi-partner collaboration approach produces highly scalable programming. Many of our programs build on the learnings and successes of past programs, tailored to fit the community and regional needs of new programming. With a commitment to working subnationally, ISC continues to engage at the community-level to provide links between all levels of government and disinvested communities, empowering them in the pursuit of their own climate action. Future considerations include scaling up from sub-national to national levels, spreading the presence of successful programs throughout the country and deepening our commitments in our fields of work. Examples include China's DELTA program, slated to be replicated across 30 cities from the original pilot cohort of three, and to move the US network-based approach to all 50 states. Knowledge products can be leveraged and applied in other regions and programs. Our successful programs in China, India, and the Mekong also have the potential for cross-regional collaboration, scale, and impact, acting independently of geography to influence climate resiliency action. In addition, many programs have produced knowledge products that can be utilized to scale impact and provide an ISC training academy, furthering opportunities for capacity-building, collaboration, and thought leadership.



COP27 Event

Saturday, November 12, 2022 • 18:30-20:00 (EGY) • Akhenaten Room

COP27 High-Level Roundtable on Just Transitions: Business, Human Rights, and Climate Action

Hosted by: Institute for Human Rights and Business (IHRB), Laudes Foundation, Institute for Sustainable Communities (ISC) and Climate Policy Initiative, Inc (CPI)

Speakers: Mary Robinson (IHRB), Joan Carling (Indigenous Peoples Rights Int'l), Andreas Ahrens (IKEA), Leslie Johnston (Laudes Foundation), John Morrison (IHRB), Megha Nath (ISC), Cristina Gamboa (World Green Bldg Council), Barbara Buchner (CPI)

This COP27 side event roundtable will explore assessing the concept of just transition, the need for accountability, and how to implement it equitably to achieve climate targets in a people-centered manner.

ISC's Megha Nath will be discussing gender equitable decarbonization, just transition, and ISC's ACE Manufacturing program.

