



# CLIMATE JUSTICE:

# JAPANESE PERSPECTIVE



This brochure consists of two parts:

In Part 1, we look from global perspectives (with examples from North America in particular) at how various social injustices led to a disparity in the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation.

Here in Part 2, we look at the current situation concerning climate justice in Japan, highlighting some specific examples.

By reading Part 1 and Part 2 together, you can see why we need environmental and climate justice and what the cause and context of the issues are, both in terms of the global historical context and the current situation, including that of Japan. If you haven't, we recommend you read Part 1 first.

Access Part 1 here: <https://bit.ly/3VLJyXI>



There are many forms of social injustice in Japan too that lead to climate injustice.

In Japan, there are various identities that often make people vulnerable in today's Japanese society, but here, we discuss a few examples, with an overview and specific circumstances in Japan: **women** and gender inequality; **people in poverty** suffering from economic disparity; **workers in primary industries** vulnerable to climate change; and **Indigenous People** living in harmony with nature whose cultural identity is threatened by climate change.

It should be noted that many other forms of injustice exist beside those highlighted here, and you cannot rank them in order of importance. Please see the table on the back cover for other identities that are typically considered socially vulnerable.

Each person has multiple social identities (attributes such as race and gender), which intersect and interact with each other.

For example, although women are generally at a disadvantage in society due to gender inequality, women of color are particularly disadvantaged compared to white women because of the combined effects of their identities.

Men may tend to be in a more privileged position, but men living in poverty are stripped of the power that affluent men enjoy due to the combination of their social identities.

The concept that explains the way in which different combinations of elements create unique circumstances for individual people, as you can see in these examples, is called **intersectionality**.

In Part 2, let's look at the unfairness of the impacts of climate change and climate measures for different groups of people and communities in Japan.



# Impacts of Climate Change on Women

As you can see in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2023, which ranked Japan 125th out of 146 countries in the gender gap index, gender inequality is significant in the Japanese society, especially where it comes to the labor market and the division of roles at home.

Although women's participation in the labor market is on the increase, women's average lifetime earnings is only 75.2% of men's earnings in Japan (2021). One of the causes of the disparity is the high proportion of women in non-regular employment (women make up around 68% of all non-regular workers in 2023.).

Also, when you compare the amount of time men and women spend on housework, child care and family care each day on average, women spent 3 hours and 28 minutes in 2016, 44 minutes longer than men. These forms of at-home labor are considered free, and this is one of the factors that prevent women from gaining financial independence.

In Japan, climate change is manifesting itself as heat waves and frequent occurrences of extreme weather events, which are significantly affecting women's health and daily living. Increased health risks due to extreme heat in particular add to the already heavy responsibility of care work that women bear. Moreover, increased social stresses negatively impact women's mental health and destabilize day-to-day living. Also, a study has found that violence and sex crimes against women increase at times of natural disasters such as the 2011 earthquake and tsunami as well as hurricanes and other disasters abroad, showing how disasters heighten gender-based risks.

Please note that, although gender in the context of social life is a spectrum of diverse identities and not binary as man or woman, this text discusses gender in binary terms of men and women in order to explain the discrimination that exists based on the traditional idea of binary genders.

The impacts of climate change are extensive, but it is particularly serious for women in non-regular employment. Disasters brought on by climate change such as powerful typhoons and intense rainfalls can have a direct impact on these women through loss of work and exacerbated financial vulnerability. The traditional employment practice in Japan increases the burden of "free" care work, which puts them in an even more difficult financial position. There is an urgent need to protect these women from climate change-induced gender inequality and take corrective action to solve the problem.

Researched and written by: Marimo Higa



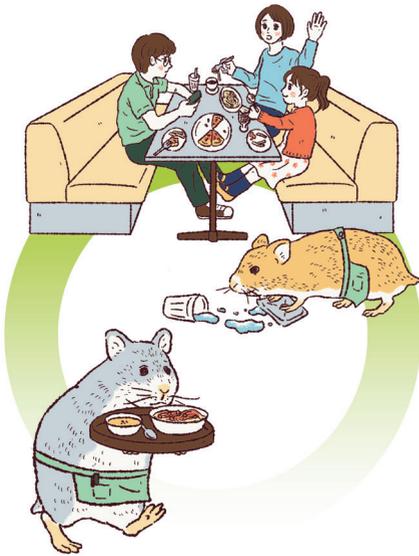
1 World Economic Forum, 2023, Global Gender Gap Report 2023  
2 Cabinet Office Gender Equality Bureau, 2021, Current Status and Challenges of Gender Equality in Japan  
3 Cabinet Office Gender Equality Bureau, 2022, White Paper on Gender Equality 2022  
4 Cabinet Office Gender Equality Bureau, 2020, White Paper on Gender Equality 2020  
5 Journal of the International University of Health and Welfare, 26 (2), 50-67, October 1, 2021, "The impact of disasters on violence against women"

# Impacts of Climate Change on the People in Poverty

One out of six people living in Japan are in relative poverty. Relative poverty means low income relative to others in a country, and in Japan in 2021, this is defined as an annual take-home household income of less than 1.27 million yen.<sup>6</sup> Poverty is particularly prevalent among single-parent households and older people living on their own.

Life's essentials such as lighting and hot water, as well as cooling to protect yourself from extreme heat, all require energy. However, many people are in energy poverty, where they cannot afford to buy enough energy.<sup>7</sup>

Being in energy poverty means having to choose between energy and things like food, medicine and education from a limited disposable income. While the risk of heat-related illness increases due to global temperature rise, climate change also leads to skyrocketing price of food and energy, which can seriously harm the life, health and livelihood of people with low income.



In a survey conducted in January-February 2023, around 77% of the 85 food banks from across Japan<sup>8</sup> that responded said that they were receiving more requests for help due to the higher cost of living.<sup>9</sup> Another survey suggests that around 40% of food bank users have missed payments on energy bills.<sup>10</sup>

It is not uncommon for people with low income to choose to live in locations susceptible to natural disasters or in older properties in order to keep the rent down. This makes them vulnerable to destructive weather events, which are becoming more frequent and severe due to the effects of climate change. In addition, many older properties are energy inefficient when it comes to heating and cooling, and the increased requirement for energy further exacerbates energy poverty.

Researched and written by: Yuki Watanabe

6 Japan's Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2022, Comprehensive Survey of Living Conditions

7 Climate Reality Project, 2023, Climate 101: What is Energy Burden?

8 A food bank is an initiative that collects edible but unsellable food due to broken packaging, misprints, etc., and distributes it to social welfare institutions, single-parent households and households in poverty.

9 NHK, Japan Broadcasting Corporation, 2023, Summer holidays without school lunches: food banks struggle to stock up as requests for help soar

10 Food Bank Sendai, 2023, Survey on the increase in poverty due to the rise in cost of living and energy bill conducted

# Impacts of Climate Change on Primary Industry Workers

Primary industries including agriculture, forestry and fishery are dependent on the natural environment, and therefore at the forefront of climate change impacts. Agriculture and fishery in particular are hugely affected already.

In agriculture, the quality of rice is affected by the temperature increase across Japan. Farmers are seeing quality issues caused by heat such as white immature grains and cracked grains that directly impact the yield. Reports suggest that farms are facing reduced revenues and financial losses due to low rice yields.<sup>11</sup>

In the fishery industry, an example of climate impacts is that, according to reports, the migration pattern of saury around the North Pacific is changing, with the fish moving south later due to rising sea temperatures. According to the National Saury Stick-held Dip-net Fishery Cooperation, the annual catch of saury collapsed from 340,000 tons in 2008 to less than 20,000 tons in recent years.<sup>12</sup> Fishers of main saury landing ports such as Hakodate, Hokkaido are badly affected and facing a devastating drop in income.

As you can see, the impacts of climate change on industries affect workers in those sectors and their communities economically. In Japan, only 3.1% of all workers are engaged in primary industries,<sup>13</sup> yet they bear a disproportional share of the burden.

According to the Statistical Survey on Farm Management and Economy, the gross agricultural income of agricultural management entities (including both juridical entities and individuals) is 11,656,000 yen, while agricultural expenditure is 10,674,000 yen. This leaves a dwindling annual average net income as low as 982,000 yen from the entire agricultural operation.<sup>14</sup> This explains why most agricultural workers are considered to be in poverty.

The rising temperatures, with the resulting deterioration in rice crop quality and disruptions in fishery patterns, are only going to exacerbate the financial misery of agricultural and fishery workers already living on poverty income.



Researched and written by: Polity Cheang

11 Ministry of the Environment (MOE), Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF), and Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism (MILT) of Japan, and Japan Meteorological Agency, 2018, Climate Change in Japan and Its Impacts

12 Jiji Press (2023), Are poor saury catches due to fish moving offshore? Global warming is changing marine environment

13 Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training, 2023, Number of workers by economic activity

14 Japan's Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, 2022, Agriculture income and expenditure per business farming entities 2022

# Impacts of Climate Change on Indigenous Peoples

The impacts of climate change is already affecting the lives, livelihoods and human rights of 370 million Indigenous Peoples worldwide.<sup>15</sup> Even though their traditional ways of life emit negligible amounts of greenhouse gases that cause climate change, they are among the most severely affected populations on Earth.

There are several reasons why Indigenous Peoples are more vulnerable to climate change, including: socioeconomic hardship; poor access to and quality of healthcare; high incidence of diseases; gender inequality; high rates of migration, and political marginalization.

Added to those are the fact that the land is central to Indigenous Peoples, as many have developed unique relationships with the natural environment they live in: For example, they are living on or next to untouched natural lands from which they obtain nature-derived foods and medicines. This means that extreme weather events, which are becoming more frequent and severe due to climate change, can destroy their traditional ways of life. When it becomes necessary for them to move to a different place, this can mean much more than a simple act of relocation; it can strip them of their cultural identities.

Worse still, despite the fact that the traditional ways of life of Indigenous Peoples are in harmony with nature, have low environmental impact and often are rich sources of knowledge that can help mitigate climate change, Indigenous communities are often prevented from putting those mitigation measures in practice and are exposed to the inequity and injustice of climate impacts.



Japan is home to the Ainu people, an Indigenous People native to Hokkaido with its own unique language, religion and culture. A survey conducted in 2017 found that there were 13,118 Ainu people, of which over 70% lived in Iburi and Hidaka regions.<sup>16</sup>

The cultures of many Indigenous Peoples value their traditional ways of life such as hunting, fishing and farming that depend on natural environments. For the Ainu people, salmon fishing has a central significance both to their livelihood and cultural heritage. However, climate change has impacted salmon catches in Hokkaido. Without salmon, the Ainu people will be unable to conduct some of their important rituals in their traditional forms,<sup>17</sup> and they will also face a likely prospect of their sources of food and livelihood diminishing.

To the Ainu people, climate change is a threat not only to their livelihood (work and economy) and food security but also to their culture.

Researched and written by: Kieu An Nguyen

15 UNESCO, 2023, Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Climate Change  
16 Comprehensive Ainu Policy Office, Cabinet Secretariat, 2023, Overview of Ainu Policy in Japan  
17 The Asahi Shimbun Company, 2022, Ainu people: “catching salmon means restoring our ethnic pride”

# No climate justice without social justice

We need to open our eyes to the reality faced by people who experience climate impacts “first and the worst”.

In any and all of our activities to tackle climate change, it’s important that we listen sincerely to the voices of vulnerable people, and that any system and policy decision-making processes are with those voices.

However, looking at vulnerable people merely as people that need to be “protected” or “helped” can disempower them and ignore their agency, which may serve to reinforce the injustice of the existing social structure.



Let’s think about how we ourselves relate to this unjust system.

Climate justice and climate change are material issues for us all. We hope that this brochure will encourage more people to think about climate justice as something that matters to them and affects people around them.



The Climate Reality Project is a global initiative working to tackle climate change. We are not just calling for climate change mitigation, we are also calling for climate justice. Please feel free to access our various materials available on climate justice.

The source of this brochure can be viewed on the CRP Japan website. <https://bit.ly/3VKiM23>



List of Main Identities

	<b>Majority</b> (socially superior position in Japan)	<b>Minority</b> (socially inferior position in Japan)
Race	Japanese	Foreigners, Korean diasporas, Ainu, etc.
Sex assigned at birth	Male	Female
Sexual Orientation	Heterosexual	LGBTQ+
Gender Identity	Cisgender (Body and gender identity match)	Transgender (Body and gender identity do not match)
Academic Background	Highly educated	Low education background
Economic Class	High income	Low income
Physical and Mental Health	Healthy	Suffer from illness or disability
Residential Area	Living in a metropolitan area	Local resident

Created by CRP Japan based on Makiko Deguchi and Jun Nakano, Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK), 2022, You may be in a dominant position: what are hard-to-spot privileges

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私たちは変える。

We MUST. We CAN. We WILL CHANGE.