CLIMATE DICTIONARY

We recommend that you familiarize yourself with these frequently used terms in the climate space.



Adaptation

Measures and adjustments made in human or natural systems in response to climatic change or its effects (real or projected). Adaptation aims to lower risks, take advantage of potential benefits, and reduce the vulnerability of societies and ecosystems.

Adaptive capacity

A country or region's set of abilities, resources, and institutions that together make implementing efficient adaptive measures possible.

Albedo

Measure of solar radiation reflected by a surface or object. The value of this measure ranges from 0 to 1 and is often expressed as a percentage. A surface with a value of 0 is a "perfect absorber" of the incoming energy, while a value of 1 means the surface is a "perfect reflector" of it.

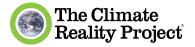
A decrease of albedo is when the soil (or other surface) absorbs more of the incoming energy from the sun, thereby heating the surface. For instance, in areas with glaciers, as ice and snow melts, it exposes the darker land beneath. This darker land has a lower albedo than snow and absorbs more heat, resulting in further warming of our planet.

Atmospheric pollution

According to the World Health Organization (WHO 2016), atmospheric pollution is a major environmental and health hazard. Particulate materials (PM) with a diameter of 10 or fewer microns are the most dangerous atmospheric pollutants as they can penetrate deeply into the lungs. Most of these pollutants are the product of fossil fuel burning, but their composition can vary depending on the sources.

Atmospheric river

Atmospheric rivers are long and narrow "sky rivers" that transport large amounts of water vapor from the tropics to the polar continents and other regions of Earth. Their extension can go from 400 up to 600 kilometers in width, and they can carry as much water, in the form of steam, as 25 Mississippi Rivers. When an atmospheric river touches the ground, especially in mountainous terrain, or interacts with a storm system, it releases much of its vapor as rain or snow.



C

Carbon cycle

Flow or chain of transformations that carbon experiences in different forms, for example, the carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, the oceans, the terrestrial biosphere, or the lithosphere.

Carbon dioxide (CO2)

The main greenhouse gas mentioned in the Kyoto Protocol. This gas is the result of burning fossil fuels like coal, oil, gas, and other organic materials like wood. It is also the result of natural processes, including humans and animals inhaling oxygen and exhaling CO2.

Carbon dioxide equivalent (CO2e)

The amount of greenhouse gas emissions in comparison to carbon dioxide. Standard measurement of the effect of all greenhouse gas emissions on the climate.

Carbon intensity

The correlation between carbon emissions and some activity producing them. For instance, carbon emissions resulting from the production of goods and services.

Carbon market

Trading system used by countries (or other regions) to buy or sell greenhouse gas emissions units to honor their national (or regional) emissions limits according to the Paris Agreement or another agreement. The term derives from the fact that carbon dioxide is the main greenhouse gas, and the other gases are measured in units of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO2e).

Carbon price

Price applied to carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions. A great incentive to reduce emissions is raising the price over the market of zero emissions.

Carbon footprint

Generally defined as the amount of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in the atmosphere as a result of human activities. The total is typically expressed as tons equivalent to carbon dioxide.

Carbon sequestration

The process of removing carbon from the atmosphere and storing it. Carbon can be sequestered via natural processes in organic materials like soils or trees or using chemical processes and stored underground for long periods in gas and oil reservoirs, coal mines, and depleted saline aquifers.



Carbon tax

A tax on carbon dioxide emissions (CO2), similar to the tax applied to gasoline or petrol, with the purpose of reducing CO2 emissions.

Circular economy

The circular economy aims to reuse and repurpose products and materials in use as long as possible to generate as little waste as possible.

Climate

Climate is often defined in a narrow sense as the average weather dimensions over a defined period of time. The usual average is 30 years, according to the definition of the World Meteorological Organization, and the dimensions measured are often surface variables (such as temperature, precipitation and wind).

Climate change

A change in climatic variables such as precipitation, temperature, and wind over an extended period of time (decades or more). Climate change can be caused by natural or anthropogenic factors together with natural climate volatility.

Climate change feedback

The process in which changing one quantity changes a second quantity, which then changes the first. Positive feedback occurs when an initial change increases an effect or effects. Negative feedback occurs when an initial change reduces an effect or effects.

For example, warmer temperatures melt glaciers that would otherwise reflect solar radiation. With less snow and ice to reflect the sun's energy, the Earth absorbs more of this energy as heat, leading to more warming and more melting. (Positive feedback.)

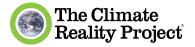
Climate forcing

Often abrupt, large-scale change in the climate system that happens over a short time period (decades or less) and cause lasting and serious disturbances in the natural and human systems.

Climate justice

Climate justice frames the environmental crisis as an economic, racial, and political issue, rather than one that is purely environmental or physical in nature.

Climate justice focuses on the root causes of the climate crisis – including an economy heavily dependent on the exploitation of fossil fuels, deeply embedded structural racism, and other social inequities. It calls for solutions that center the priorities and the voices of the most impacted communities.



Key components of a climate justice perspective:

- People-centered: Elevates the voices and leadership of the people most impacted by the climate crisis.
- Acknowledgement of the disproportionate impacts: People of color and poor families will feel the effects of the climate crisis more than others.
- Identification of intersecting oppressions/issues: The climate crisis overlaps with many other issues.

COP

The Conference of the Parties (COP) is the highest decision-making body of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (see UNFCCC). The members, known as "the Parties," are the countries and organizations of countries such as the European Union that have ratified the convention.

The body holds an annual meeting to discuss international cooperation and progress on climate through the Paris Agreement and other means. The 30th of these meeting – COP 30 – will take place from November 10 through November 21, 2025, in Belém, Brazil.



Decarbonization

A reduction of the carbon dioxide emissions per production unit. A decrease of carbon intensity.

Drought

Abnormal dryness that lasts long enough to cause a serious hydrological imbalance. It is one of the most complex natural disasters, as well as the one with the biggest potential impact on humans. Apart from its direct effects on production, it can also affect the supply of drinking water, force migration, and even cause famine. The consequences of drought can last several years having a negative effect on development.



Emissions

Gases such as methane and carbon dioxide released by economic activity (manufacturing, generating electricity, etc.), that have an impact on the global atmosphere, the climate, and other aspects of the environment. In the context of climate change, emissions refer to the release of greenhouse gases and/or one of their precursors and aerosols in the atmosphere.

Emissions trading system (ETS)

A financial instrument traded in markets designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by putting a specific price on carbon. This can be done through the principle of cap and trade, in which a



government sets a limit or a top level of pollutant emissions for an entire industry or industries (the cap). To maintain this top level, companies that exceed their individual limit effectively purchase the left over pollution credit from companies that do not (the trade).

Environmental services

Tangible and intangible benefits generated by ecosystems needed for the survival of the natural and biological system as a whole and to the benefit of human beings.

Environmental justice

The fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.

Achieved when everyone enjoys:

- The same degree of protection from environmental and health hazards.
- Equal access to the decision-making process to have a healthy environment in which to live, learn, and work.

Environmental justice is intended to address environmental racism and the disproportionate burden on low-income communities, regardless of race or ethnicity.

Environmental justice demands:

- Fair treatment or distributive justice ensuring that harms and benefits are shared equitably.
- Meaningful involvement or procedural justice giving people a role in decision-making processes and making sure those processes are fair.
- Corrective justice or restorative justice holding those who are responsible for wrongs to account and repairing the losses of those who have been harmed.

Environmental racism

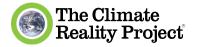
Environmental racism occurs when "communities [of color] are shouldering more than their fair share of environmental harms related to pollution, contamination, toxic waste, and heavy industry."

• In other words, when communities of color bear a "disproportionate impact of environmental hazards."

The term "environmental racism" is frequently used in a US context, but around the world, many historically marginalized groups, whether referred to as "ethnic minorities," "cultural and linguistically diverse communities," or another term appropriate to that country and context, experience disproportionate environmental harms.

Externalities

Activities that have an impact on people who have not agreed to any associated costs or benefits. Externalities can be positive or negative. A classic example of negative externalities would be the



burning of fossil fuels, which creates profits for oil companies while billions worldwide pay the true cost in air pollution, climate change, and more.

Extreme hydrometeorological event

An uncommon natural event such as a flood, drought, or heat wave in a determined place and season. These events vary depending on the area: Something very common in one region can be extreme in another. These events are not only a result of climate change, but climate change may increase their frequency, intensity, and duration.



Fenceline communities

Fenceline communities are communities that are next to a company, industrial, or service facility and are directly affected in some way by the facility's operation (e.g. noise, odor, traffic, and chemical emissions).

Food insecurity

The probability of a drastic reduction in people's access to food or levels of consumption due to environmental or social risks.

Food security

People's access at all times to the food products required to have an active, healthy life.

Fossil fuels

Elements, such as oil, gas, or coal, created from organic residues of living organisms that inhabited the planet millions of years ago. When burned to obtain energy, they release greenhouse gases.

Frontline communities

Communities on the front lines are those that experience environmental injustice impacts and the impacts of the climate crisis "first and worst."

"These are often communities of color and low-income, whose neighborhoods often lack basic infrastructure to support them and who will be increasingly vulnerable as [the climate crisis intensifies]...These are Native communities, whose resources have been exploited, and laborers whose daily work or living environments are polluted or toxic."

Source: Ecotrust, "Centering Frontline Communities"

"Centering communities on the front lines" in our work means listening to those living with climate impacts and fossil fuel pollution and following their lead on solutions.



G

Global warming

The increase of the earth's atmosphere's average temperature. This warming is causing a change in our climate.

Global warming potential (GWP)

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) uses this concept to analyze the capacity of different gases to trap heat in the atmosphere in comparison to that of carbon dioxide.

Equivalent chart: https://www.epa.gov/ghgemissions/understanding-global-warming-potentials

Greenhouse gases (GHG)

Atmospheric gases that absorb the sun's infrared radiation and increase the Earth's global temperature. The main greenhouse gases (GHG) are carbon dioxide (CO2), methane (CH4), and nitrous oxide (N2O). The hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), perfluorocarbons (PFCs), and sulfur hexafluoride (SF6) are among the less prevalent, but very powerful, greenhouse gases.

These gases are produced naturally thanks to biological processes such as living beings breathing or plants going through photosynthesis. However, due to fossil fuel combustion, deforestation, and overexploitation of natural resources, they have reached unsustainable levels.

Greenhouse gas sink

Every process, activity, or mechanism that removes greenhouse gases, aerosols, or any of their precursors from the atmosphere.

Greenwashing

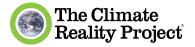
According to Merriam Webster, greenwashing is the act or practice of making a product, policy, activity, etc. appear to be more environmentally friendly or less environmentally damaging than it really is.

When applied to fossil fuel companies, this refers to how many companies will mislead customers about the extent of their investments in renewable and low-carbon energies, timelines and plans for scaling down production, and the climate impact of their core business products.



Heat wave

Period of time in which temperatures stay steadily above the average levels of a certain season in a determined geographic region.



I

Impact investing

Investing with the clear intention to solve social or environmental problems, optimize risk and financial performance, and have a positive impact on people or on the planet.

IPCC

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is the body of scientists in charge of providing reliable and accurate data to the countries that are members of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) so they can make political and policy decisions based on a scientific approach. It was created in 1988, and since then, it has released five reports officially known as "assessment reports" (ARs). Each one of them conducts a detailed scientific analysis about the technical, socio economic, and environmental aspects related to climate change.

Just transition

"Just transition is a framework for a fair shift to an economy that is ecologically sustainable, equitable, and just."

Source: Indigenous Environmental Network

A just transition is both an outcome and the process of achieving it.

"The transition itself must be just and equitable; redressing past harms and creating new relationships of power for the future through reparations. If the process of transition is not just, the outcome will never be. Just transition describes both where we are going and how we get there." Source: Climate Justice Alliance

While the just transition framework is broader in its mandate, it has historically been used in the context of labor, i.e., good, green jobs (see below). As such it's important to note the context when using this term.

"A just transition is an economy-wide process that produces the plans, policies and investments that lead to a future where all jobs are green and decent, emissions are at net zero, poverty is eradicated, and communities are thriving and resilient. A just transition will:

- Invest in jobs decent work opportunities in sectors which reduce emissions and help communities adapt to climate change.
- Respect the contribution that workers in fossil-fuel industries have made to today's prosperity and provide them with income support, retraining and redeployment opportunities, as well as secure pensions for older workers.
- Guarantee social protection and human rights.



- Invest in community renewal to gain the hope and trust of regions and townships at the forefront of the energy transition, industrial transformation, or climate impacts.
- Support innovation and technology sharing to enable a rapid transformation of energy and manufacturing companies along with all other economic sectors.
- Ensure the involvement of workers and communities in the sectoral plans for transforming megacities.
- Formalize jobs associated with rescue, restoring communities, and building resilience to climate disasters.
- Be based on social dialogue with all relevant parties and include collective bargaining with workers and their unions for workplace change, resource productivity, and skills development."

Source: International Trade Union Confederation, "Just Transition – Where Are We Now and What's Next?"



Kyoto Protocol

The Kyoto Protocol, created by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), was an agreement adopted in 1997 in Kyoto, Japan, with the purpose of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Countries agreed to reduce at least 5% of their anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions (carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, hydrofluorocarbons, perfluorocarbons, and sulfur hexafluoride) in comparison with the levels of 1990, between 2008 and 2012. The Kyoto Protocol went into effect on February 16, 2005.

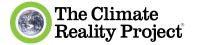


Mitigation

Implementation of policies and actions intended to reduce emissions or improve greenhouse gas sequestration. Along with adaptation, it is one of the existing strategies to manage climate change.

Montreal Protocol

The Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer is an agreement adopted in 1987, before being revised in London (1990), Copenhagen (1992), Vienna (1995), Montreal (1997), Beijing (1999), and Kigali (2016). This protocol controls the consumption and production of chemical substances containing chlorine and bromide that destroy the stratospheric ozone, such as chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), methyl bromide, and carbon tetrachloride.



0

Ozone layer

Ozone concentration in the stratosphere with an extension ranging from 12 to 40 km. The ozone layer is reducing due to degradation caused by the emissions of anthropogenic sources of chlorine and bromide compounds. Every year, during spring in the Southern Hemisphere, the Antarctic region experiences a reduction of the ozone layer's thickness. This phenomenon is known as the ozone hole. The Montreal Protocol regulated the substitution of industrial gases that cause this phenomenon.



Paris Agreement

The Paris Agreement is an international treaty adopted in 2015 during COP 21 with the goal to keep global warming under 2° C and make a great effort in order to hold warming below 1.5° C. In addition, the agreement suggests an action plan for all the governments highlighting three main points:

- 1. Mitigation or reduction of CO2 emissions. Every government should draft a national action plan, adapted to its situation and economic capacities to contribute to the main goal.
- 2. Transparency and global balance. All the countries are expected to inform of any progress and hold a meeting every five years to set more ambitious goals.
- 3. Government adaptation. Governments should reinforce society's ability to face the consequences of climate change.

R

Renewable energies

Energy obtained from natural sources that are considered endless due to the immense amount of energy they contain, or due to their capacity to regenerate themselves in a natural way. Renewable energies are divided into: wind, geothermic, hydroelectric, tidal energy, solar, wave energy, biomass, and biofuels.

Reservoir

A component or components of a climate system where a greenhouse gas or its precursor is stored. Trees are "reservoirs" for carbon dioxide (CO2).

Resilience

The ability of natural or social systems to absorb external stresses and disturbances as a result of social, political, or environmental changes while maintaining their essential function, identity, and structure.



Rising sea levels

A rise in the global average sea level. In terms of global warming, the rise can be induced by thaw of land ice or by a change in the water density due to the rise of the ocean's temperature or a higher salinity.



Short-lived climate pollutants (SLCP)

Substances like methane, black carbon, tropospheric ozone, and several hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) have a short-term substantial impact on climate change and have a fairly short life in the atmosphere in comparison with carbon dioxide and other gases.

Social cost of carbon

Added economic damage caused by an additional ton of carbon dioxide emissions or an equivalent. This cost factors impacts on the environment and human health.

Source of emission

Every process, activity, or mechanism that releases greenhouse gases (GHG), aerosols, or their precursors in the atmosphere.

Sustainable development

Needed development to satisfy the cultural, social, political, and economic needs of this generation without endangering the power of future generations to satisfy their own.



Tipping point

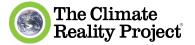
When it comes to climate, the tipping point is the hypothetical critical threshold in which the global or regional climate changes from one steady state to another. The effects of this event can be irreversible.



Understanding "environmental justice" vs "climate justice"

There are many definitions of "environmental justice," but we default to the Asian Pacific Environmental Network's approach:

"Environmental justice is the right of everyone to a clean, healthy, and safe place to live, work, learn, play, and pray."



In practice, the fight for environmental justice is about addressing environmental racism and the disproportionate harms that poor families suffer from climate impacts and fossil fuel and industrial pollution.

Climate justice is a subset of environmental justice, focused on the burden the climate crisis places on those least responsible for it. From this perspective, solving inequality is a critical first step to solving the climate crisis.

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

The UNFCCC is an agreement drafted in New York on May 9, 1992 and signed the same year during the Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro. Its ultimate goal is "the stabilization of greenhouse gas concentration in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interferences with the climate system."

Urban heat island

Heat levels in a city in comparison to that of adjacent rural areas, frequently associated with changes in moisture and a greater absorption of solar energy due to the usage of materials such as asphalt.



Vulnerability

Tendency or predisposition to be affected in a negative manner. The level of susceptibility of a system, or its inability to face the negative effects of climate change such as the volatility of weather and the extremes.

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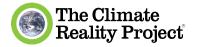
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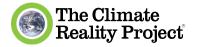
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