

An Introduction to Climate Change and Human Rights

Course Syllabus



United Nations Climate Change
Paris Committee on Capacity-building



UNITED NATIONS
HUMAN RIGHTS
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER



United Nations
Framework Convention on
Climate Change

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COURSE INTRODUCTION

“The climate crisis is the biggest threat to our survival as a species and is already threatening human rights around the world”. - UN Secretary-General António Guterres, February 2020

From hurricanes affecting communities in the Caribbean, to sea level rise threatening lives and livelihoods across the Pacific, heat waves and droughts across Europe, and people displaced in the context of extreme weather events, floods and droughts, the effects of climate change are already impacting human rights, including, the rights to food, water and sanitation, decent shelter, health, personal security, and even life itself. Climate change disproportionately affects the world’s most disadvantaged people - those who are the poorest, most exposed and have the least resources to withstand climate shocks and stresses such as extreme weather events. Climate action that is not anchored in a human rights-based approach risks further violating human rights.

"Environmental degradation and biodiversity loss create the conditions for an increase in the type of animal-to-human zoonosis that can result in viral epidemics. They also contribute to pre-existing medical conditions, such as asthma, that make persons more vulnerable to viral infections. Crises such as COVID-19 amplify those impacts, including through adverse effects on access to food and land, water and sanitation, housing, livelihoods, decent work, healthcare and other basic necessities."

(Source: OHCHR and UNEP (2020). [Key messages on human rights, the environment and COVID-19.](#))

This course addresses how human rights obligations require the international community to take more ambitious action to mitigate emissions, to support adaptation that benefits persons, groups and peoples in vulnerable situations, and to address loss and damage associated with the impacts of climate change. It demonstrates the importance of rights-based, participatory climate action, which leads to more coherent, sustainable and effective outcomes. Increased awareness and education on human rights and climate change have been identified as key variables to enhance and support effective, rights-based climate action.

This course is intended for everyone with an interest in learning more about climate change and human rights; including policy-makers, students, experts, activists and academics. The course will provide you with tools to better understand, discuss, participate, and act on climate change as well as human rights challenges and opportunities.

The course has been developed by the Paris Committee on Capacity-building (PCCB) with support from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), with funding support from Germany's Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) through the German Corporation for International Cooperation GmbH (GIZ).

A snapshot of key climate change impacts on human rights

- The World Health Organization (WHO) indicates that, between 2030 and 2050, climate change is expected to cause approximately 250,000 additional deaths each year from malnutrition, malaria, diarrhoea and heat stress alone.
- According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), climate change is causing extreme weather, drought, flooding and other disasters, depriving millions of people around the world of a livelihood. The nearly 78 per cent of the world's poor – approximately 800 million people – who live in rural areas, many of whom rely on agriculture, forestry and fisheries for their survival, are particularly affected.
- Without urgent action, climate change impacts could push an additional 100 million people into poverty by 2030, according to the World Bank.

(Source: OHCHR (2021). [Frequently Asked Questions on Human Rights and Climate Change](#))

- The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has noted that “the effectiveness of decision-making and governance is enhanced by the involvement of local stakeholders (particularly those most vulnerable to climate change, including indigenous peoples) in the selection, evaluation, implementation and monitoring of policy instruments for land-based climate change adaptation and mitigation.”

(Source: IPCC (2020). “Summary for policymakers”, in: [Climate Change and Land: An IPCC Special Report on climate change, desertification, land degradation, sustainable land management, food security, and greenhouse gas fluxes in terrestrial ecosystems](#), p. 30.)

PCCB, UNFCCC and OHCHR wish to express their gratitude to the expert reviewers who contributed to the development of the course.

COURSE MODULE & SUB-MODULE TITLES

Overview

Introduction

Module 1: Human Rights Impacts of Climate Change and Corresponding Human Rights Obligations

What will you learn?

Climate change: An overview

Human rights in the era of climate change

Human rights obligations and climate change

Additional resources

Quiz

Module 2: Human Rights in Climate Negotiations, Agreements and Action

What will you learn?

Incorporating human rights in climate change negotiations

Incorporating human rights in climate change agreements

Human rights in climate change decisions

Human rights in climate action

Additional resources

Quiz

Module 3: Climate Change in Human Rights Processes, Agreements and Action

What will you learn?

Climate change in human rights processes, agreements and action

The United Nations Human Rights Council

The Special Procedure mandate-holders

The Human Rights Treaty Bodies

The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

National Human Rights Institutions

Climate change and human rights: Joint action

Additional resources

Quiz

Module 4: Persons, Groups and Peoples in Vulnerable Situations

What will you learn?

Persons, groups and peoples in marginalized situations

Women and gender-responsive climate action

Children

Indigenous peoples

Migrants and people on the move in the context of climate change
Persons with disabilities
Older persons
Additional resources
Quiz

Module 5: Regional and National Frameworks and Action

What will you learn?
Regional human rights systems
Regional human rights systems: Europe
Regional human rights systems: The Americas
Regional human rights systems: Africa
Emerging human rights systems: The Asia-Pacific region
National action
Additional resources
Quiz

Module 6: Rights-Based Climate Litigation

What will you learn?
Climate litigation: Introduction and trends
Human rights in climate litigation
Case 1: Indigenous peoples and litigation
Case 2: States' obligation to implement adaptation measures
Case 3: States' obligations to mitigate climate change
Case 4: Corporate responsibility for climate change
Case 5: Climate change, migration and litigation
Additional resources
Quiz

Module 7: Right to Development and Climate Change in Focus

What will you learn?
Right to development, rights holders and duty bearers
Climate change and The Declaration on the Right to Development
The right to development in the Paris Agreement
Climate change in the global development agenda
International cooperation in climate action
Key actors
Additional resources
Summary

MODULE LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Module 1

Overview: Module 1 consists of an introduction to human rights and climate change, an overview of the human right impacts of climate change, and the corresponding human rights obligations. The module will enhance your understanding of the link between human rights and climate change and the need to integrate human rights in climate action at all levels.

Learning objectives: After completing this module, you will be able to:

- Identify the relationship between climate change and human rights.
- Describe the direct and indirect impacts of climate change on human rights.
- Highlight the human right obligations of both state and non-state actors arising in relation to climate change, access to remedy and accountability of state and non-state actors.
- Recognize the value of a human rights-based approach to climate action.

Module 2

Overview: Module 2 introduces you to the incorporation of human rights in global climate change negotiations, agreements and action. It briefly highlights relevant references to human rights in climate negotiations and agreements and some key human rights considerations in climate action.

Learning objectives: After completing this module, you will be able to:

- Outline how human rights have been discussed in climate negotiations.
- Describe how climate agreements such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement address human rights concerns.
- Discuss strategies that can be used to integrate human rights in climate action.

Module 3

Overview: Module 3 introduces you to the incorporation of climate change in human rights processes, agreements and action. It briefly highlights key climate change considerations in human rights action and builds understanding on how climate change considerations are reflected in the decisions and work of human rights mechanisms.

Learning objectives: After completing this module, you will be able to:

- Discuss how climate change has been reflected in human rights processes, agreements and action.
- Outline how human rights mechanisms have attempted to address climate change concerns.
- Describe the entities involved in incorporating climate change in human rights action and the strategies they have used.

Module 4

Overview: Module 4 provides an introduction to the disproportionate impacts of climate change on persons, groups and peoples in vulnerable situations, such as women, children, future generations, indigenous peoples, environmental human rights defenders, migrants, persons with disabilities, older persons and the poor, and highlights considerations made in international and national processes to address these impacts.

Learning objectives: After completing this module, you will be able to:

- Describe some of the ways that climate change disproportionately affects persons, groups and peoples in vulnerable situations.
- Identify rights-based approaches for the protection and empowerment of persons, groups and peoples disproportionately affected by climate change.

Module 5

Overview: Module 5 provides an introductory overview to key regional human rights frameworks and mechanisms. The module also highlights examples of national actions and actors protecting human rights in the context of climate change.

Learning objectives: After completing this module, you will be able to:

- Identify how climate change is addressed through regional human rights frameworks.
- Explain the link between regional human rights frameworks and national human rights action in addressing climate change issues.
- Define roles of different actors involved in human rights-based climate action at the regional and national level.

Module 6

Overview: Module 6 highlights efforts by rightsholders to hold duty bearers accountable for climate change and the protection of human rights through examples of climate change litigation.

Learning objectives: After completing this module, you will be able to:

- State the key objectives of climate change litigation.
- Describe current trends in climate change litigation.
- Outline how human rights have been applied to seek redress for climate harms.

Module 7

Overview: Module 7 is a case study on the linkages between climate change and the right to development. It highlights the synergies between key elements and principles of the right to development and international climate laws and policies, including the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement. It also highlights the key actors operationalizing the right to development in climate action and the role of international cooperation.

Learning objectives: After completing this module, you will be able to:

- Describe the right to development and its key features.
- Identify key actors, laws and policies related to climate change and the right to development.
- Illustrate the linkage between climate change and the right to development including:
 - the obstacles climate change poses to realization of the right to development; and
 - the guidance the right to development offers for effective climate action.
- Explain human rights obligations related to the right to development in the context of international cooperation to address climate change.

METHODOLOGY, CERTIFICATION AND FEEDBACK

The course is self-paced and not moderated. It has been divided into seven modules, packaged in one single interactive material. The modules are self-standing and can be completed in any order. It is however suggested to start the course with Module 1, providing a general introduction of the human rights impacts of climate change, and the corresponding human rights obligations, and then continue with the thematic modules of interest. Each module contains interactive content and ends with a short non-compulsory quiz. Each module takes around 25 minutes to complete. All modules can be downloaded in PDF format for offline study or for training purposes. The modules also contain a wealth of links to other resources on

climate change and human rights and are thus a gateway to more in depth and specific information. All these resources open in new external windows.

The interactive material is followed by a final assessment which aims to assess the achievement of the learning objectives. The assessment contains 20 multiple choice questions. After completing at least 70% of the interactive material and passing the final assessment with at least 70% of correct answers within 5 attempts, the learner can automatically download a certificate of completion from the certification tab.

Participants can provide feedback on the course by filling a feedback form, which can be accessed in the 'Certificate' section on the course page.

TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

Browser:

- The course works best with Firefox 50 or higher
- The course is also compatible with Google Chrome and Internet Explorer
- JavaScript & Cookies must be enabled

Platform: 2000, NT, ME, XP or superior; MacOS 9 or MacOS X

Hardware: 64 MB of RAM, 1 GB of free disk space

Modem: 128 K