

# International Environmental Justice and the Climate Change Challenge

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[Word version of course outline](#)

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**Figure: WIND TURBINE**

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## Overview

This course uses the example of climate change to explore key environmental and geographical issues including: justice, scale, international equality, global political processes, and environmental change. We begin by examining the foundation and principles of the environmental movement, distinguishing between different types of environmentalism and articulating early environmental conflicts between the North and South (presentations 1, 2,

4). We then develop ideas of environmental justice (presentation 3) and how it applies to climate change.

This topic provides the scope for debate among students because of the contentious nature of the subject, and the lack of clear answers. Importantly this course focuses on presenting *multiple* explanations and *diverse* viewpoints and is intended to provide context, history and structure for students' thinking. Students are not provided with solutions, but instead encouraged to develop their own explanations and responses to climate change and justice.

## Teaching and Learning Context

This course is one section of a larger course called Geography, Development and Environment that runs as a first year course in the [Department of Environmental and Geographical Science](#) at the University of Cape Town.

The course work provided here is one of 3 modules. The modules are structured to focus on: the global economic environment, regional dynamics of development, and the North-South debates on environmental problems. This module falls under the theme of North-South debates on environmental problems. The courses use theories of underdevelopment and climatic change to explain global and regional inequalities and environmental problems. Key concepts in the course are: trade, foreign aid, regional integration, and climatic change.

The objectives of this section of the course are to begin understanding:

1. the concepts of environmental justice and climate change,
2. the relationship between environmental change and development, and
3. the international politics of global environmental change,

## Course Components

*Section 1* gives an overview of environmental history. The reason for this is to situate current debates within a long time span, to introduce the range of environmental issues, and begin getting students to think about different kinds of environmentalism: e.g. green/brown, preservation/wise use. ([ppt](#))

*Section 2* is intended to get students to begin thinking critically about what exactly the environmental crisis is about. Rather than provide answers, this presentation is largely about provoking questions and showing different explanations. (The use of graphs showing increased resource consumption, population, and temperature might add to this, including the typical increased use contrasted with predictions of population levelling, reduced CFCs.)

Different explanations of the environmental crisis are put forward in order to encourage students to think outside their preconceived solutions (population, poverty, technology as problem/solution). It is particularly useful to contrast these in classrooms where students have very different types of preconceived solutions. ([ppt](#))

*Section 3* introduces the idea of environmental justice (including race, class and gender justice). It begins with the use of the concept in the 1980s in the US, then expands this idea to international issues. Importantly, environmental justice is noted to be an environmental issue with underlying social causes. ([ppt](#))

Reading: Munnik, Victor. 2007. Solidarity for Environmental Justice in South Africa. Report prepared for groundwork

<http://www.groundwork.org.za/Publications/Solidarity%20for%20EJ%20in%20SA.pdf>



#### BALANCE

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*Section 4* traces the genealogy of the idea of sustainable development. It builds on the environmental history of the separation between North and South environmentalism.

Importantly, it shows a discursive shift between “environmentalism as a *limit* to economic growth” and the “environmental crisis as hindering development.” The second important piece of this presentation is to show the vagueness of the concept of sustainable development and how it has been used in different ways. The presentation briefly introduces the ideas of ecological modernization and social/political ecology/civic environmentalism.

Students may not understand these concepts in depth here, but the ideas are picked up on further in the course. ([ppt](#))

Reading: Sachs, Wolfgang. 2002. Fairness in a Fragile World: The Johannesburg Agenda. *Development* 45, 3: 12-17.

*Section 5* is an overview of climate change, including the basic explanation and definitions of key concepts like adaptation and mitigation. ([ppt](#))

*Section 6* explains why climate change is a justice issue. It provides three main aspects: who causes climate change, who will be impacted, and who should pay. This presentation gives details for the first two aspects which are less controversial. It introduces the concepts of social and environmental vulnerability. ([ppt](#))

Reading: Okereke, Chukwumerije. 2006. Global Environmental Sustainability: Intragenerational equity and conceptions of justice in multilateral environmental regimes. *Geoforum* 37: 725-738.

Video: WWF Climate witness

[http://wwf.panda.org/about\\_our\\_earth/aboutcc/problems/people\\_at\\_risk/personal\\_stories/](http://wwf.panda.org/about_our_earth/aboutcc/problems/people_at_risk/personal_stories/)



#### GIRAFFE IN A RIVER

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*Section 7* builds on presentation 6 to begin discussing who should pay for the reduction of greenhouse gasses and/or adaptation strategies and/or for damages from climate change. It provides five responses for why the global North, despite clear evidence that it is the main contributor, may be unwilling to pay. These responses are intended to be general comments which underpin many of the existing, vague political responses, and are intended to be controversial and provoke debate. ([ppt](#))

Reading: Klinsky, Sonja and Hadi Dowlatabadi (2009) Conceptualizations of justice in climate policy. *Climate Policy* 9. 88-108.

*Section 8* provides an overview of international political responses to climate change, including some of the mechanisms used to redress climate change and climate justice. This presentation serves as context for students to debate the mechanisms and their implications which are further detailed in presentations 9 and 10. ([ppt](#))

Reading: Brown, Donald A. (2010) Have We Been Asking the Wrong Questions About Climate Change Science? Why Strong Climate Change Ethical Duties Exist Before Scientific Uncertainties are Resolved. Posted July 16, 2010. <http://rockblogs.psu.edu/climate/2010/07/>



**OUR PLANET.**

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*Section 9* details carbon trading as a particular example of a mechanism for addressing climate change. It shows the underlying assumptions of carbon trade, and how this concept links to ecological modernization. It provides arguments for the strengths and weakness of carbon trade as a concept and in practice. ([ppt](#))

Reading: Bond, Patrick (2011) From Copenhagen to Cancún to Durban: Moving Deckchairs on the Climate Titanic. *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism*. 22:2, 3-26.

Video: The Story of Cap and Trade: <http://www.storyofstuff.org/movies-all/story-of-cap-trade/>

*Section 10* assesses the merit of using tree planting in the global South as a mitigation measure. It builds on a reading which contrasts how the idea is viewed from the perspectives of ecological modernization and civic environmentalism. ([ppt](#))

Reading: Backstrand and Lovbrand. 2006. Planting Tress to Mitigate Climate Change: Contested Discoures of Ecological Modernization, Green Governmentality and Civic Environmentalism. *Global Environmental Politics*. 6.1 50-75.

*Section 11* provides an overview of some responses to the climate challenge. Individual lifestyle and choice are noted as important, and students are encouraged to respond in their own manner to this point. But importantly this is contextualized within the big picture and the importance of structural and political causes are raised. ([ppt](#))

## Reference List

Backstrand and Lovbrand. 2006. Planting Tress to Mitigate Climate Change: Contested Discoures of Ecological Modernization, Green Governmentality and Civic Environmentalism. *Global Environmental Politics*. 6.1 50-75.

Bond, Patrick (2010) Climate debt owed to Africa: What to demand and how to collect? Links International Journal of Social Renewal. <http://links.org.au/node/1675>

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