

## As Capitalism Drives Us Toward Extinction, What Does Real Climate Justice Look Like?



Back in 2018, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) warned [we had only 12 years left](#) to prevent the climate's current trajectory from reaching a point where the damage is not only catastrophic but irreversible. Two years on, very little has been done to stop us from reaching that point.

What's important to know, as we begin this critical decade, is that there is no stopping climate change. It is here and we are already feeling its effects, [some countries more acutely](#) than others. It is an incredibly unfortunate reality that those who participated least in the actions that led us to this point are also those who are, and will continue to be, its first victims.

Although we can no longer prevent climate change, we can participate in climate justice. Climate justice demands bold actions by communities to build a new regenerative economy and expose false solutions that allow some to take the easy way out.



### **What does climate justice mean?**

The concept of climate justice addresses civil rights and the notion that climate change will dramatically impact our most basic human rights. The former president of Ireland, Mary Robinson, [described the concept to the United Nations](#) as a “shift from discourse on greenhouse gases and melting ice caps into a civil rights movement with the people and communities most vulnerable to climate impacts at its heart.”

At its core, climate justice is a form of environmental justice. It argues that all species, humans and otherwise, have a fundamental right to an equal chance for survival. To achieve this, we need to both focus on the root causes of climate change as well as build a solutions-oriented grassroots movement to change the way we live.

To participate in climate justice, individuals and communities must reject and expose the disingenuous promises made by bad corporate and governmental actors, and instead confront organizations to act decisively or get out of the way.



## How cities are going green

Climate justice is a community effort, and some cities around the world have taken the message to heart. One of those is Copenhagen, the capital of Denmark, which continues to impress not only for its sustainability but its innovation. Copenhagen is close to its goal of becoming [carbon-neutral by the year 2025](#), 25 years ahead of the [European goal of being fully carbon neutral by 2050](#). The IPCC also says reaching climate neutrality by 2050 is essential.

[Renewable energy](#), which is both stable and inexpensive, is at the heart of the city's initiative. In addition to a fleet of electric buses and boats, one of Copenhagen's most marked achievements will also be its monument to going green: the [Copenhill](#), a site that transforms waste into energy for

thousands of homes and businesses. To prevent it from being an eyesore, the city has turned the spot into an artificial ski center.

The biggest lesson that Copenhagen [and Denmark generally](#) offers for the rest of the world is the benefit of putting climate solutions first and building around them, rather than trying to fit them into existing plans. Denmark's bicycling infrastructure is a perfect example of what happens with excellent planning: cycling in Denmark is both popular and extremely easy to do (the two complement one another). It wouldn't be as popular, of course, if the city's infrastructure hadn't put cycling considerations at the center of its infrastructure policies.



## Conscious capitalism isn't enough

[Conscious capitalism](#) is a catchy phrase that allows businesses to pursue a profit while recognizing they must meet the needs of all stakeholders, particularly those that can't speak for themselves (like the environment). Over the past decade, industry thought leaders have said that conscious capitalism could be what saves us. While there are merits to the practice, it's no longer enough.

Going "conscious" doesn't eliminate the need for corporations and shareholders – their most important stakeholders – to continue producing more and finding cheaper ways to do it. In [an article](#) in The Guardian, Nicole Aschoff argued that even the most conscious-looking of corporations, Whole Foods, represent the abysmal failure of the practice.

Sure, the store markets itself as a feel-good experience where local, organic, and sustainable food practices are on sharp display. But in 2017, hedge fund managers demanded an overhaul to save the store. We all know what happened next: the [acquisition of Whole Foods by Amazon](#).

The fact is, capitalism – both economic and cultural – is the [driving force behind climate change](#), and attempts to use that system to save ourselves, as we're doing now, means falling for the kind of disingenuous promise that climate justice advocates reject.



## Collective action is the way forward

While it's true that the earth depends on social movements as well as accountability from businesses, it's important not to rule out the ways people – both collectively and individually – can make a difference. Members of groups like [Extinction Rebellion](#) play a key role helping build support for actions like overhauling the electrical grid through widespread deployment of renewable energy. XR is pushing for the use of other existing technologies that will allow us to decarbonize quickly – without allowing venture capitalists to put those market technologies out of reach.

For example, it's impossible [for those living on scarce resources](#) to invest in pricey consumer tech that can help "reduce the carbon footprint" of the individual. Some people can go out and buy all the tools needed to [implement the latest smart home energy strategies](#), like smart washers and dryers, or creating smart assistant routines for their interconnected devices.

But for people who are struggling to make mortgage payments or those being priced out of the housing market, their contribution to climate solutions can be different, like lowering their thermostats when they're out of the house or making sure they run their dishwashers and dryers only with full loads, to maximize energy use.

By taking collective action, individuals can make a difference in the way solutions are implemented, and in doing so, they'll ensure that low income communities won't be disproportionately punished for a crisis they didn't create. So far, humans have taken little meaningful action to deal with climate change, but what success has occurred is the product of people taking collective action. A just climate future requires it.



[climate crisis](#)[renewable energy](#)[climate justice](#)