

Methane Reduction and Environmental Justice at a Crossroads: What's at stake?

Waste will be critical on the COP28 agenda as a global effort to reduce methane continues to gather momentum, with countries under higher pressure to deliver on its commitment to reach the [Global Methane Pledge \(GMP\)](#). Country endorsements of the GMP have grown to more than 150, and more than 50 countries have developed national methane action plans or are in the process of doing so, while substantial new financial resources are being directed to the effort.

Methane, a short lived greenhouse gas over 80 times as potent as CO₂, is vital to achieving the Paris Climate Agreement's goal of limiting global warming to 1.5°C, and waste is the third largest source of methane, primarily from landfilling organic waste.

The COP28 GAIA Delegation brings together a diverse group of Global South representatives from the frontlines of organizing on waste and environmental justice. GAIA members from Ecuador, Brazil, India, South Africa, Ghana, Uganda, Philippines, Indonesia, Nigeria and Bangladesh, among others, will be championing zero waste solutions that demonstrate how we can rapidly reduce methane emissions from the waste sector by scaling up proven organic waste management strategies rooted in environmental justice principles with proven co-benefits for livelihoods, quality of life, governance, and community health.

Now the question at hand is: how can we ensure a fair, just, and sustainable implementation of solutions?

Across the globe, ensuring an effective implementation of a methane reduction agenda according to environmental justice principles is not without obstacles. It is often the case that waste sector decision-making and investment are significantly unaligned, preventing the coherent coordination among local communities and governments, national strategies, and financial incentives. Failure to see the interconnections between the issues of justice, and lack of strategy and alignment can often result in the adoption of "false solutions" e.g. waste-to-energy incineration. In sum, environmental justice principles are often neglected in waste management approaches, exacerbating social divisions and excluding critical stakeholders, especially in the informal sector.

Keeping organics out of landfills is a central component of the zero waste movement, which empowers towns, cities, and regional governments to play a leading role in countering the climate crisis. It is already [yielding results in hundreds of diverse locales worldwide](#), and carries an array of co-benefits: [creating more and better jobs, building stronger communities, improving public health, reducing environmental pollution, fostering better governance, and addressing inequalities and societal injustices](#).

The Environmental Justice Principles for Fast Action on Waste and Methane

The Environmental Justice Principles for Fast Action on Waste and Methane, has been produced by GAIA in collaboration with environmental justice advocates and zero waste practitioners from 41 different countries over the last few months. This set of EJ principles provides guidance to policymakers and key stakeholders on how to integrate community members and waste workers in the design and implementation of waste systems, which tends to support sustainability over time, especially when complemented by government strategies.

Environmental justice is key to ensuring climate solutions that are fair, just, and sustainable in the future. Up until now, and despite its importance, there has been no central set of values and principles to guide decision-makers in order to ensure that the right steps are being taken to incorporate justice into national plans for methane reduction.

The Framework includes a vision for systems change towards zero waste, climate justice, and quick action on methane reduction. Furthermore, it outlines 5 environmental justice principles for the waste sector. It is also complemented with guidance for policymakers and checklists for NDCs that are anchored to the 5 principles. Successful implementation of organic waste diversion in line with EJ principles builds community, waste worker, and local government buy-in and demonstrates the practical effectiveness of these strategies, including important co-benefits in livelihoods and environmental health.

