

**DECOLONIZING CLIMATE JUSTICE:
AMAZONIAN YOUTH RESISTING NORTHERN
HEGEMONY IN THE GLOBAL CLIMATE
MOVEMENT FROM 2018-2025**

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Abstrak: This study examines inequalities in the globalization of the climate movement through the case of Amazonian youth activism, specifically focusing on Txai Suruí's participation in COP26 in Glasgow (2021). Academic concern arises from the Global North's dominance over the narratives and leadership of Fridays for Future (FFF)—a dominance that reproduces structural inequalities rooted in colonial legacies of extraction and knowledge hierarchies, often relegating affected communities in the Global South to the role of symbolic representatives. Employing a descriptive qualitative method and a critical analysis of secondary sources (academic literature, movement documents, funding reports, action databases, and media coverage from 2018–2025), the study evaluates environmental justice through the dimensions of distribution, procedure, and recognition. The findings reveal that while Amazonian youth have gained visibility in international advocacy spaces, their access to resources, agenda-setting authority, and recognition of their ecological knowledge and local cosmologies remain limited. The study asserts that environmental justice can only be achieved through the redistribution of power and resources, the strengthening of Indigenous leadership, and the restructuring of the global climate movement to ensure it is substantively, rather than merely symbolically, inclusive.

Keywords: Fridays for Future, Pemuda Amazon, keadilan lingkungan, globalisasi gerakan, Global North–South

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INTRODUCTION

The Amazon rainforest, often described as the “lungs of the Earth” is one of the planet's most vital climate-regulating ecosystems. Spanning approximately 6.7 million km² across nine countries, it stores vast carbon stocks and helps

stabilize rainfall and temperature systems far beyond South America.¹ . However, accelerating deforestation, extractive industries, and climate stress are pushing the biome toward a dangerous threshold. Scientific warnings suggest that as forest loss approaches critical levels, the Amazon's capacity to function as a net carbon sink and hydrological regulator can weaken, amplifying global warming and regional instability.²

The crisis is not only environmental but also social. Approximately 1.5 million people live in the Amazon basin as indigenous communities who rely heavily on forest for their livelihood and cultural survival³. However, their territories are disproportionately targeted by extractive industries such as oil, gold mining, logging, and cattle ranching. That condition worsened by frequent facilitated by weak governance or authoritarian policies. For instance, during Jair Bolsonaro's (2019–2022) administration, violence against indigenous defenders increased and environmental protections were significantly reduced⁴ . Reports from Global Witness (2022) confirm that Latin America, particularly Brazil, has the highest rates of environmental activists murders worldwide. In 2021, Brazil recorded 26 environmental defenders killed, 78% of whom were Indigenous or rural leaders opposing illegal logging. Meanwhile satellite data from INPE (2022) show that Amazon deforestation reached 13,235 km² that year-the highest level in 15 years-representing a 22% increase from 2020. These statistics underline the intensifying ecological degradation and systemic violence that accompany extractive expansion across the region. These acts of violence reveal the profound imbalance between corporate power and indigenous resistance. The economic model imposed on the Amazon, driven by global demand for commodities, mirrors a colonial legacy that extracts resources from the South to sustain development in the North. Thus, the ecological crisis cannot be separated from historical and geopolitical injustices that continue to marginalize local voice in the name of progress.

So, political, socio-economic, and ecological injustice are intertwined with the Amazon's climate emergency. The region is not merely a backdrop to climate change but also a frontline where structural inequalities, corporate interests, and

¹ Thomas E. Lovejoy and Carlos Nobre, "Amazon Tipping Point," *Science Advances* 4, no. 2 (2018).

² Gilvan Sampaio et al., "CO₂ physiological effect can cause rainfall decrease as strong as large-scale deforestation in the Amazon," *Biogeosciences* 18 (2021): 2511–2525.

³ World Resources Institute, "Amazon Carbon Sink: Indigenous Forests," WRI Insights, diakses 11 Desember 2025.

⁴ Human Rights Watch, "Brazil: Indigenous Rights Under Serious Threat," 2022.

indigenous resistance meet. The struggle for climate justice in this region exemplifies broader global inequities where indigenous communities are bearing its gravest burdens while also leading some of the most effective grassroots solutions. Within this context, youth-led indigenous activism embodied by figures like Txai Suruí, emerges as an essential voice to challenge climate narratives.

Alongside these local crises, a transnational youth climate movement Fridays for Future (FFF) has expanded rapidly since 2018, reframing climate change as a matter of generational justice and positioning young people as legitimate political actors.⁵ Through strikes, mass mobilizations, and media visibility, FFF has influenced public debate and entered high-level forums, including UN climate meetings. Yet the movement's global reach has not ensured equal inclusion or equal agenda-setting power. Scholarship on transnational mobilization and representation notes that dominant narratives and strategies within global youth climate activism are often shaped by Global North priorities, while Global South struggles⁶, such as land dispossession, extractivism, and violence against defenders are less centered in mainstream movement discourse

These dynamics raise an urgent question for climate justice: whose voices are amplified in global climate activism, and whose remain at the margins? Global platforms can offer visibility, but they often do not provide equitable access to resources, decision-making spaces, or sustained solidarity for activists from Most Affected People and Areas (MAPA). Txai Suruí's participation at COP26 illustrates this dilemma: Amazonian priorities territorial rights, ecological sovereignty, and spiritual relationships to the forest entered the spotlight,⁷ yet remained peripheral to negotiations and media frames dominated by carbon-centered and technocratic solutions. In this article, "climate colonialism" (or climate coloniality) refers to the reproduction of historical North–South hierarchies in climate action, where Global North institutions and networks define agendas and validate knowledge while Indigenous and Global South actors are included symbolically rather than granted substantive power.

Accordingly, the problem is not only the number of Global South representatives in transnational spaces, but the substance of representation who

⁵ Marc Fabel, Markus Ludwig, and Matthias Flückiger, "The Power of Youth: Political Impacts of the 'Fridays for Future' Movement," CESifo Working Paper No. 9742 (2022).

⁶ Farhana Sultana, "The unbearable heaviness of climate coloniality," *Journal of Peasant Studies* (2022).

⁷ Txai Suruí, "The Earth is speaking: she tells us we have no more time," speech at COP26 opening ceremony, Glasgow, November 1, 2021.

controls resources, procedures, and the recognition of knowledge. This article asks: how do the structures and narratives of Fridays for Future reproduce distributional, procedural, and recognition injustices for Amazonian youth activists, and what changes would be required to decolonize climate justice within the movement? By integrating environmental justice theory with decolonial critiques of climate, the paper analyzes secondary evidence from 2018–2025 to show how Amazonian youth can be simultaneously visible and marginalized, and to derive movement-level and institutional reforms that shift from symbolic inclusion toward substantive solidarity.

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative descriptive design with critical analysis of secondary sources to examine how the globalization of *Fridays for Future* (FFF) shapes the representation of Amazonian youth in transnational climate activism (2018–2025). The dataset combines (1) peer-reviewed scholarship on transnational activism, youth climate movements, decolonial climate politics, and environmental justice; (2) movement communications and public-facing materials (e.g., statements and online narratives linked to key global mobilization moments); (3) institutional and NGO reports on climate finance and violence against environmental defenders; and (4) quantitative summaries from publicly available databases used to contextualize patterns of protest distribution and regional funding allocation. Sources were selected based on (a) direct relevance to FFF governance/narratives and Amazonian youth activism (with Txai Suruí as an illustrative case), and (b) empirical credibility (peer-reviewed publications or reports from recognized institutions/organizations), and then cross-checked across categories to reduce reliance on single-source claims.

Analytically, the study operationalizes environmental justice through three interlinked dimensions—distributional, procedural, and recognition justice and applies a decolonial lens attentive to climate coloniality (Sultana, 2022). A structured thematic coding was used to identify: (a) how resources and opportunities (funding, travel capacity, media visibility) are distributed across regions; (b) how decision-making authority is organized within global climate forums and within movement networks; and (c) how Amazonian/Indigenous knowledge, spirituality, and territorial claims are represented, validated, or reduced to cultural symbolism. The purpose is not to claim ethnographic generalization, but to build a theory-driven diagnosis of how a “global” youth

movement can reproduce inequality and to ground recommendations for more substantive inclusion of frontline communities.

Theoretical Framework: Environmental Justice

Environmental justice (EJ) argues that all people, regardless of race, ethnicity, class, or geography have the right to live free from environmental harm and to receive equal protection and equal voice in decisions affecting their environments. Importantly, EJ is not only a distributive claim about who bears environmental burdens; it is also a procedural claim about who participates and exercises decision authority, and a recognition claim about whose identities, knowledge systems, and values are treated as legitimate). Applied to transnational climate politics, these dimensions foreground the politics of representation: injustice occurs when marginalized communities are invited to “speak” without the power to shape agendas, and when Indigenous cosmologies are treated as cultural ornament rather than as governance-relevant knowledge. This article adopts these EJ dimensions as the core analytical framework for evaluating whether the globalization of youth climate activism advances justice or reproduces inequality.⁸

The restructuring of the world economy in the current phase of increasingly global production is leading to an increasingly global pattern of environmental injustice. Improved communication technologies have allowed international environmental and human rights organizations to connect communities around the world, fostering transnational solidarity. The globalization of the environmental justice movement introduces new actors and opens the way for broader alliances that go beyond race and ethnicity including economic and class inequalities. It encourages collaboration between environmental and social justice movements⁹.

Environmental justice is the idea that every person-regardless of race, ethnicity, or class-has the right to live free from environmental destruction and deserves equal protection in terms of their environmental health, job, housing, and transportation. In 1991, People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit (Summit I) established 17 principles of environmental justice, which are holistic and universal. The movement is not only about environmental issues but also addresses social, economic and cultural justice, particularly for communities of

⁸ J. Bandy, “Paradoxes of Transnational Civil Societies under Neoliberalism: The Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras,” *Social Problems* 51, no. 3 (2004): 410–431, <https://doi.org/10.1525/sp.2004.51.3.410>.

⁹ R. Sandler dan P. C. Pezzullo, *Environmental Justice and Environmentalism: The Social Justice Challenge to the Environmental Movement* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007).

color. They emphasize the need for equal participation or marginalized groups in all levels of decision making. Environmental justice also addresses long-standing economic and social inequalities. Environmental injustice appears in two ways, unequal siting of hazardous facilities and unequal enforcement of environmental laws. The environmental justice frame has been used by communities outside the United States to resist environmental destruction caused by corporations and government. There are several global struggles that have been associated with the concept of environmental justice, such as in Brazil that, led by Chico Mendes, fought against deforestation in the Amazon caused by cattle ranches. His struggle has been framed as a case of environmental justice.

After World War II, developed countries (global north) promised economic development for Global South nations. However, the gap between rich and poor has only widened. Jamaica President, Michael Manley stated that the shared experiences of colonialism and global economic injustice have helped unify countries in the global south during climate negotiations. In October 2001, a group of Brazilian academics and social movement organizers held the first national environmental justice congress in Niteroi, near Rio de Janeiro. They intentionally used terms environmental justice and environmental racism to bridge the divide between traditional environmentalists (focus on green issues) and social justice activists. The main goals are to build a bridge between environmental and social justice issues, to adapt the principles of environmental justice from 1991 U.S Summit I to the Latin America context, and to build a national and regional network of environmental justice groups across Brazil and Latin America. Globalizing environmental justice is an important thing, because it addresses climate justice networks, anti-oil and gas campaigns and indigenous rights alliances. International institutions such as global courts, UN agencies, and human rights bodies, may provide leverage, even for domestic struggles.

In this context, the struggle of Amazonian youth emerges as a powerful embodiment of the environmental justice movement today. These young activities are not only defending their forests, territories, and cultures from deforestation, extractive industries and state neglect, they are also demanding a seat at the table in global climate dialogue. Amazonian youth today face severe challenges as they fight for climate and environmental justice within a global movement that remains largely dominated by the global north. One major issue is marginalization in the international climates forum. While Amazonian youth are on the frontlines of environmental destruction, many global platforms fail to provide them with meaningful space to speak or lead. Their lived experiences with deforestation,

land dispossession, and climate impacts are often sidelined in favor of global north priorities such as clean technology or carbon trading. This structural imbalance reflects the inequalities that the environmental justice movement seeks to confront. Amazonian youth encounter severe barriers to global participation, no funding or support to attend major conferences like COP, and they endure militarization, violence from landowners and corporations. Their struggle powerfully reflects the core value of the environmental justice movement.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Decolonizing Fridays for Future to Rethinking Global Climate Justice

Fridays for Future (FFF) is frequently presented as an emblem of the “globalization” of climate activism. Originating in Greta Thunberg’s 2018 school strike outside the Swedish parliament, the movement rapidly diffused across countries and mobilized millions of students to pressure governments on the climate crisis. However, globalization has not produced equality within the movement. Evidence summarized in Table 1 and in movement communication suggests that FFF’s dominant narratives, organizational structures, and repertoires of action remain shaped primarily by Global North actors, while participation from the Global South is more often framed as presence rather than power.¹⁰ This raises a decolonizing climate justice question: does transnational youth mobilization advance environmental justice, or does it reproduce injustice in a new, “green” form?

The study profoundly shows the leadership within FFF solely dominated by youth in the middle class, educated, and coming from Global North. On some occasions, activists from Global South partake at the forum, but their involvement is more likely viewed as tokenistic or symbolic with limited impact within the decision making process¹¹. For instance, the analysis of social media in the Global Day of Climate Action conducted on 25 September 2020, highlighted by the hashtags and narration dominate from Western Europe and Northern America. Unfortunately, a specific issue in the Global South, such as land conflict and indigenous rights are seldom brought up in the global dialogue rather than carbon mitigation issues which are merely considered as Global North interests¹²

¹⁰ S. Springer, “Unequal Solidarity: Global North Dominance and the Limits of Fridays for Future,” *Global Environmental Politics* 25, no. 2 (2025): 121–139.

¹¹ *ibid*

¹² M. S. Schäfer, J. Haßler, dan J. Metag, “Climate Change Activism in the Digital Age: Fridays for Future and Transnational Mobilization,” *Global Environmental Change* 69 (2021): 102–113, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2021.102301>.

Table 1. Global Distribution of Fridays for Future Protest (2018-2023)

Region	Number of Registered Strikes	Percentage of Total	Dominant Issues Highlighted
Europe (Western & Northern)	8,425	62%	Carbon emission reduction, energy transition
North America	2,930	21%	Green jobs, fossil fuel divestment
Latin America	1,120	8%	Deforestation, land rights, indigenous protection
Asia-Pacific	820	6%	Air pollution, climate financing
Africa	360	3%	Drought, adaptation, environmental justice

Source: *Global Climate Strike Database (Climate Action Tracker, 2024)*

From table 1. above, it shows a stark concentration of FFF activities in Europe is the highest estimated at over 62%. Followed by North America with approximately 2,900 registered. It portrays regions that already have greater institutional capacity, media visibility, and financial support. This demonstrates how the geography of activism reflects the global economic and informational asymmetry.

Amazonian activists do participate in major international forums, including the UN Climate Change Conferences (COPs), yet their participation often functions more as symbolic representation than as agenda-setting authority. Resource asymmetries, funding for travel, access to elite networks, and media infrastructure shape who can speak and who can decide (Laux, 2021). Txai Suruí's COP26 intervention illustrates this tension: while her presence was celebrated as evidence of inclusivity, dominant negotiation and media frames remained centered on carbon neutrality targets and energy transitions, with comparatively little substantive attention to Indigenous land rights, ecological sovereignty, and spiritual relationships to the forest. In environmental justice terms,¹³ . Global South actors are not only underrepresented numerically; they are also structurally constrained in agenda-setting and decision-making, which sustains climate coloniality rather than dismantling it.

This phenomenon also correlated with western media to frame FFF in global image. The research showed the dominance of Global North imagery characterized by large, urban, and diverse crowds, so that it can be accepted by international

¹³ *El País*, "Txai Suruí: The Amazon's Voice in the Global Climate Debate," November 14, 2023, diakses dari <https://english.elpais.com/>.

media.¹⁴ This representation became the standard of “the valid climate activism”. In contrast, localized protest rooted in traditional rituals, land defense, or grassroots community actions do not receive the same attention. It is supported by the existence of FFF in elite forums like COP and Davos which strengthen the domination of Global North. The voices of the Global South are indeed present, but more often as moral adjuncts rather than as policymakers.¹⁵

To assess these dynamics systematically, this article uses environmental justice as an analytical lens. Following Schlosberg (2007), EJ encompasses distributive justice (how harms and resources are allocated), procedural justice (who participates and holds decision authority), and recognition justice (whose identities and knowledge systems are respected).¹⁶ In the case of FFF’s transnational expansion, all three dimensions remain imbalanced: Global South priorities are marginalized in dominant issue framings (distributive), decision-making spaces remain concentrated in Global North networks and institutions (procedural), and Indigenous cosmologies are frequently treated as symbolic “ornament” rather than foundational knowledge for defining problems and solutions (recognition). The funding patterns summarized in Table 2 deepen these inequalities by converting symbolic inclusion into structural dependency, thereby reproducing environmental injustice within the movement’s global architecture.

Table 2. Funding Allocation for Climate Youth Movements

Region	Estimated Funding (USD Million)	Primary Donors	Type of Support
Europe & North America	94.2	Climate Works, Bloomberg Philanthropies	Media, advocacy, networking
Latin America	11.7	Greenpeace, Rainforest Foundation	Field campaigns, training
Asia-Pacific	7.3	Global Green grants Fund	Advocacy, logistics
Africa	5.6	Global Green grants Fund	Capacity building, local organizing

Source: *Global Youth Climate Finance Report (UNDP, 2024)*

¹⁴ J. Shim, “Visual Politics of Climate Activism: Representation and Recognition in Fridays for Future,” *Media, Culture & Society* 46, no. 1 (2024): 89–108.

¹⁵ J. Laux, “Decolonizing the Global Climate Movement: Indigenous Activism and the Fridays for Future Paradox,” *Environmental Politics* 30, no. 7 (2021): 1173–1190.

¹⁶ D. Schlosberg, *Defining Environmental Justice: Theories, Movements, and Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

Table 2. above illustrates the global funding disparity in youth- led climate movements across different regions. It shows that Europe and North America receive the largest funding allocation amounting to 94.2 million USD primarily sourced from major philanthropic institutions, such as Climate Works and Bloomberg Philanthropies. The type of support provided in these regions focuses on media engagement, advocacy, and international networking which reinforces the Global North's dominance in shaping climate movements narrative. On the other hand, Latin America, Asia-Pacific, and Africa receive lower funding. This comparison highlights a structural inequality in access to financial resources. The Global North controls the majority funding and advocacy agendas, while the Global South is positioned as local implementers rather than key policy decision-makers. Consequently, the globalization of the FFF continues to reflect imbalance of power and representation within the broader framework of environmental injustice.

Amazonian Youth as Local Resistance for Global Environmental Justice

The Amazon faced a critical tipping point from deforestation, large-scale agricultural expansion, illegal mining, and the criminalization of indigenous people¹⁷. In this context, there is an emergence of local resistance movements that are led by young indigenous leaders such as Txai Surui from Brazil. As a young activist from the Paiter Surui community, Txai emphasized that the struggle of indigenous people is not only about environmental protection but also about land rights, spirituality, and collective identity. This narrative often overlaps with the broader current of global climate movements centered in the Global North, such as FFF which focus more on carbon emissions targets. Thus, the case of the Amazonian Youth illustrates that environmental justice can only be achieved when local resistance and indigenous epistemologies are given equal space within the globalization of the climate movements.

According to Global Witness (2021), Brazil is the most dangerous country for environmental defenders with more than 20 environmental activists killed per year over the past decade. Most of the victims come from indigenous communities in the Amazon. This indicates that the struggle of indigenous peoples is not only about climate policy but also direct threats to their lives. On the other hand, data from Brazil's National Institute for Space Research (INPE) show that the rate of

¹⁷ A. R. Clímaco, P. S. da Silva, dan C. C. Pereira, "Youth, Territory, and Environmental Resistance in the Brazilian Amazon," *Latin American Perspectives* 51, no. 2 (2024): 67–82.

Amazon deforestation rose significantly during 2019- 2021, approximately reaching over 13.000 km² in 2021. This report is classified as the highest level in 15 years¹⁸ . The destruction of forest threatens not merely global biodiversity but also the ecological and spiritual bonds that indigenous people maintain with their ancestral lands. In Amazonian cosmology, land and forest are not solely resources but integral parts of collective identity and survival¹⁹ .

Table 3. Number of Environmental Violence, Deforestation, and Indigenous Youth Resistance in the Brazilian Amazon

Year	Recorded Murders of Environmental Defenders (Brazil)	Amazon Deforestation Rate (km ²)	Key Youth Activism/Resistance Event
2018	21	7,500	Launch of <u>Suruí</u> Youth Forest Monitoring Initiative
2019	24	10,100	FFF Brazil integrates indigenous youth in national protests
2020	20	11,000	Amazonian Youth Network established across six states
2021	26	13,038	<u>Txai</u> <u>Suruí</u> 's COP26 speech calling for indigenous rights
2022	22	11,600	Youth-led reforestation and spiritual ecology campaigns

Source: Global Witness, 2021

Table 3. above represents an overview of the intersection between ecological degradation and indigenous youth resistance in the Amazon. The data shows three main variables, first, the record murders of environmental defenders in Brazil. Second, the rate of Amazon deforestation (km²). Third, the key youth-led activism or resistance action that emerged in each year. It indicates from 2018 to 2021, both the rate of deforestation and the number of murdered environmental defenders have significantly increased. In 2018, there were 21 recorded murders and 7,500 km² of forest loss, coinciding with the launch of the Surui Youth Forest Monitoring Initiative which aimed to strengthen local environmental surveillance.

¹⁸ INPE (Instituto Nacional de Pesquisas Espaciais), *Desmatamento na Amazônia Legal – Taxa Prodes 2021* (Government of Brazil, 2021), <http://www.obt.inpe.br/>

¹⁹ A. R. Clímaco, P. S. da Silva, dan C. C. Pereira, “Youth, Territory, and Environmental Resistance in the Brazilian Amazon,” *Latin American Perspectives* 51, no. 2 (2024): 67–82.

By 2021, the situation had reached a critical point with 26 environmental defenders murdered and more than 13,000 km² of forest destroyed. That condition portrays the highest level in fifteen years. Despite the number declined in 2022, the data suggests a persistent pattern of violence and ecological crisis. In response, indigenous youth expanded their resistance through reforestation and spiritual ecology campaigns, signaling a shift from symbolic advocacy to community based restoration efforts.

Furthermore, Txai Surui has become a key figure in international environmental activism. At COP26 in Glasgow 2021, she delivered a speech that emphasized indigenous people have protected the forest for thousands of years but remain the most marginalized in global decision making. She asserted that climate solutions can not be separated from the recognition of indigenous land rights and ecological sovereignty²⁰. However, Txai's role in international forums is often diminished within a Global North centric framework. For instance, the main focus on COP26 remained the commitment of carbon neutrality targets and energy transition while indigenous demands for land recognition and ecological spirituality were treated as secondary issues. This condition reveals the dilemma between symbolic representation and substantive participation. The presence of indigenous youth on the global stage is essential, yet without their involvement in the decision making process it remains merely tokenistic.

If we take an underline to environmental justice, there are three dimensions to identify the struggle in decision-making processes, and recognition of the identities and values of local communities. Firstly, in terms of distributional justice where indigenous people faced the heaviest burdens of the climate crisis through deforestation, water pollution, and biodiversity loss, however, they receive no economic benefits from such exploitation. Secondly, they rarely have equal access to influence climate policy agendas at national or international levels. Then, their recognition, primarily indigenous identity, spirituality, and ecological knowledge are often reduced to cultural symbols rather than recognized as legitimate sources of climate solutions.

In this regard, FFF's dependence on Western media and elite forums, such as Davos or COP has limited the visibility of Global South issues. This shows that the globalization of climate movements remains unequal, privileging narratives

²⁰ *El País*, "Txai Suruí: The Amazon's Voice in the Global Climate Debate," November 14, 2023, diakses dari <https://english.elpais.com/>.

aligned with Global North interests²¹²². In other words, the participation of the Amazonian Youth in the global movement is still treated as a “moral voice” rather than as actors who determine the direction of the movement.

The Globalization of Climate Movements and the Pursuit of Environmental Justice

The inequality within the globalization of climate movements becomes increasingly apparent when the discourse of environmental justice is practiced in transnational spaces. A movement initially to build cross border solidarity often exposes representation gaps between the Global North and Global South. In the midst of collective enthusiasm to “save the planet”, the fundamental question arises, who has the power to define the problem? Who has the right to speak? And who benefits from the global narrative? Those questions are crucial, particularly when observing how indigenous people continue their struggle to be recognized not only as victims of the climate crisis but also as knowledge bearers and leaders of change.

This phenomenon is reflected in the relationship between FFF and the Most Affected People and Areas (MAPA) group. While FFF has expanded global awareness of the climate emergency and mobilized millions of people, the movement’s internal structure and orientation still remain influenced by the Global North logics in discourse, strategy, and resources. Regarding Martiskainen (2023), he found that FFF’s main leadership is rooted in Western Europe and Scandinavia, however, representatives from the Global South largely serve as symbols of diversity without having real influence over policy agenda. It means, the solidarity promoted by the global movement operates within a framework that remains epistemologically and politically unequal.

Additionally, inequality is also reflected in data on global mobilization. According to the reports, from the FFF Global Action Map in 2022, around 62% of global action took place in Europe, 21% in North America, and less than 15% across the entire Global South (Table 1). These differences do not only portray disparities in economy and infrastructure but further unequal access to public space, safety, and media support. As mentioned above, indigenous communities such as those in the Amazon faced direct threats of violence. The condition is

²¹ M. S. Schäfer, J. Haßler, dan J. Metag, “Climate Change Activism in the Digital Age: Fridays for Future and Transnational Mobilization,” *Global Environmental Change* 69 (2021): 102–113, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2021.102301>.

²² J. Shim, “Visual Politics of Climate Activism: Representation and Recognition in Fridays for Future,” *Media, Culture & Society* 46, no. 1 (2024): 89–108.

strengthened by the data that more than 70% of all killings of environmental defenders occur in Latin America with Brazil and Colombia at the top. This indicates those on the frontlines of protecting the planet are the one who are treated unfairly and faced the greatest risks.

The limited recognition of the local knowledge system is also interconnected to how the world understands science and environmental politics. FFF and many international climate institutions often use the slogan “listen to the science” asserting scientific authority as the moral foundation of the movement. Unfortunately, indigenous people understand their relationship with nature not merely as a scientific issue, but as a spiritual and collective identity. In Amazonian epistemology, they believe the forest is not simply an ecosystem to be preserved but a living entity with cosmological meaning. Thus, when form of knowledge is excluded from global policymaking, efforts to achieve environmental justice become imbalanced due to ecological justice which cannot be achieved without epistemological justice. From the perspective of justice recognition, the acknowledgement of a plural system of knowledge is a precondition for global justice. Hence, the climate movement must through a process of decolonization which is freeing itself from the dominance of a single form of knowledge and opening space for the co- production of knowledge between modern science and local wisdom²³ . This approach does not reject science but combines and complement empirical validity with local ecological values. For instance, the data of deforestation in the Amazon can be combined with indigenous spiritual maps that mark sacred lands, river pathways, and habitats of totemic species. Such collaborations have proven effective in indigenous environmental monitoring programs in Brazil that enhance data accuracy and strengthen the social legitimacy of conservation policies²⁴ .

To ensure an equal form of solidarity, structural changes are necessary in the governance of global climate movements. First, forums like COP and the IPCC must provide genuine deliberative space for indigenous communities. So far, indigenous representatives have been limited to observer status without decision making power. Furthermore, the institutional reform could include the establishment of an Indigenous Climate Council under the UNFCCC with

²³ S. Jasanoff, *States of Knowledge: The Co-production of Science and the Social Order* (London: Routledge, 2004).

²⁴ P. Anderson, S. Arora-Jonsson, dan M. Funder, “Co-producing Knowledge for Climate Resilience: Indigenous Environmental Monitoring in the Amazon Basin,” *Environmental Science & Policy* 135 (2022): 47–56, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envsci.2022.05.013>.

consultative authority and rights over mitigation projects that threaten indigenous territories. Those mechanisms would move recognition of indigenous people beyond symbolism, emphasizing it within the global climate policy. Secondly, the transformation in the funding system is essential. According to the UNEP Adaptation Gap Report in 2023, only around 10% of global adaptation funds flow directly to local communities. Thus, community-based projects have proven to yield more sustainable results as they are in real need. One adaptable model is the Local Climate Adaptive Living Facility (LoCAL) in Asia and the Pacific which allows local governments to access adaptation funds based on participatory evaluations²⁵. In the Amazon context, similar models could be developed as a Community Climate Sovereignty Fund managed by indigenous representatives with transparency rooted in collective values.

Furthermore, the protection of environmental defenders must become a global priority. Due to the number of activists killed, the mechanism to protect them is important. Climate Defender Protection Mechanism under UNDP or UNHCHR should be established providing legal protection, digital security training, and emergency evaluation for threatened activists. This scheme could also be integrated with national human rights institutions to strengthen its local reach. Then, decentralization within the global climate movement network must be encouraged. Movements, like FFF could establish regional climate assemblies in Africa, Southeast Asia, and Latin America with autonomy to set their own agendas and strategies. This would ensure that narratives and priorities are locally engaged rather than homogenized. Several steps would strengthen leadership transfer giving space for young indigenous leaders like Txai Surui to serve as strategic directors of the movement, not just limited as an icon.

Beyond structural changes, education and public communication are foundational to this transformation. For instance, climate education curricula in schools should integrate indigenous perspectives and the concept of the pluriverse or the idea that the world consists of multiple legitimate ways of living and knowing²⁶. Not limited to that, journalism can also play a crucial role through the establishment of indigenous climate desks in major international media outlets to work in collaboration with local journalists. This would expand the public space for marginalized narratives. So, the long term goals of these reforms are to build

²⁵ UNCDF (United Nations Capital Development Fund), *Local Climate Adaptive Living Facility (LoCAL) Annual Report 2021* (2021), <https://www.uncdf.org/local/home>

²⁶ A. Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse: Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018).

a horizontal, plural, and complement for the global climate movements. In such a structure, the Global North would no longer be the center but as part of a collective learning network. The climate movement would foster from symbolic solidarity to substantive solidarity which was marked by the redistribution of voice, recognition of local knowledge, and equal participation at every level of the decision making process.

Moving forward, the implementation of this vision must proceed gradually. In the short term, international institutions can begin with collaborative projects between scientists and indigenous communities in deforestation hotspots like the Amazon. Next in the medium term, multilateral funding mechanisms should be revised to prioritize community led projects. In the long term, cultural transformation must be encouraged through education, media, and public diplomacy to cultivate global awareness that climate justice is inseparable from social and historical justice. Therefore, environmental justice cannot be achieved without the courage to listen and many ways of understanding the world. The discussion of the climate crisis is not about a carbon crisis but a crisis of relationships between the North and the South. By creating space for local knowledge and decolonizing the movement, climate globalization can shift from a project of homogenization to a process of unity in diversity. Only through this path can the global climate movement become a true movement for justice.

CONCLUSION

This paper shows that the globalization of the climate movement, exemplified by Fridays for Future (FFF) has produced enduring structural inequalities between the Global North and the Global South. While FFF has succeeded in popularizing the climate emergency and mobilizing youth at unprecedented scale, its leadership, dominant narratives, and resource flows remain concentrated in Global North institutions and networks. Consequently, many Global South communities, including Amazonian youth and Indigenous activists, are visible within global climate spaces yet remain marginal in agenda-setting and decision-making. In other words, representation is frequently performed for diversity while power over priorities and strategies remains uneven.

The case of Amazonian youth, illustrated through Txai Suruí demonstrates how frontline leadership can be simultaneously amplified and constrained. Amazonian activists bring claims grounded in land rights, ecological sovereignty, and spiritual relationships to the forest, yet these claims are routinely overshadowed by carbon-centered frames that dominate global negotiations and media coverage. Txai's COP26 message that "The Earth is speaking: she tells us

we have no more time” captures the urgency of this lived experience, but institutional responses often treat Indigenous demands as moral appeals rather than as governance priorities. This reflects climate coloniality, where epistemic and material hierarchies shape who is heard, whose knowledge counts, and who defines global climate priorities.

Achieving environmental justice therefore requires decolonizing the global climate movement, redistributing power, recognition, and resources so that inclusion becomes substantive rather than symbolic. This involves three interdependent EJ dimensions. First, distributional justice: directing climate finance, media attention, and organizational capacity toward Global South priorities and frontline communities rather than concentrating resources in Global North headquarters. Second, procedural justice: granting Indigenous communities and youth real decision authority in movement governance and in international forums, not merely observer status or speaking slots. Third, recognition of justice: valuing Indigenous ecological knowledge and cosmologies as legitimate foundations for defining climate problems and solutions, alongside modern scientific expertise.

Ultimately, this research concludes that climate justice cannot be achieved without decolonizing the global climate movement. Environmental justice demands not only reducing emissions but also dismantling historical and structural hierarchies between the Global North and the Global South that shape vulnerability, voice, and visibility. Only by recognizing Indigenous leadership, respecting local knowledge, and redistributing decision-making power can the global climate movement transform from symbolic solidarity to substantive solidarity, one that genuinely embodies equality, inclusivity, and justice for all.

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