

SCDN

Scottish Community Development Network

SCDN Conference 2025

***Can we Achieve Environmental Justice without
Social Justice?***

March 2026

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Can we Achieve Environmental Justice without Social Justice?

At the SCDN conference on 23rd October 2025, we asked delegates to come up with a SCDN statement on climate justice and captured the voice of our members in the below feedback from workshops.

SCDN statement on climate justice

We believe that climate justice is inseparable from broader social justice and human rights, and that meaningful engagement depends on building community capacity, fostering inclusive dialogue, and strengthening the conditions that allow women and marginalised voices to participate fully.

We believe that real power should sit closer to communities. We believe there is an urgent need to “protect people, not environments,” address extractive systems, redistribute power, and create governance structures that genuinely respond to community voice.

We call for climate justice to be embedded across all aspects of community development practice, with long-term investment in skilled, impartial and value-based community development practitioners.

What it is like for marginalised communities at present

- Communities often feel excluded from local and national decision making.
- Planning processes rarely involve residents in meaningful ways, particularly in areas undergoing rapid development or where land values are high. This lack of influence contributes to frustration, weakened trust, and a sense that decisions have already been taken without communities.
- There is inconsistent use of legislation intended to empower communities, and the limited visibility and accountability of political actors on the ground.
- Hesitancy persists, often shaped by the overwhelming nature of global challenges and a sense that local efforts have limited impact.
- Climate and social injustices exacerbate existing inequalities, particularly in communities facing poverty, ageing populations, poor housing quality, and proximity to environmental hazards.
- Rising costs, funding pressures, and overstretched local organisations undermine community capacity and contribute to feelings of powerlessness, especially among young people.
- There are gendered impacts of climate injustice. The under-representation of women of colour, and the diminishing influence of young women as they transition from school into civic life. The central roles of women as organisers, carers, and community makers continue to be undervalued.
- Limits of localism, including aggressive fiscal mechanisms, volunteer dependent community councils, and planning processes that favour corporate and developer interests.

A solution focused approach

Nurture appetite for more participatory approaches that build local knowledge, create spaces for collective learning, and support residents to shape outcomes. Ideas such as co-housing models, community-led organising, and strengthened networks are important steps toward enabling communities to connect everyday concerns with wider climate and social justice agendas.

Highlight that, when opportunities are relevant, practical, and rooted in everyday life – such as walking routes, community gardens, and intergenerational activities – people do engage.

Ensure approaches that prioritise hands-on action rather than abstract messaging, supported by accessible communication, appropriate incentives, and stronger facilitation.

Provide more local spaces for dialogue to help people understand systemic drivers of injustice and connect global issues to local impacts.

Develop a more direct relationship between communities and Scottish Government. Existing systems rely too heavily on intermediaries and do not reflect the realities of local power dynamics.

Adopt a feminist perspective, recognising persistent gender imbalances in democratic structures and develop engagement approaches that reach women who are not currently part of the conversation.

Highlight groups whose experiences are misunderstood or marginalised and design structural changes needed for communities to influence climate and social justice agendas more effectively.

Community Development as a catalyst for positive change

Community development can... bridge knowledge gaps, enable community voice and collaborative partnerships that make climate and social justice meaningful at a local level. Success stories, such as Wallacetown's school-community collaboration and youth-led "trashathon" events, were cited as examples of what is possible when belief, pride, and local commitment align.

Community development can... be a catalyst for social and climate justice – one that can build the capacity of those in power to listen, support residents to reclaim their space, and foster collaboration through culturally attuned and trust-based approaches.

Skilled, knowledgeable and value-based community development workers can... help to reduce reliance on "survival mode," and strengthen links between health, wellbeing, and climate resilience.

To find out more read our [Strategy](#)

For further information go to [our website](#) or email susan.campbell@scdn.scot

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