

RIO TO BELEM

**Confronting the Climate
Governance Paradox
through Natural Rights
Led Governance (NRLG)**



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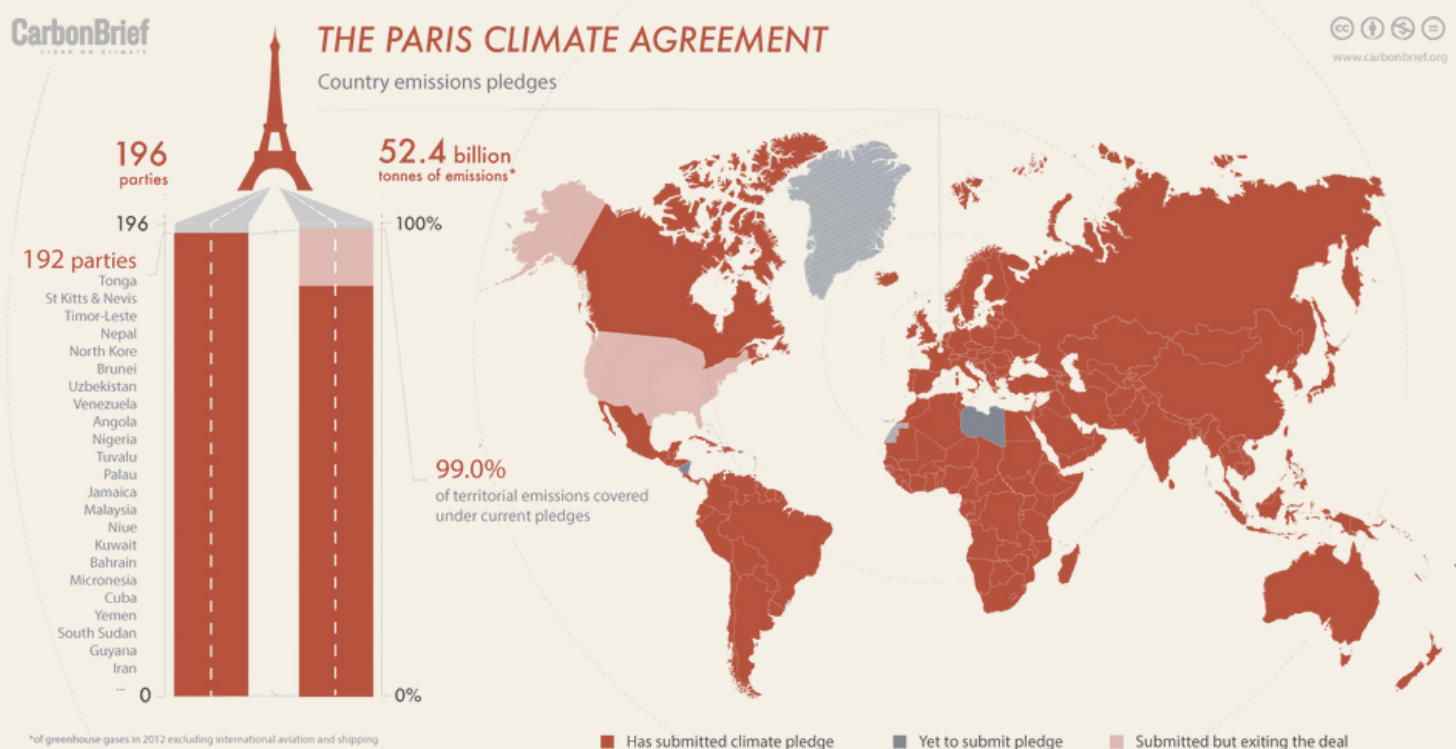
It began in Rio de Janeiro, 1992, a moment when the world paused to look at itself. For the first time in modern history, nations gathered under one roof to ask a simple but profound question: how long can we grow by consuming the very planet that sustains us?

The Earth Summit gave birth to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), founded on the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR), a quiet recognition that the burden of saving the planet could not fall equally upon those who had caused the damage and those who had merely endured it.

“Behind every dollar of climate finance lies a question: is it relief, or is it another chain of debt disguised as aid?”

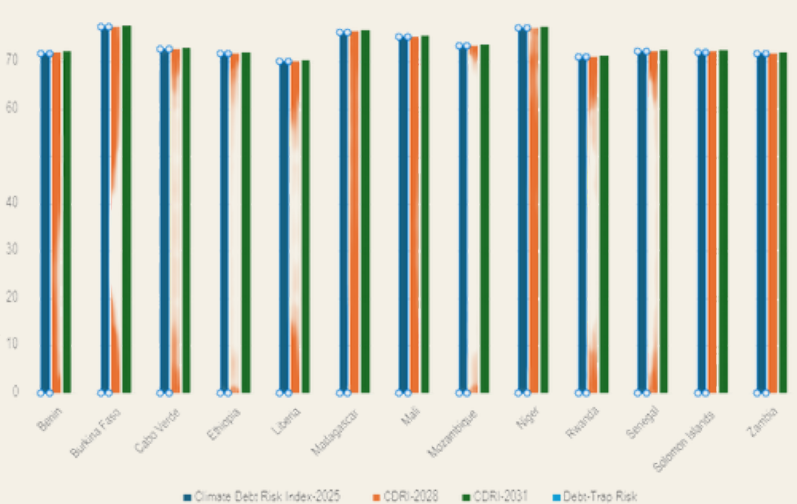
The years that followed were filled with hope. The Kyoto Protocol of 1997 promised binding commitments on what???, and for a moment, humanity seemed to have found its moral compass. The Marrakesh Accords created the first funds to support vulnerable nations, and the Copenhagen Accord in 2009 pledged an ambitious USD 100 billion a year from 2020 for the developing world. By the time the Paris Agreement was signed in 2015, the stage seemed set for a just transition, a collective vow to limit warming to 1.5°C and reshape the world’s energy and financial systems.

But as the decades unfolded, the scaffolding of progress revealed a hollow core. Each COP added more institutions, mechanisms, and declarations, but the Earth’s fever only worsened. Behind the polished speeches and climate diplomacy, the global system continued to march to the rhythm of extraction and debt. Nations, least responsible for emissions, were led to survive the storms, floods, and droughts they never caused. The Climate Finance Shadow Report 2025 of Oxfam, & CARE, exposed this illusion with startling clarity: while developed countries claimed victory in meeting the \$100 billion finance target, only a fraction, about \$28,35 billion, ever reached vulnerable nations in real, usable form. Most of it came as loans, not grants, tightening the financial noose around economies already gasping for air.



Source: Carbon Brief's Paris climate pledge tracker : INDC database

The Climate Debt Risk Index 2024, a landmark study by Change Initiative, went further; it quantified the injustice. Countries like Bangladesh, Zambia, and Madagascar found themselves in a climate, induced debt trap, with loan to grant ratios as high as 0.94 and disbursements below one, third of what was promised. Thirteen nations, from Burkina Faso to Liberia, were ranked in “Very High Risk” of climate debt vulnerability. The report’s message was unambiguous: climate finance had turned into climate colonialism, a system where the poor pay the rich for the privilege of surviving. Bangladesh pays \$29.52 per ton of CO₂ emitted, while Cabo Verde, with barely any emissions, pays \$287.94. This is not justice; it is a quiet economic war disguised as aid.



Very High Risk LDC score CDRI'25

The story of failure did not end with finance. Another study by Change Initiative uncovered the cross-border plastic pollution crisis in the Bay of Bengal, where Bangladesh, lying downstream of 18 transboundary rivers, receives over 15,000 tonnes of foreign plastic waste daily. Despite being a signatory to international environmental treaties, the country finds itself the final dumping ground of global negligence. The cost is immense, over USD 11 billion in lost marine services, food insecurity, and threats to the Sundarbans, the planet’s largest mangrove forest. Once again, global governance has produced treaties without teeth and frameworks without accountability.

“When the poor pay the rich to survive the crisis they didn’t create, it’s not aid, it’s climate colonialism in its purest form.”

The pattern was unmistakable: promises without delivery, frameworks without justice, growth without balance. The COP system, noble in intent, had become a theater of procedure, an endless loop of development and destruction. Growth based economic expansion continued to feed on ecological decline, and “green” projects were often financed through loans that deepened debt rather than building resilience. This “Development-Destruction Trap” is not just an economic flaw; it is the philosophical core of the crisis, born from the illusion that humanity can dominate nature without consequence.

But history, too, offers its moments of reckoning. The Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ), delivered in 2024, marked one such turning point. The Court declared that climate obligations are legal duties, not political gestures. It recognized climate change as an existential threat and affirmed that states must prevent environmental harm, act on the best available science, and protect both present and future generations. Crucially, it stated that failure to regulate fossil fuels or continuing subsidies could constitute an internationally wrongful act. In one sentence, the Court gave the vulnerable a new weapon, the law itself.

“The ICJ gave us legality; Nature Rights Led Governance gives us morality together, they rewrite what justice means on a living planet.”

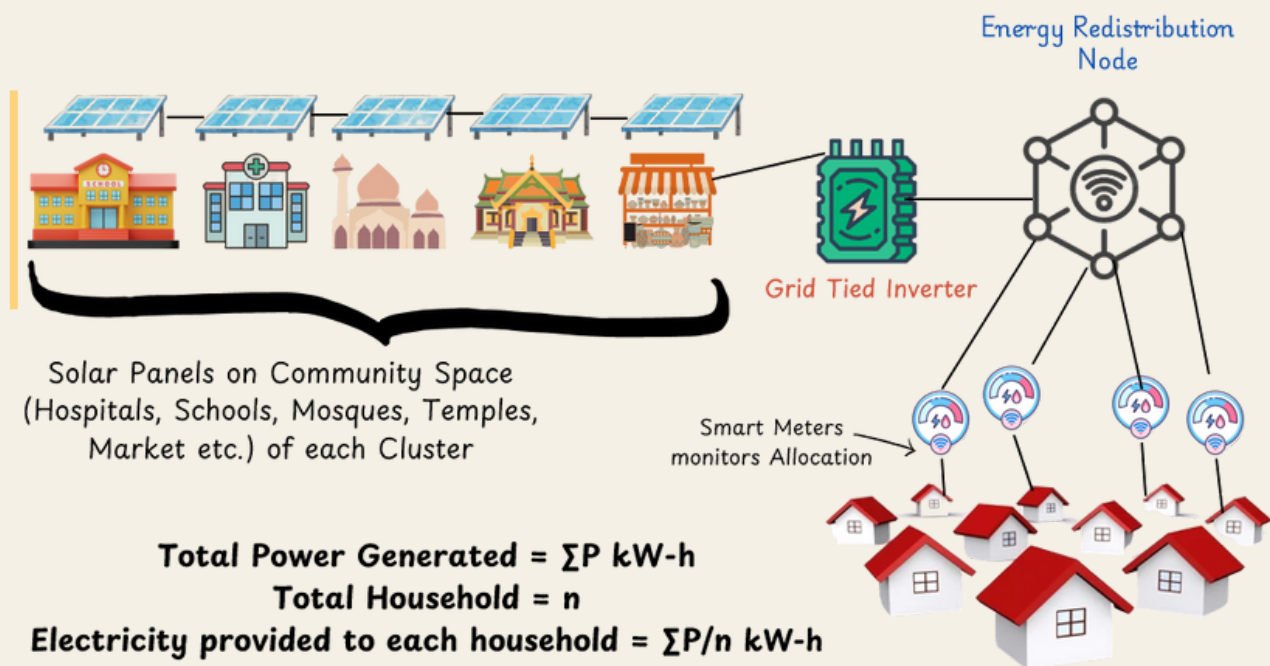
And it is here that the vision of “Nature Rights Led Governance (NRLG)” rises, not as another framework, but as a fundamental rethinking of civilization’s relationship with the planet. The NRLG begins with a simple truth: nature is not a resource; it is a living entity. It possesses inherent rights to exist, thrive, and regenerate, just as humans possess the right to life and dignity. Under this paradigm, governance must operate within the boundaries of natural law, making ecological accountability binding as fiscal discipline.

Each pillar of NRLG offers a remedy to a systemic wound. Legal recognition of nature’s rights restores balance to law. Rules by natural law and natural accountability replace empty pledges with ecological responsibility. Nature Justice widens the moral horizon to include rivers, forests, and species as rightful subjects of protection.

Community stewardship empowers Indigenous Peoples and local communities as custodians of their ecosystems. Equity and shared rights ensure that no one, human or non-human, is left behind. And peaceful grievance mechanisms transform climate conflicts into opportunities for restoration and reconciliation.



Through these principles, NRLG transforms governance from managing resources to stewarding relationships between human and nature, from debt, based development to justice, and regeneration. It calls for a transition from loan, based finance to grant, based adaptation, from centralized control to community ownership. The Renewable Energy Sovereignty through Community Stewardship model demonstrates this vision in action, solar, powered smart mesh systems that let villages generate and share energy as a collective right, not a corporate privilege.



From Rio to Belém, the world's journey tells a story of both progress and paradox, a climb toward global cooperation shadowed by the same logic of exploitation that created the crisis. The choice before humanity is no longer technical but moral: to continue refining a broken system or to reimagine one rooted in reciprocity. The Nature Rights-Led Governance framework offers a new moral compass. It is not merely governance; it is a declaration that justice, equity, and survival are inseparable, and that true progress begins only when we put Nature First.

Reference

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