



## Act Now:

### Future Scenarios and the Case for Equitable Climate Action

*Illustrated Summary*

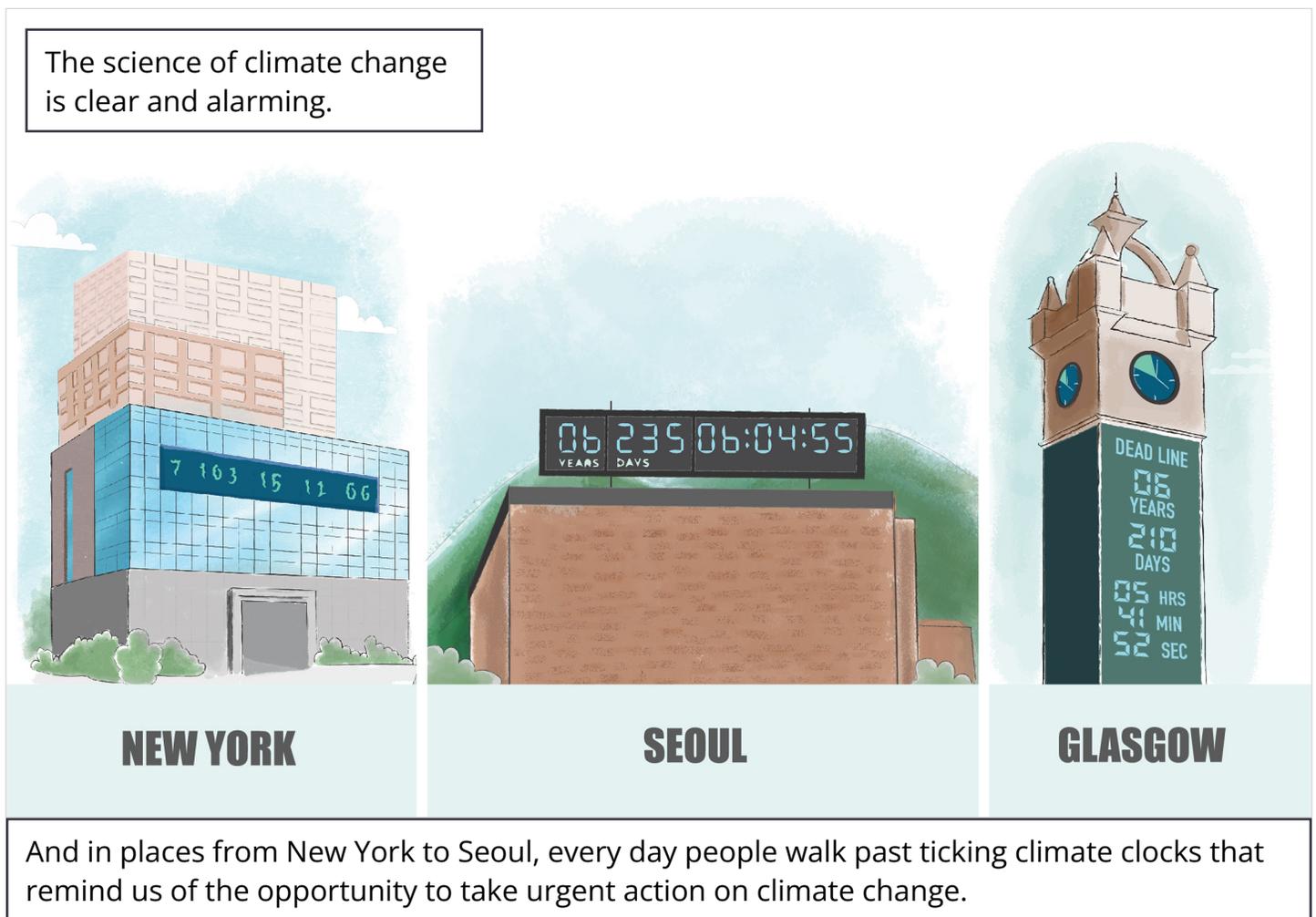
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**Monitor  
Institute**

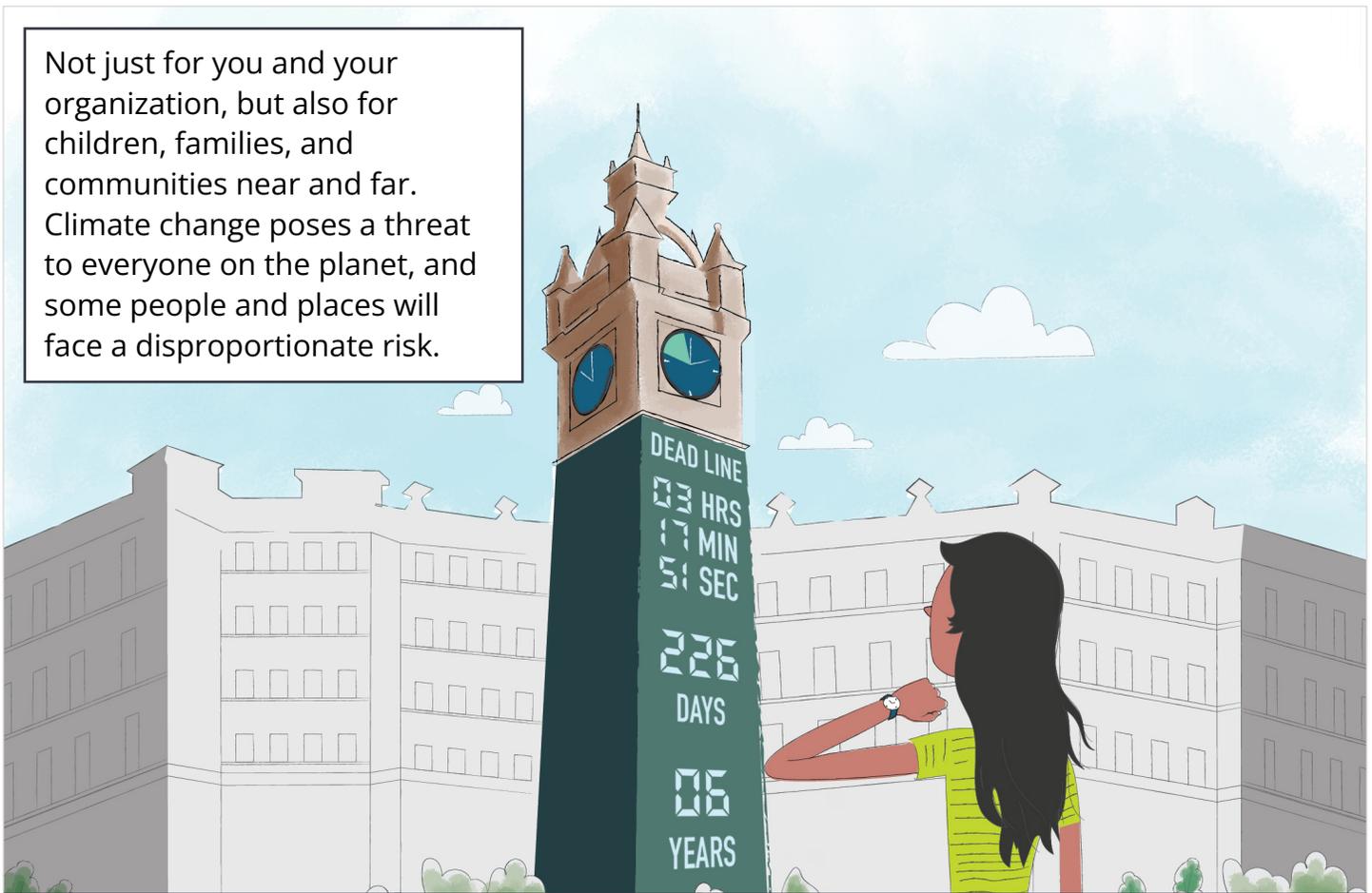
by Deloitte

While much remains uncertain about the future, *Act Now*, a new report from the Monitor Institute by Deloitte, can help leaders get on their front foot in thinking about climate change and equity—informing and guiding the actions they take *today* by helping them understand the range of different directions the *future* might head. This “illustrated” summary highlights the key concepts of the full report, which can be found [here](#).



The individual and collective choices about what we do—or don't do—over the coming years will shape the future trajectory of our climate and our world.

Not just for you and your organization, but also for children, families, and communities near and far. Climate change poses a threat to everyone on the planet, and some people and places will face a disproportionate risk.

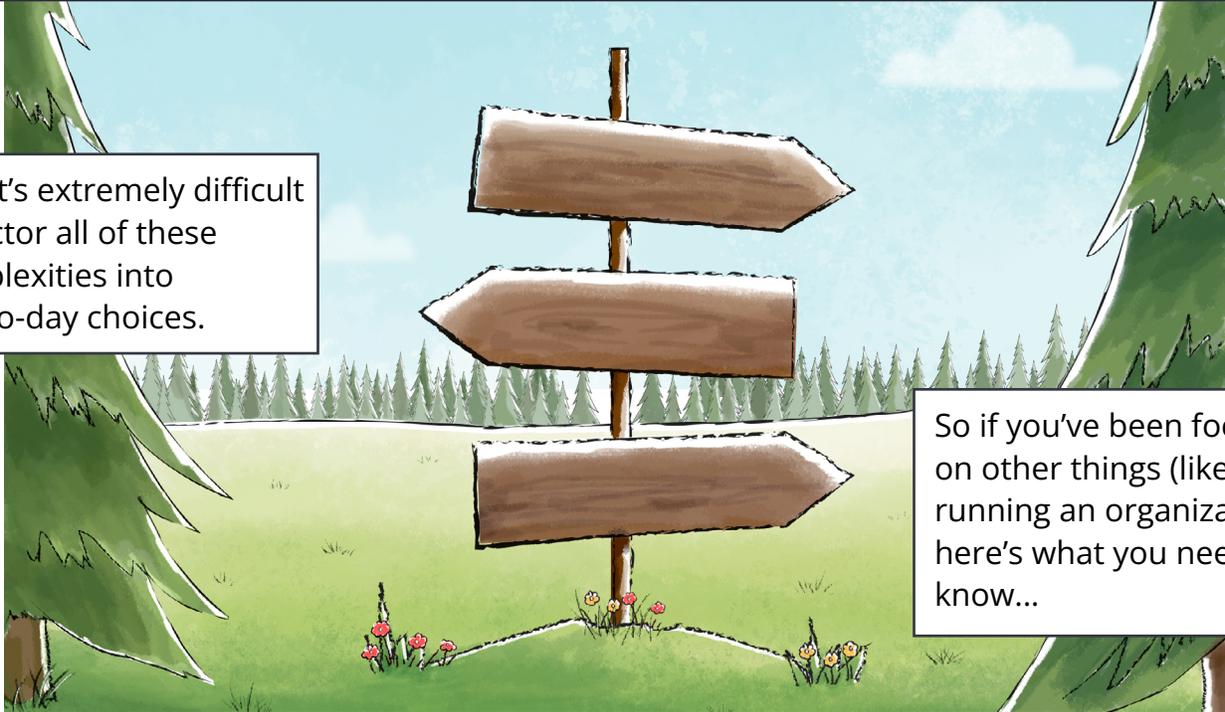


Our cumulative choices along two dimensions—the **scale** at which we act to address climate change, and how **fairly** we do it—will have an outsized impact on how the coming years unfold.

As author Kim Stanley Robinson put it,  
“What does it feel like to live on the  
brink of vast historical change?  
*It feels like now.*”

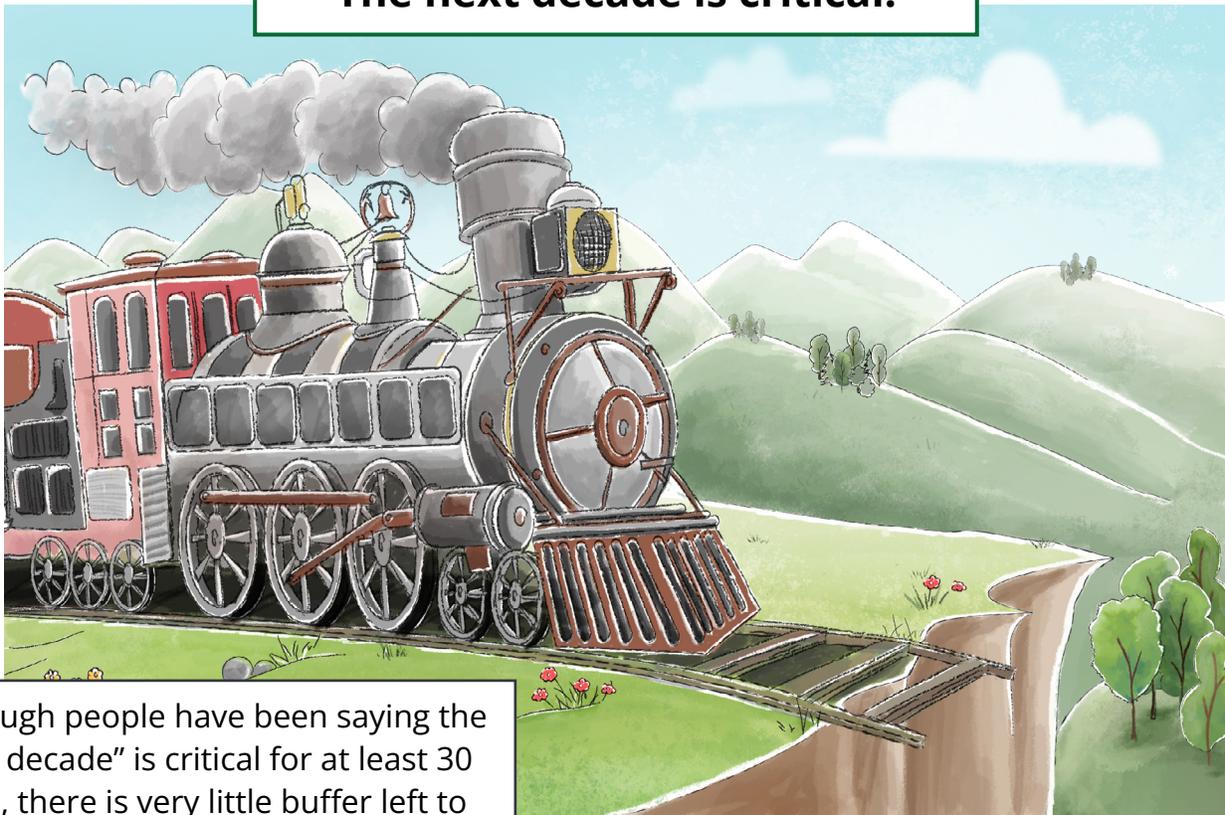
But even as many leaders acknowledge that climate will be one of the most important issues of the 21st century, they also recognize that it's unfolding against a backdrop of interconnected forces—uncertain economic conditions, advancements in technology, political instability, and much more.

And it's extremely difficult to factor all of these complexities into day-to-day choices.



So if you've been focused on other things (like, say, running an organization), here's what you need to know...

## The next decade is critical.



Although people have been saying the "next decade" is critical for at least 30 years, there is very little buffer left to accommodate further inaction.

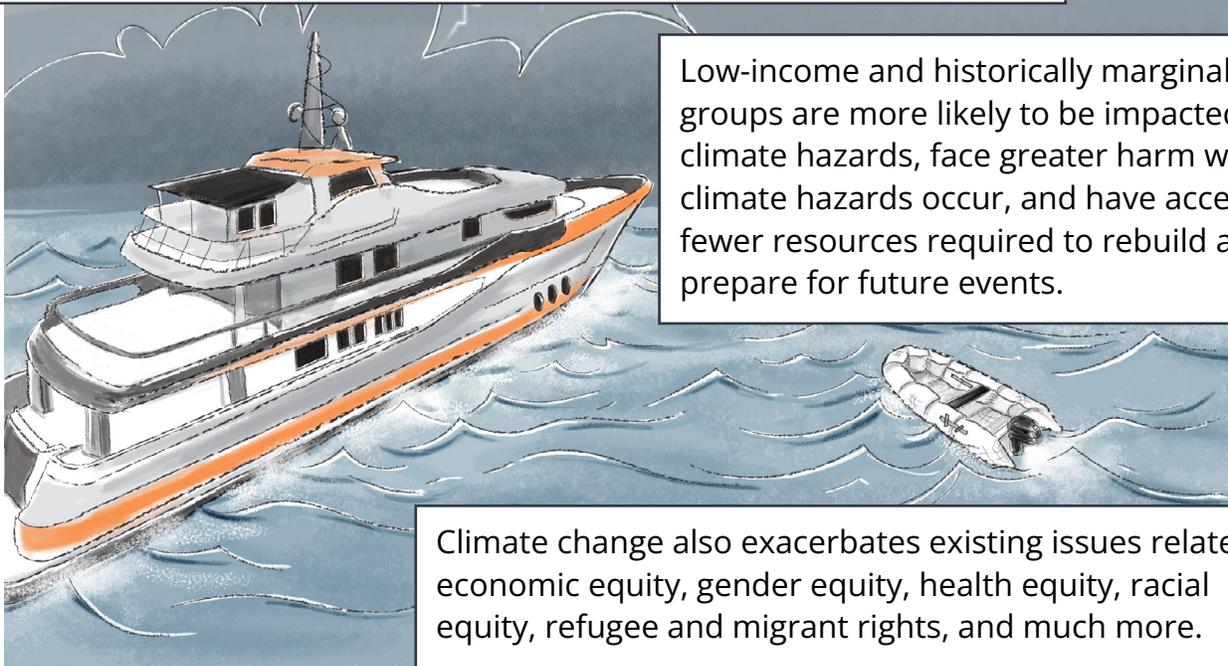
## There is real momentum to build on over the next decade.

Current progress is imperfect, caveat-ridden, and insufficient. But it is happening. And some of the bleakest projections for warming now seem less likely because of this work. There's reason for optimism.



## There's also cause for concern, because the effects of climate change are so unequal.

"We're all facing the same storm, but we're not all in the same boat. Some of us are in duct-taped rafts and others are in reinforced cruiser ships and there's really no comparing the vessels." – Tulaine Montgomery, New Profit

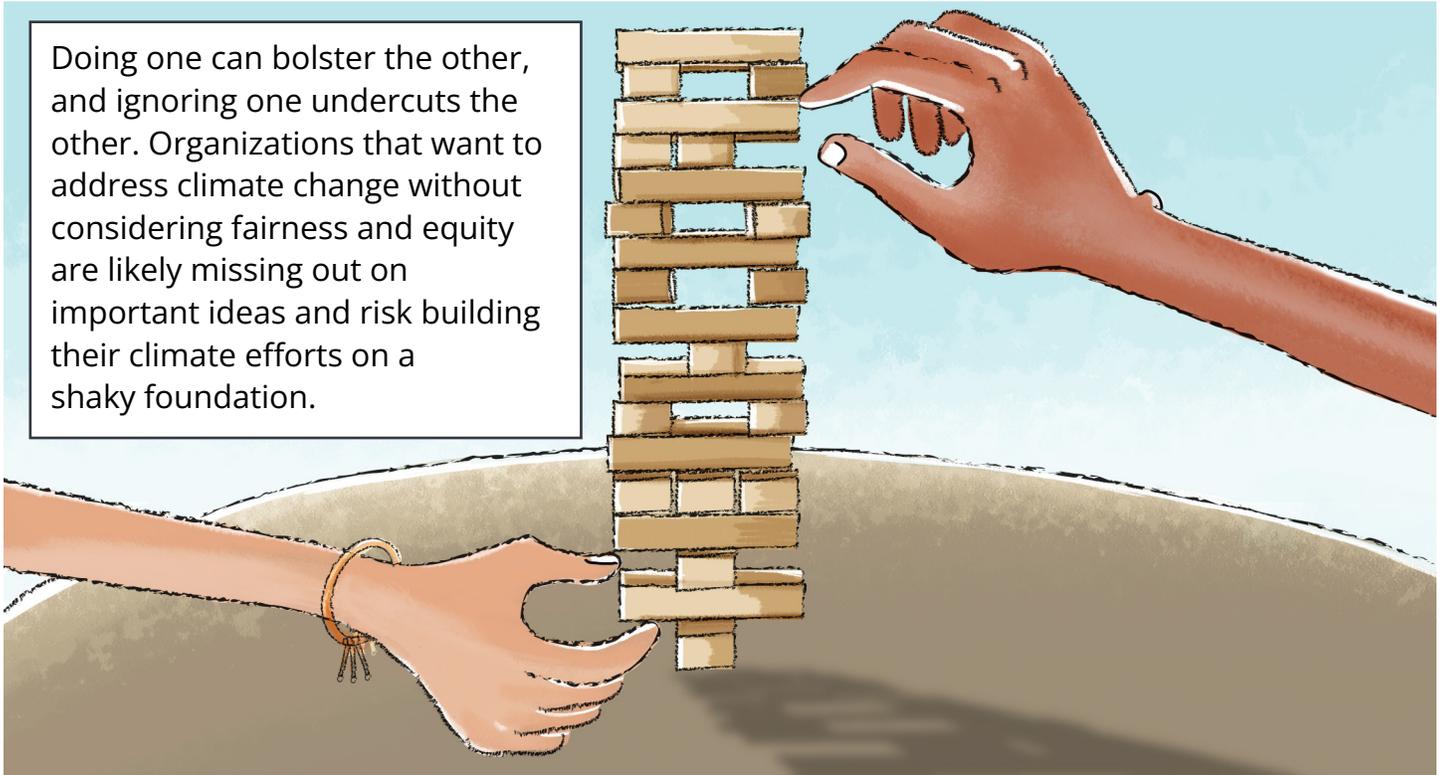


Low-income and historically marginalized groups are more likely to be impacted by climate hazards, face greater harm when climate hazards occur, and have access to fewer resources required to rebuild and prepare for future events.

Climate change also exacerbates existing issues related to economic equity, gender equity, health equity, racial equity, refugee and migrant rights, and much more.

**But, if done right, addressing climate change and creating more equitable outcomes can be mutually reinforcing.**

Doing one can bolster the other, and ignoring one undercuts the other. Organizations that want to address climate change without considering fairness and equity are likely missing out on important ideas and risk building their climate efforts on a shaky foundation.

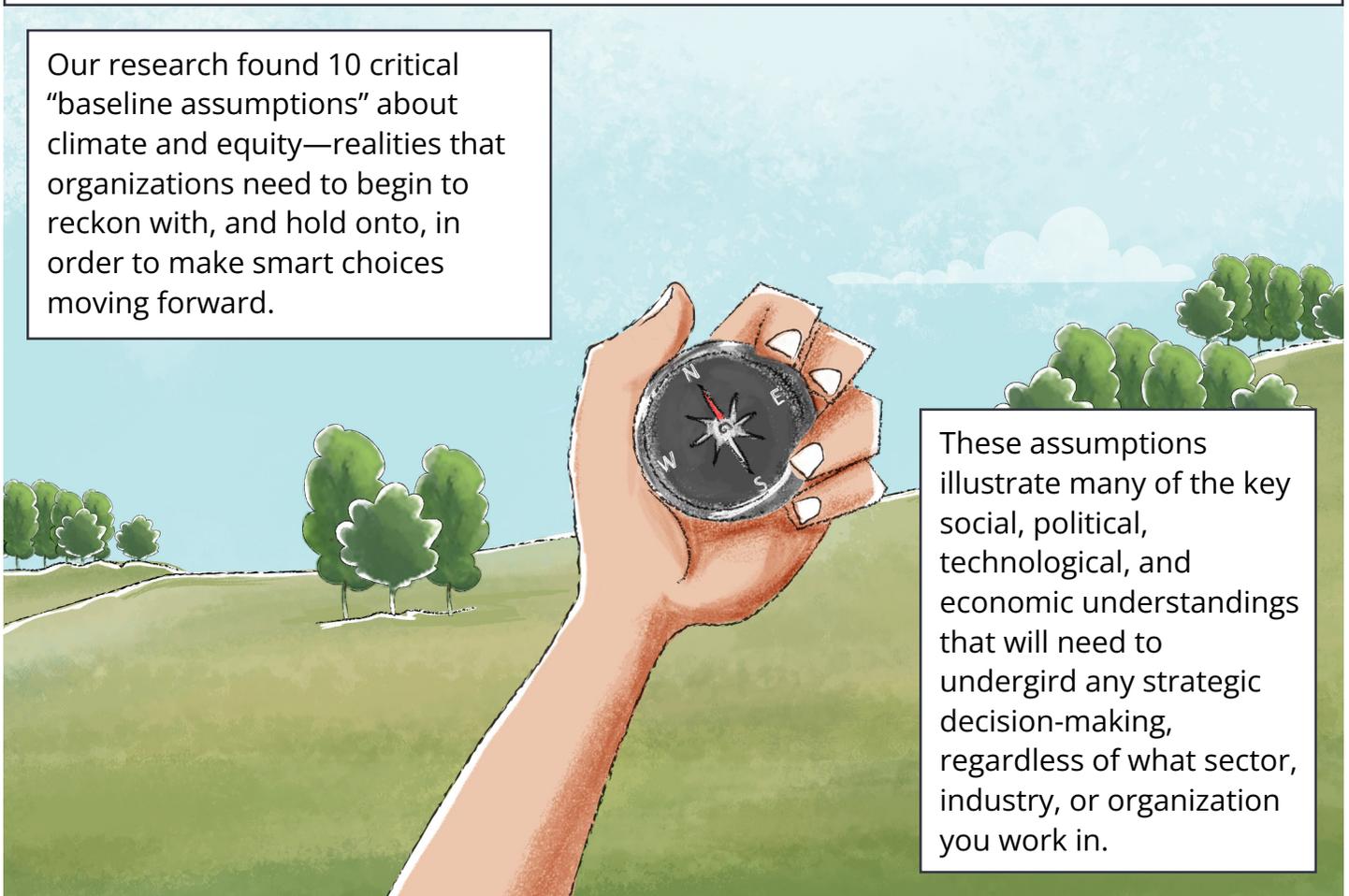


While the implications of the science of climate change are becoming clearer, it's hard to make sense of the many different viewpoints, preferred solutions, and constant new findings and reports that are emerging...



That's why Monitor Institute by Deloitte—the social impact strategy consulting unit of Deloitte—launched an initiative exploring what leaders need to know about climate and equity in the years ahead.

Our research found 10 critical “baseline assumptions” about climate and equity—realities that organizations need to begin to reckon with, and hold onto, in order to make smart choices moving forward.

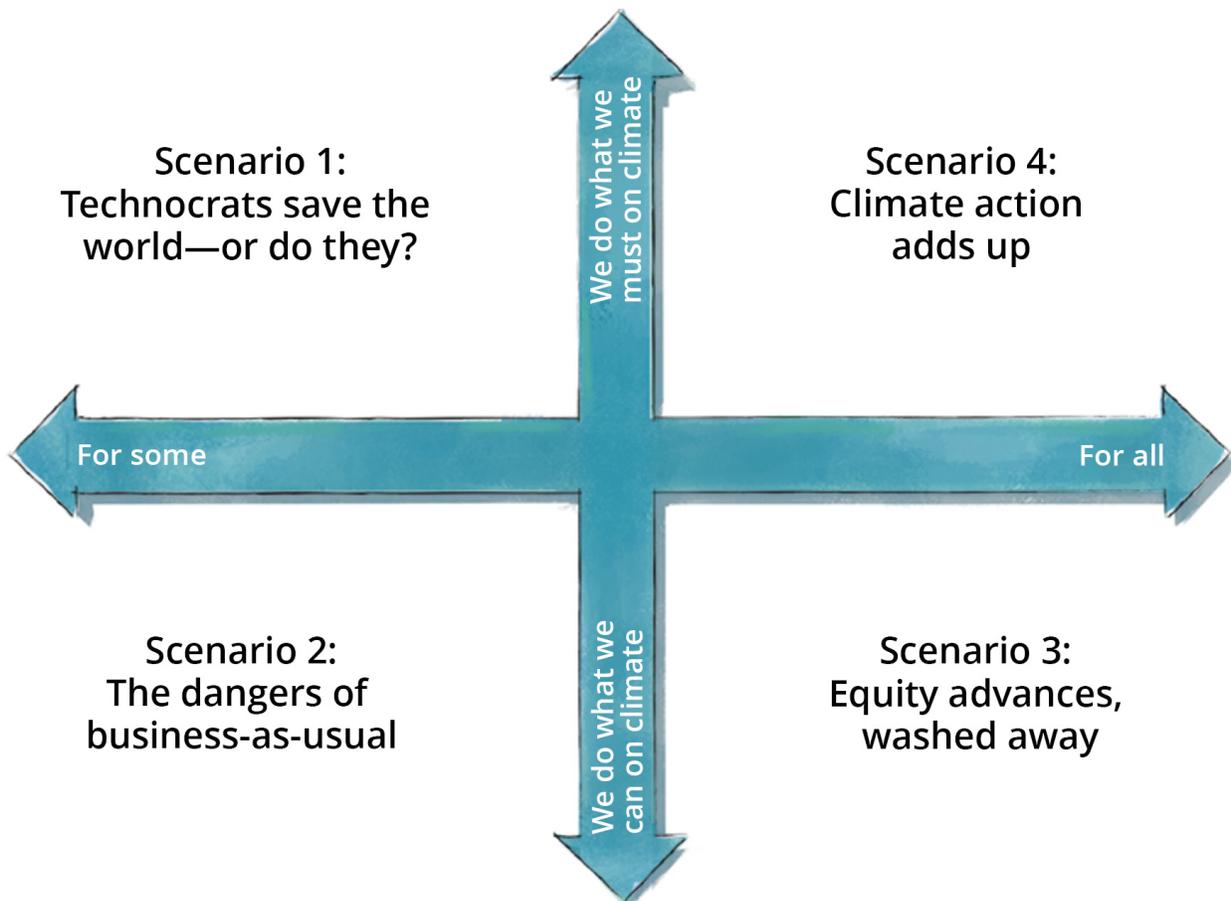


These assumptions illustrate many of the key social, political, technological, and economic understandings that will need to undergird any strategic decision-making, regardless of what sector, industry, or organization you work in.

You can learn more about the baseline assumptions in our full report, [\*Act Now: Future Scenarios and the Case for Equitable Climate Action.\*](#)

Yet even as these assumptions provide some clarity, much still remains uncertain.

And while no one can predict the *future*, we have found that exploring hypothetical future scenarios can help inform and guide the actions we take *today*.



We looked at four scenarios, which each explore varying degrees of emphasis on climate action and social equity.

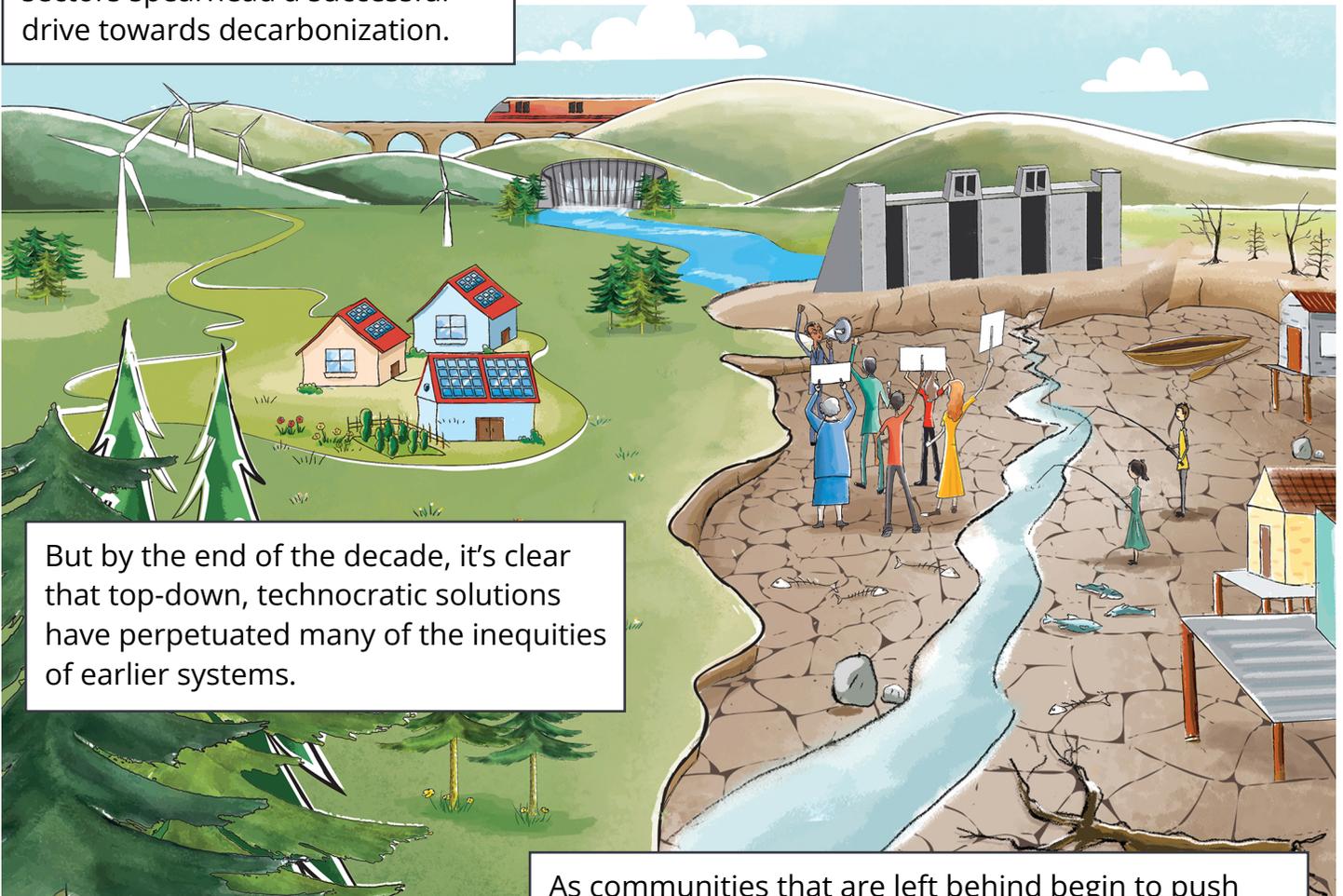
They are not intended to be predictions about what *will* happen; they're provocative pictures of what *could* happen that can challenge assumptions, stretch thinking, and illuminate how your choices might add up alongside the decisions of others.

## Scenario 1: Technocrats save the world—or do they?

Prompted by increasing public pressure, global leaders across sectors spearhead a successful drive towards decarbonization.

But by the end of the decade, it's clear that top-down, technocratic solutions have perpetuated many of the inequities of earlier systems.

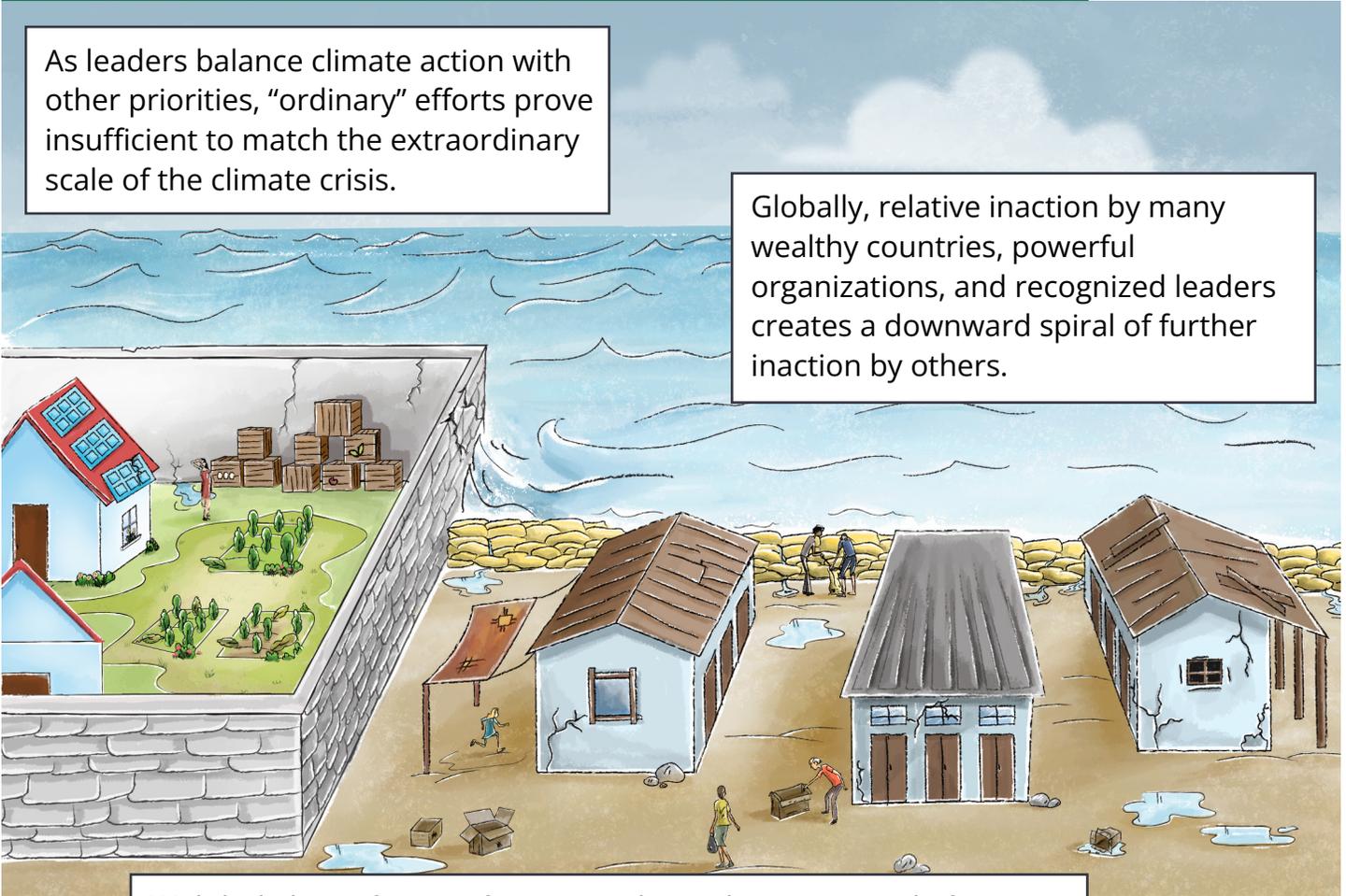
As communities that are left behind begin to push back, climate progress appears more fragile than many had hoped.



## Scenario 2: The perils of business-as-usual

As leaders balance climate action with other priorities, "ordinary" efforts prove insufficient to match the extraordinary scale of the climate crisis.

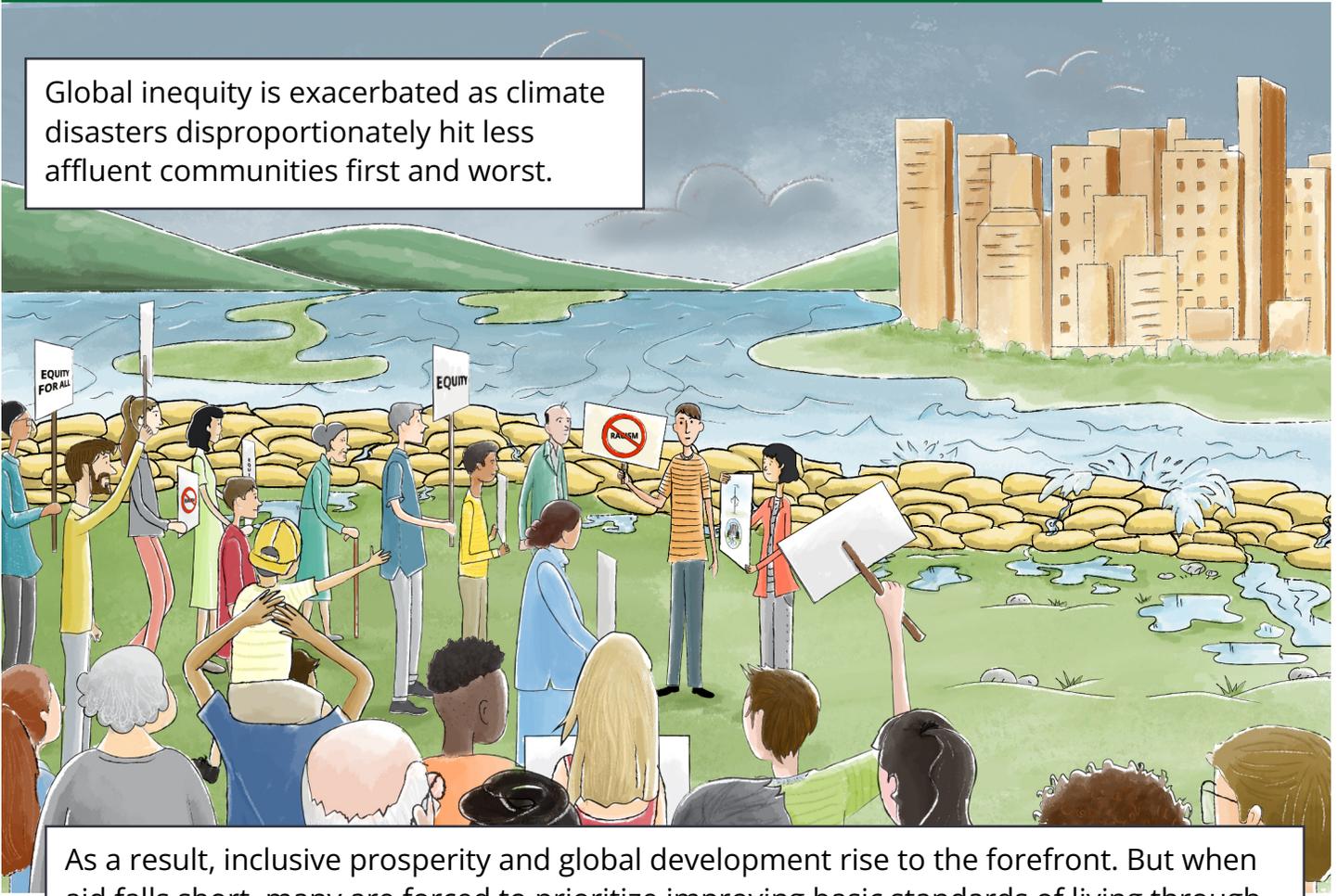
Globally, relative inaction by many wealthy countries, powerful organizations, and recognized leaders creates a downward spiral of further inaction by others.



With little hope for significant coordinated action, people focus on protecting their own to weather the worsening storms ahead.

### Scenario 3: Equity advances, washed away

Global inequity is exacerbated as climate disasters disproportionately hit less affluent communities first and worst.

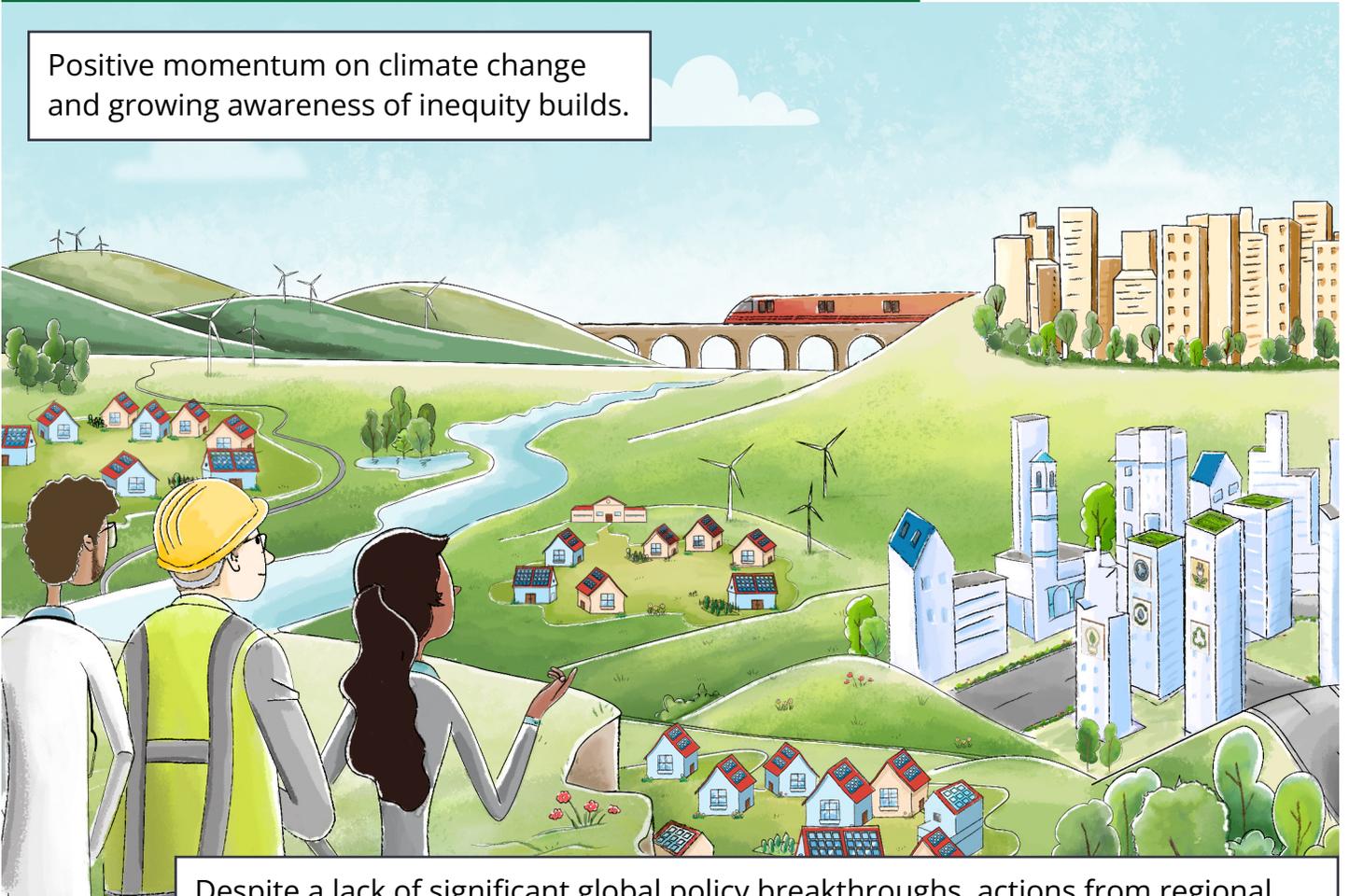


As a result, inclusive prosperity and global development rise to the forefront. But when aid falls short, many are forced to prioritize improving basic standards of living through carbon intensive development. Climate actions focus on disaster relief, inequitable health outcomes, and refugees.

By 2030, many equity gains stand to be washed away by insufficient progress on climate.

## Scenario 4: Climate action adds up

Positive momentum on climate change and growing awareness of inequity builds.



Despite a lack of significant global policy breakthroughs, actions from regional governments, businesses, and community leaders start to add up, exerting further positive pressure towards collective action.

By 2030, we've made significant progress on many fronts—the worst-case scenarios and resultant mass humanitarian crises have been taken off the table.

If you think about these different hypothetical futures, they shed light on some very important realizations...



## Climate will be increasingly inseparable from everything else.

Its consequences, and our responses to them, will become inescapable “context” for a larger and larger share of business, social, and political decisions.

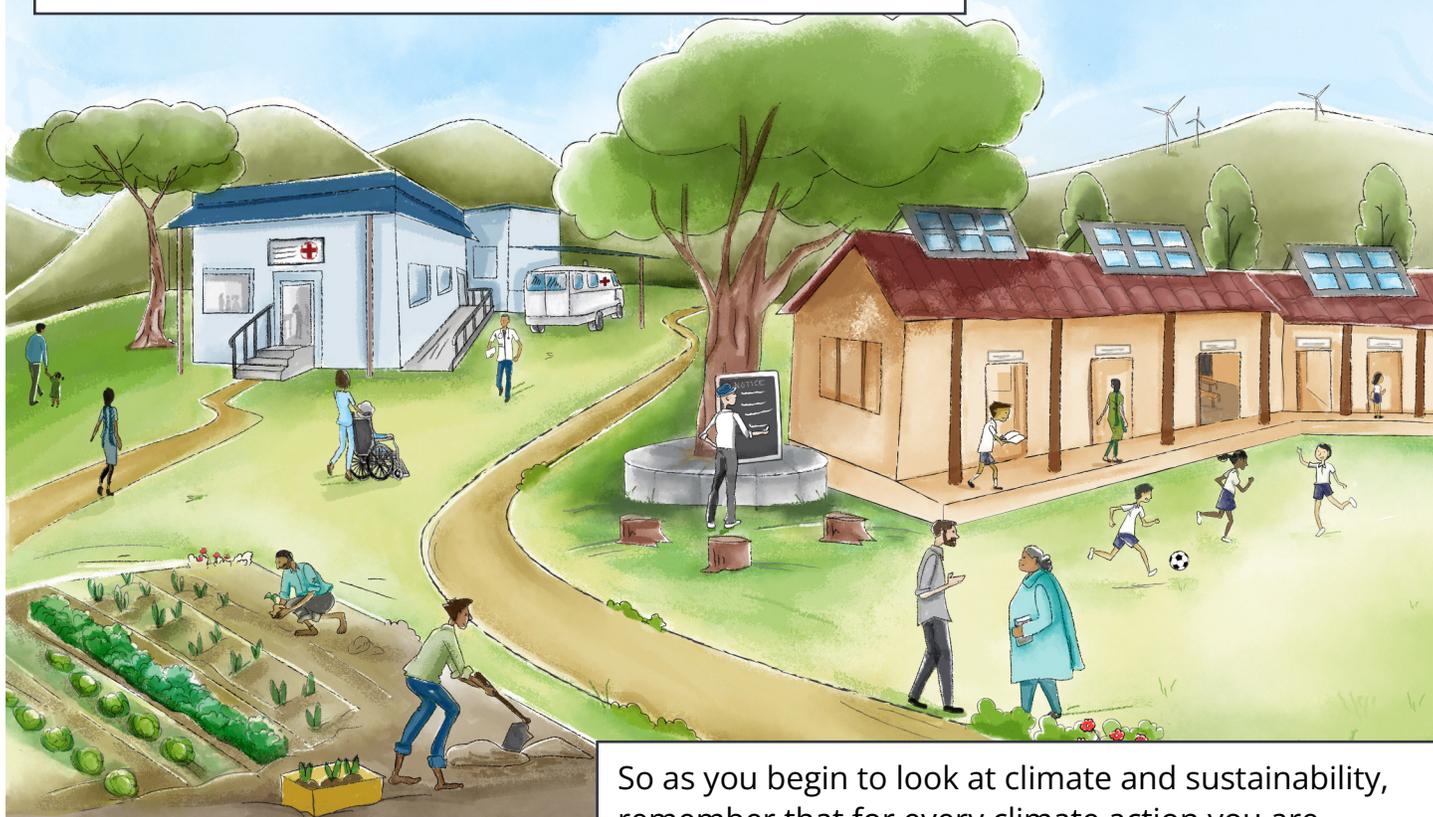
Whether you’re selling products, advocating for social change, or providing public services, climate change will affect your work in unavoidable ways. It’s going to get harder and harder for organizations of all sorts to make choices without considering climate as part of them.

## Climate action without consideration of equity is fragile, and prioritizing equity without climate action risks watching many gains literally wash away.



**And while climate action appears to be increasing in many organizations, it's important to remember that equity doesn't just happen. It requires intentionality.**

Without deliberate design and effort, new, greener systems will naturally mirror the inequities of existing ones.



So as you begin to look at climate and sustainability, remember that for every climate action you are taking, there are ways you can make them more equitable and inclusive.

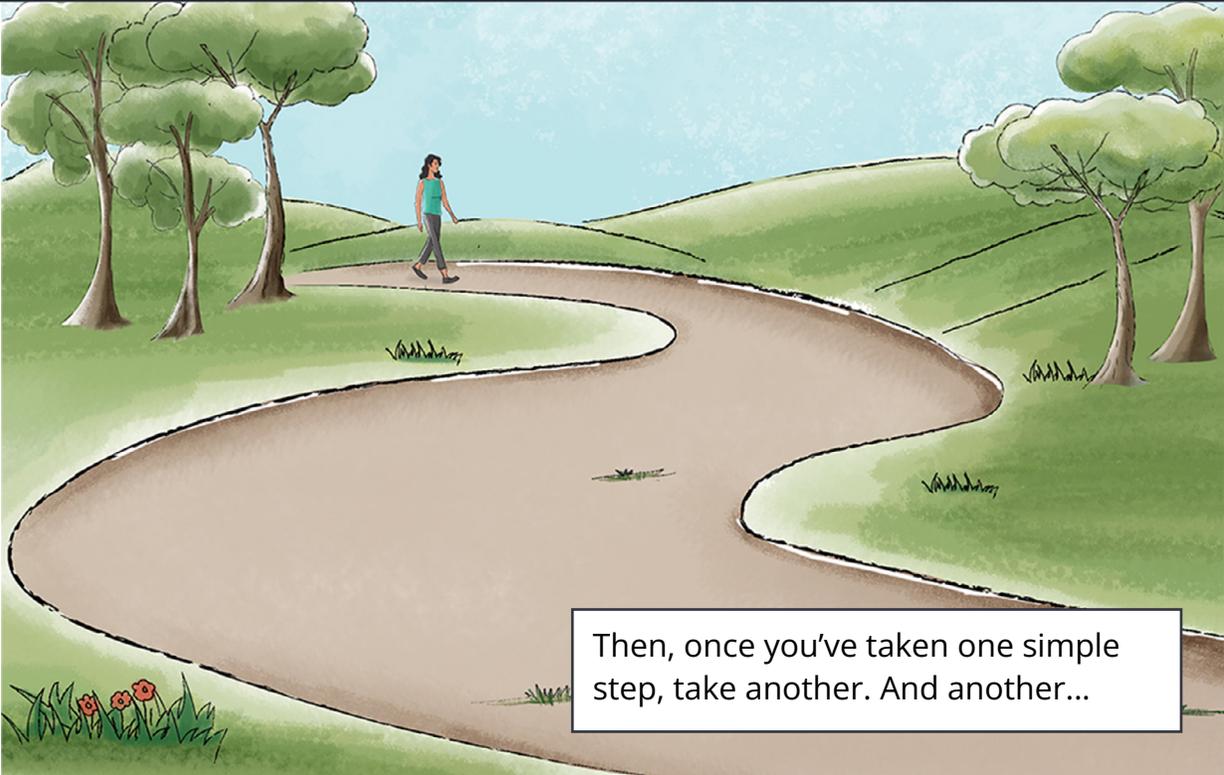
# So, what can you do today to move towards a future where climate action adds up?

TAKE STOCK of how change will impact your organization's...



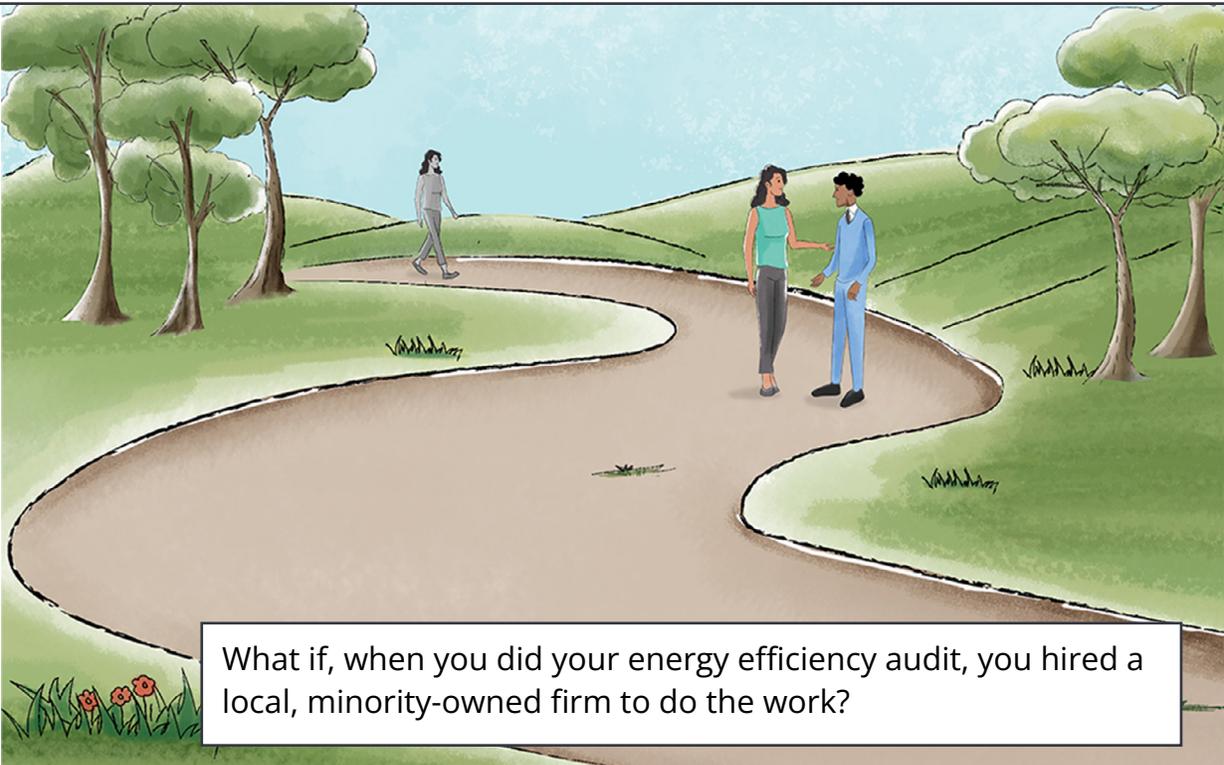
TAKE A FIRST STEP, even if it's an easy one, to help you get past the inertia of inaction.

What if, for example, you did an energy efficiency audit of your headquarters?



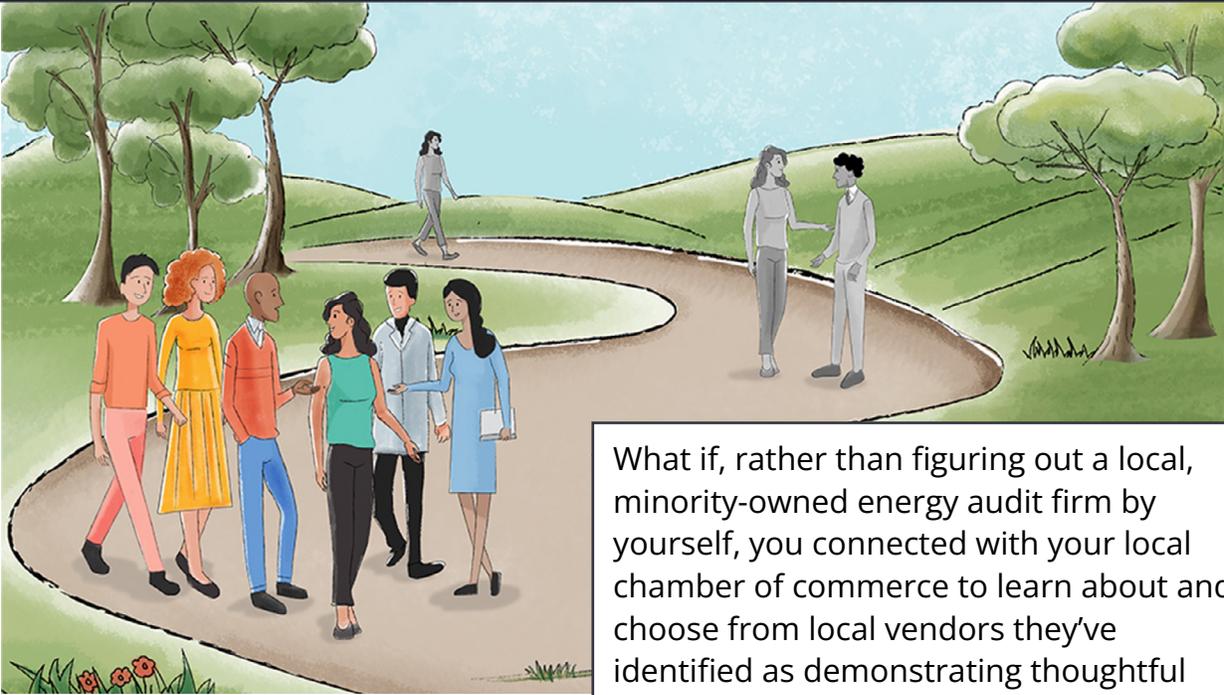
Then, once you've taken one simple step, take another. And another...

PRIORITIZE EQUITABLE OUTCOMES. For each climate action you consider, think about how you can design, fund, act, or build in ways that can share the benefits more broadly.



What if, when you did your energy efficiency audit, you hired a local, minority-owned firm to do the work?

**JOIN OTHERS.** You don't always need to be the leader or the initiator. There are a wide range of existing collaborative efforts that you can plug into.



What if, rather than figuring out a local, minority-owned energy audit firm by yourself, you connected with your local chamber of commerce to learn about and choose from local vendors they've identified as demonstrating thoughtful and sustainable ESG policies?

**MAP OUT THE BOLDEST PLAY.** Stretch your thinking by imagining the boldest move you could make.



What if you extended your energy efficiency audits to all of your facilities, and then committed to being completely carbon neutral as an organization?

Our research suggests that we're facing a range of possible futures—some better and some quite scary. But as Jonas Salk, the inventor of the polio vaccine once explained:

**“I have had dreams and I've had nightmares. I overcame the nightmares because of my dreams.”**



If we can all begin to move towards more equitable climate action today, we still have the time to prevent our nightmares from becoming our reality.



#### **About Monitor Institute by Deloitte**

Monitor Institute by Deloitte is a social change consultancy that marries the specialized knowledge and experience of a boutique social impact consulting practice within the breadth and scale of a globally-recognized professional services organization. It sits in the Deloitte Purpose Office as part of the Office of the CEO. We work with innovative leaders to surface and spread best practices in public problem solving and to pioneer next practices—breakthrough approaches for addressing social and environmental challenges. Monitor Institute combines a deep grounding in strategy, networks, social innovation, and human systems with the fundamentals of professional advisory services—effective project management, skilled facilitation, and well-timed intervention.

As a for-profit/for-benefit hybrid, Monitor Institute pursues social impact while operating as a fully integrated unit of Deloitte LLP.

For more information about the Monitor Institute by Deloitte, visit [www.monitorinstitute.com](http://www.monitorinstitute.com).

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