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[Dachzeile]

Time is of the essence in the climate crisis – and so is the case for global justice and equity

The climate crisis and its effects on current and future generations has become one of the most hotly debated issues in bilateral, regional, and global negotiations. [Scientific evidence on the speed](#) of global warming and the visible effect of climate change on lives and livelihoods, especially of marginalized and vulnerable communities, have led to an almost global consensus that humanity's future depends on how fast we can repair and protect the planet. Yet events at the [COP26 in Glasgow](#) from 31 October to 13 November 2021, whose principal goal was “Uniting the World to Tackle Climate Change”, showed that the world is in fact *not* fully united on how to address the climate crisis. At the core of this disunity is the importance of equity and justice in the fight against climate change and broader sustainable development processes. Both must go together. We will not see quick transformations towards sustainable futures without the consideration of past and present inequalities and injustices. We can tackle the climate crisis much more efficiently and sustainably only if equity and justice are treated as top priorities by all countries at the negotiation table. While we acknowledge that there are no one-size-fits-all solutions to today's complex and diverse challenges, and that the process begins from different starting points, a closer look at the negotiations of the COP26 and ongoing actions around climate change can help us identify locations and processes that promote injustices and inequalities in preparations for the COP27 in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt. We want to take a look at the actions around [the COP26 sub-goals](#) concerning mitigation, adaptation, finance, and collaboration which are creating challenges and opportunities to promote justice and equity in climate action processes. We argue that addressing past, current, and potential future injustices and inequalities with the speed and urgency the climate crisis demands is important to trigger interest in meaningful and sustainable actions to achieve the goals set out in the [Paris Agreement](#) and the SDGs.

Mitigation

[The first goal of COP26 and one of the Paris Agreement objectives is to “secure global net zero and keep 1.5 degrees within reach”](#). [The IPCC firmly places the responsibility of mitigating climate change on humans: “a human intervention to reduce the sources or enhance the sinks of greenhouse gases”](#). Yet, as shown by COP26 in Glasgow, where historical tensions between countries at different stages of social and economic development were again visible, there is no agreement on the scale,

! Zum Aktualisieren der Textelemente, Zitation markieren und dann F9 drücken !

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shape, and scope of the [intervention](#). At issue were demands from low-income countries to forge development pathways, just like higher-income countries did, to meet the needs of growing populations, and for higher-income countries to finally honour the support they pledged for adaptation measures, especially to make amends for their historically much larger contributions to climate change.

Given the threat of [inequalities and injustices induced by climate change](#), the major obstacle to climate negotiations and mitigation efforts is not the development demands of low-income countries, but the growing social and economic inequalities between countries, largely fuelled by the fossil energy system and further catalysed by the global Covid-19 pandemic. One effect of these growing inequalities is a lack of political, social, and economic agency and capacity (financial, technological, human, institutional, governance) in low-income countries to meet the urgent needs of current and future populations, despite the abundance of both human and natural resources.

[Sluggish climate action](#) puts countries of the Global South between “a rock and a hard place” because of the pressure from populations already experiencing a lack of basic needs as well as the [calamitous impacts of climate change induced events](#) on lives and livelihoods.

Yet, policy contradictions by high-income countries and regions, such as the one made most recently by the European Commission to label natural gas, a fossil fuel that contributes significantly to climate change, a “[transitional](#)” fuel, shed doubt on the urgency of efforts to mitigate climate change.

Moreover, such actions risk compromising climate change commitments and responsibilities such as [the Nationally Determined Contributions \(NDCs\)](#). While delayed climate change mitigation efforts have immediate and long-term consequences for Europeans, they especially hurt the vulnerable inhabitants of the Global South, who suffer disproportionately from climate change-induced inequalities and injustices. Such delays in fulfilling climate change commitments and responsibilities are a deferment of justice and equity, and put at risk the lives and livelihoods of current and future generations around the world. The swift mitigation of climate change is not attainable or sustainable in the absence of just and equitable climate action and sustainable development processes. To improve negotiations and outcomes at COP27, the world must understand and meaningfully address the diverse and broader obstacles that could compromise the achievement of the SDGs and the Paris Agreement.

Adaptation

The last few years have been marked by intensified climate impacts such as floods, droughts, wildfires, and swarms of locusts that destroyed crops in East and North Africa. All of these events pose a threat to food security and livelihoods. Accordingly, COP26 underscored the importance of adaptation by calling on the world to come together to “urgently adapt to protect communities and natural habitats” in its second sub-goals. According to the IPCC, adaptation involves “the process of adjustment to actual or expected climate and its effects. In human systems, adaptation seeks to moderate or avoid harm or exploit beneficial opportunities. In some natural systems, human intervention may facilitate adjustment to expected climate and its effects.” Following the well-known [role of humans in contributing to the current climate crisis](#), scientists at the [IPCC](#) remind us of our responsibility to *clean up* the mess and to step up efforts to avoid additional harm to the planet. Though the pace of adaptation financing is growing, the United Nations sees growing [adaptation gaps](#). Still, adaptation remains an attractive area to combat climate change and address inequalities and injustices. While adaptation involves efforts to adjust to actual climate change efforts, it also provides opportunities for mitigation through the exploitation of [beneficial opportunities to strengthen resilience and socio-economic development](#). Whereas financial support is urgently

needed for countries of the Global South to adapt because of their susceptibility to climate change effects and lack of capacity to cope and adapt, these countries also have a lot to offer for climate change adaptation and mitigation efforts as they are rich in renewable energy (RE) resources. For example, the production of green hydrogen to support decarbonization efforts in hard to abate sectors is an area where developing countries can contribute to climate mitigation efforts, especially in support of high-income ([European](#)) countries with limited RE resources. This provides an opportunity to focus on mutually beneficial areas of action, such as green hydrogen collaboration, to further sustainable development (for RE rich countries) and climate action (fossil fuel-dependent countries) at COP27. Equity and justice in climate change adaptation and mitigation actions can also be spurred by offering the just energy transition support announced for [South Africa at COP26](#) to more climate change-vulnerable countries.

Finance

The Paris Agreement aims to balance mitigation and adaptation efforts to support those already experiencing the effects of climate change, a clear message that developing countries brought to [COP26](#). Despite increases in adaptation costs expected to reach \$140 billion–\$300 billion in 2030, world's wealthiest economies have so far failed to deliver on their pledge [to mobilize \\$100 billion per year in climate finance for poorer countries](#). This is despite the hope of many countries in the Global South that the development needs of current and future generations could be addressed through environmental and climate protection financing. As a result, adaptation financing remained one of the many unresolved issues of the COP26 and an issue expected to feature strongly in the upcoming COP27.

In addition to mitigation and financing, we also need to focus on climate change damage that has already taken place. Loss and damage finance is an important mechanism to reduce inequalities by compensating for climate change damage that has already occurred. Vulnerable countries in the Global South pushed for a reliable mechanism to finance loss and damage. However, industrial countries in the Global North were not willing to commit and only agreed to further dialogue on this issue. As Mohammed Adow of Power Shift Africa [commented in The Guardian](#): “We now have the rich countries pushing the developing countries to agree to a loss and damage outcome that is basically a never-ending talking shop on loss and damage.” In failing to acknowledge past human and planetary injustices and the current vulnerable lived reality of billions of people around the world, the current discourse fails to see or acknowledge sticking points in reaching a common goal to address the climate crisis in an equitable way.

Collaboration

Events at COP26 in Glasgow made it difficult to ignore the failure to achieve the goal of “uniting the world”. What COP26 and many other international climate negotiation forums lacked was a model of cooperation that simultaneously unites the world around human and planetary justice. The kind of justice that considers the diversity and the magnitude of past, current, and future happenings in the complex and interconnected socio-cultural, economic, political, or ecological spheres, a justice that parallels the interest of achieving the Paris Agreement and the sustainable Development Goals, without leaving anyone behind. While a final agreement, [the Glasgow Climate Pact](#), was reached with unanimous support, efforts to build consensus around the urgency posed by climate change were set back by growing injustices and inequalities around the world. COP26 took place against the backdrop of the pandemic, which [limited the participation of civil society organizations \(CSO\)](#), and key negotiators from the Global South even more due to health restrictions and vaccine inequalities.

Such exclusion and power imbalances among nations and actors limits opportunities to build the trust needed for meaningful collaborations and partnerships towards climate action. This kind of exclusion also creates conditions where climate narratives and actions miss the relevance of lived experiences, struggles, and opportunities for the excluded communities. The result is a so-called global agenda that often does not represent or align with the needs, realities, values, and aspirations of those excluded. To support and ensure a productive COP27, inclusive and trust-based engagements and collaborations at bilateral, regional, continental, and global levels must be prioritized. COP27 provides yet another opportunity to improve relations between nations and to re-establish ambition, confidence, and trust to solve the pressing and urgent global challenge of sustainable development and climate protection.

Outlook

The road to climate action and just societies is not an easy one because it begins at different locations for diverse actors. Faced with the fragile recovery from the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, as well as the social and economic ramifications of the war in Ukraine, such as increased food and fuel prices, countries, especially developing and emerging countries, have limited policy space to respond to the climate crisis. However, while climate change can feel distant in the face of immediate and often complex social and economic challenges, actions on the climate crisis can also serve as an opportunity to address social and economic inequalities and injustices as well as support access to basic and immediate needs on a long-term basis. As the analysis above demonstrates, climate inaction and increasing social and economic inequalities and injustices have their roots in the historical imbalance of power and the unequal distribution of resources and opportunities. Many actors with valuable ideas and aspirations are excluded from meaningful collaboration at the COP; mitigation measures are difficult to implement because resources are lacking; opportunities to effectively adapt to climate change are lost; and climate politics, including loss and damage, are not solidly and fairly financed. These are consequences of a world of 'haves and have-nots', the included and the excluded, the agenda setters and the followers. To achieve effective and sustainable progress, actors must not only commit to talk to each other in boardrooms or at negotiations, such as the COPs. Efforts need to be put in place to prepare for platforms and conditions where such talks and negotiations have a chance to generate multiple futures rooted in a common vision but informed by the realities of each actor. The climate crisis reminds us of how deeply intertwined planetary and human justice are – one cannot be addressed without the other. Taken together, such actions and outcomes could become mutually reinforcing.

BU: A model of cooperation that unites the world around human and planetary justice is urgently needed.