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The 'net-zero emissions' fallacy

Why the current push for 'carbon-neutral' targets will not resolve the climate crisis

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The current drive to get pledges by all countries to achieve ‘net-zero’ carbon emissions is not only inequitable but also falls short of adequately tackling climate change. 7

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The dismantling of environmental protections in Brazil

Environmental protection agencies and regulations in Brazil are being severely weakened under the administration of President Jair Bolsonaro.

**Sue Branford and
Thais Borges**

‘THE Bolsonaro government has a clear policy for dismantling national environmental policies. It is delegitimising the federal environmental bodies and its employees, sacking competent staff and appointing ill-prepared people to head departments and “flexibilising” the regulations that form an important part of environmental policies in every country. He is destroying all this,’ says Suely Araújo, a senior specialist in public policies at Observatório do Clima, a network of Brazilian non-governmental organisations working on climate change issues.

What the dismantling of Brazil’s environmental agencies and policies looks like in practice has been described in detail in a new report published 22 January by Observatório do Clima. It maps out how the government of President Jair Bolsonaro has systematically slashed the budget for environmental monitoring and firefighting – reduced by 9.8% in 2020, then by another 27.4% in 2021. The cuts are so sweeping they make it impossible for the nation’s environmental agencies to carry out their work effectively, according to the report.

Critics point out that, if the government was truly committed to environmental protection, these cuts would make no sense at all. Another proof: even as Brazil’s deforestation soars under Bolsonaro (with an increase of 34% in the last two years), federal agencies’ capacity to punish criminals has steeply declined due to chronic funding shortages. The number of fines imposed for illegal

deforestation and damage to vegetation, instead of rising with increased criminal activity, fell steeply by 42% from August 2019 to July 2020, according to figures supplied by the government’s environment agency, IBAMA (see graph).

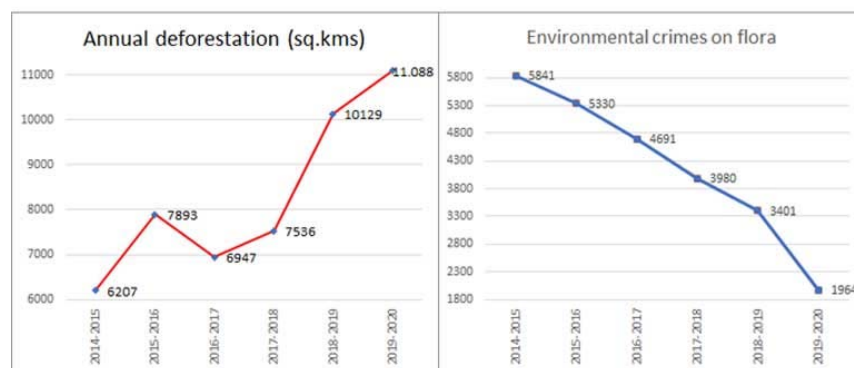
Far from trying to stem deforestation, Observatório do Clima believes, the government has a very different goal. ‘It is opting not to have environmental policies, to have paralysis,’ said Araújo. ‘The resources going to the Ministry of the Environment and bodies linked to it are so small that reducing them won’t make much difference to the country’s account. When you cut yet further resources that are already insufficient, your goal is to mess things up. It is sabotage. We must remember that, as well as the unacceptably low 2021 budget allocation, the government has refused money from the [internationally supplied] Amazon Fund since January 2019.’

The government’s intention of dismantling environmental protections isn’t only apparent in its drastic budget cuts, says the report. The administration has also pushed deregulation and rule changes rapidly, in an ‘infra-legal’ way; that is, moving

outside legal processes. Nearly 600 important regulatory changes have been implemented to date with nothing more than a presidential signature.

These key alterations include the ‘flexibilisation’ of controls over suspicious Amazon timber exports; attempts to permit oil exploration in sensitive areas, as for example when it endeavoured to open up the Abrolhos archipelago, the most diverse marine region in the South Atlantic, to oil exploration; the cramming of military officers into environmental bodies; and the proposed merging of ICM-Bio (the Chico Mendes Institute for Biodiversity Conservation which administers the nation’s protected areas) with IBAMA.

The approach to the government’s wholesale environmental deregulation, says the report, was revealed by Brazilian Environment Minister Ricardo Salles at a meeting of state government ministers on 22 April 2020, which was videotaped. The government tried to prevent the video being made public, but its release was forced by a ruling on 22 May by judge Celso de Mello, who heads the Federal Supreme Court (STF).



A side-by-side comparison of rising annual deforestation in square kilometres and the plummeting number of forest-related environmental crimes charged in Brazil from 2014 to 2020. Image by Thais Borges / data by INPE (deforestation) and IBAMA (crimes).

Using a phrase during the meeting that has since become famous across Brazil, Salles urged the state governors to take advantage of the mainstream media's hyper-focus on the COVID-19 pandemic in order to get to work '*passando a boiada*' (pushing through the cattle). That's a ranching term originally referring to the rounding up of cattle to quickly get them across a river – a phrase which Observatório do Clima used as the title to



Even as deforestation soars in Brazil, federal agencies' capacity to punish criminals has steeply declined due to chronic funding shortages.

its report. Salles was explicit in his meaning: 'There's an enormous list of things we can simplify in all the ministries that have a regulatory role. We don't need Congress,' he said.

The Mongabay environmental news website, on which this article was originally published, contacted Brazil's Environment Ministry for a comment on the allegations made in the report. As of the time the article went to press, the ministry had not replied.

But, says the report, Bolsonaro's policies face pushback in Congress, the judiciary and civil society. The government ended 2020 facing four high-impact lawsuits which are going before the STF, addressing attempts to dismantle environmental policies. Earlier, the STF imposed defeats on the administration by requiring explicit policies to better protect Indigenous peoples and forcing it to supply emergency help to combat COVID-19 outbreaks in Indigenous territories.

The dismantling of environmental policies has also been clearly aimed at traditional communities, including Indigenous peoples. But there are other ways in which Indigenous peoples have been deliberately targeted by the Bolsonaro government.

Observatório do Clima gives several examples: Normative Ruling no. 9, issued by the Indigenous agency, FUNAI, permits private

landowners to claim land in Indigenous territories, provided the Indigenous land hasn't been fully demarcated; and Draft Law 191/2020 regulates economic activities, such as mining and logging, and the construction of hydroelectric dams within Indigenous territories. Add to that Bolsonaro's diatribes against Indigenous people in which he encourages invasions of Indigenous land, invasions which, according to the Catholic Church's Indigenous Council CIMI, increased 135% in 2019.

International Criminal Court asked to investigate

Faced with Bolsonaro's gutting of federal environmental agencies and protections and his anti-Indigenous policies, two Brazilian Indigenous *caciques* (leaders) – Chief Raoni Metuktire, head of the Kayapo people, and Chief Almir Surui, leader of the Surui group – have asked the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague to investigate Bolsonaro for 'crimes against humanity'. The charges are wide-ranging, with Bolsonaro being accused of deaths, extermination of Indigenous people, forced migration, slavery and carrying out anti-environmental policies.

Metuktire, aged about 90, said last year: 'I have seen many presidents come and go, but none spoke so badly of Indigenous people or threatened us

and the forest like this one. Since he [Bolsonaro] became president, he has been the worst for us.'

This is not the first time that charges have been brought against Bolsonaro at the ICC. Three attempts have been made to charge him with 'crimes against humanity' because of negligence in his handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. Each time the Brazilian government has refused to comment. Mongabay contacted the presidency for comment with respect

to the *caciques*' charges and, as of the time this article went to press, had not received a reply.

A Paris-based lawyer, William Bourdon, is acting on behalf of the Indigenous leaders in the case. He told Mongabay that the ICC has a 'subsidiary jurisdiction' to that of national courts and can only get involved when the latter refuse to prosecute or are unable to. Bourdon explained: 'In this case, the principle of subsidiarity [jurisdiction] is satisfied because the Brazilian judicial authorities refuse to prosecute and ... are also unable to do so.' He said that Bolsonaro would likely be charged with 'crimes against humanity perpetrated in the broader context of environment crime'. In other words, he added, if the case goes forward, Bolsonaro will likely be charged with 'ecocide'.

In coming months, ICC Chief Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda will need to determine whether or not there are sufficient grounds for an investigation of Bolsonaro. There is no deadline for a decision, but Bourdon told Mongabay that it is a matter of great urgency. 'Bolsonaro wants to destroy these Indigenous communities. We have a collective duty to protect them.' ♦

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Fossil fuels caused the Texas freeze

The fossil-fuel-heavy electricity network in the US state of Texas broke down during February's unprecedented cold wave – and it is also fossil fuels that are making such extreme weather events more likely.

Basav Sen

IN Texas and across much of the US South, record-breaking cold temperatures and ice storms trapped millions of people indoors without electricity. People froze to death, and failing water treatment facilities left millions of Texans under boil advisories.

For me, what happened is personal. I lived in Texas for years, and most of my wife's relatives still do. We spent days worrying about them. Thankfully they are all fine now, but most experienced power outages and water shutoffs in bitterly cold weather that Texas homes aren't designed for.

So what happened?

In short, the cold weather caused very high energy usage, even as generating units went offline, because of extreme conditions. Texas's fossil-fuel-heavy electric power grid simply couldn't handle the peak load.

Conservative Texas politicians and right-wing media, absurdly, blamed everything from wind power to the 'Green New Deal' for the crisis. These are lies.

According to the Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT), the operator of the Texas grid, generating units went offline 'across fuel types' – especially natural gas.

Independent experts agree. 'Texas is a gas state,' said Michael Webber, a professor of energy resources at the University of Texas at Austin. And 'gas is failing in the most spectacular fashion right now'.

This isn't surprising. A lot of peak generation capacity, which is brought online only when demand peaks, uses natural gas. What's more, two-thirds of electricity generation in Texas uses fossil fuels, with 47% from natural gas alone. Only one-fifth is from wind energy.

Fossil fuels are also to blame in a larger sense. Texas and the US South are more likely to experience freak cold snaps today because warming planetary surface temperatures are destabilising the jet stream, causing extremely cold Arctic air masses to flow south.

That's right: global warming makes extreme cold weather events more likely.

When propagandists spew misinformation about 'freezing wind turbines' and advocate more fossil fuel use, they're actively calling for measures that would make disasters such as the deep freeze in Texas more frequent.

So when propagandists spew misinformation about 'freezing wind turbines' and advocate more fossil fuel use, they're actively calling for measures that would make disasters such as the deep freeze in Texas more frequent.

This propaganda isn't new. It's an old, repeatedly debunked lie suggesting that wind, solar and other renewables are less reliable.

Under Rick Perry, the one-time Texas governor and the Trump administration's former secretary of energy, the US Department of Energy produced a highly flawed, politicised

2017 study alleging that renewable sources made the grid unreliable. Professional researchers at Perry's own agency disputed that claim. Now Perry is claiming that Texans would rather freeze to death than endure federal regulation of the state's energy grid.

In truth, the reliability of the nation's grid is improving – even as the share of energy from intermittent renewable sources increases.

So how can we prevent more disasters like these?

For starters, a more decentralised (but interconnected), locally controlled grid with distributed renewable energy generation and storage would go a long way towards preventing and mitigating such crises.

If the grid is made up of interconnected microgrids, it's easier to isolate breakdowns in the grid so they don't lead to power outages over a vast area. A decentralised grid, powered by locally controlled renewables, would also make it more cost-effective to electrify remote rural communities and reduce reliance on polluting, corporate-controlled power generation.

It's also essential to require utilities to prepare for more weather-related emergencies, which Texas's climate-denialist authorities plainly failed to do. But they're hardly alone – utility regulators across the country must make sure utilities are better prepared for the disasters we know are coming.

Last but not least: We must end the era of fossil fuels, which are making disasters such as the Texas freeze more likely. ♦

Basav Sen directs the Climate Policy Project at the Washington, DC-based Institute for Policy Studies. This article first appeared on Progressive.org.

Cold truth: The Texas freeze is a catastrophe of the free market

Texas's epic power failure was also a failure of the deregulatory ethos behind the operation of the state's electricity grid.

James K Galbraith

LENIN, who was a better economist than Rick Perry, once defined communism as 'soviet power plus electrification of the whole country'. Competing with Stalin, the New Deal built dams and strung power lines in America's backcountry. Lyndon Johnson, then a young congressman, got Roosevelt to help build the Mansfield Dam, which brought public power to the Texas hill country, and another, the Tom Miller dam, which brought it to the city of Austin.

Times changed. Texas grew and the cult of the free market took control of the state's government. Economists lit the way forward. Electricity is the ultimate standard product, every jolt exactly like every other. Texas had a self-enclosed grid, cut off from interstate commerce and exempt from federal regulations. What better place to prove the virtues of a competitive, deregulated system?

Under New Deal-style regulations, electric utilities got a rate of return on their investment, governed by a utility commission that set and stabilised prices. It was (in principle) enough to cover construction and maintenance and a fair profit, not so much as to amount to monopoly profits; utilities were a stable but dull business, municipal socialism. Economists complained: there was an incentive, they said, for such utilities to *over-invest*. The bigger their operations, the higher their total costs, the more they could extract from the rate-setters.

What to do? Economists proposed a free market: let generating companies compete to deliver power to the consumer through the common



Residents of Austin, Texas, queue up to buy groceries amid widespread power outage during the February cold snap.

electrical grid. Freely chosen contracts would govern the terms and the price. Competition would assure bare-bones, lean-and-mean efficiency, and low, low prices most of the time, reflecting the cost of fuel plus the smallest possible profit margin. The role of the state would be minimal – just to manage the common grid, through which power flows from the producer to the consumer. In times of shortage, prices might rise, but then the market would decide; those who did not wish to pay could always flip their switches off.

It was a perfect textbook setup, with supply on one side, demand on the other, and a neutral manager in between. True, there were a few loose ends. One is that demand for electricity is what economists call

inelastic: it doesn't respond much to price, but it does respond to changes in the weather, and at such times, of heat or cold, the demand becomes even more inelastic.

Another detail was that in an ordinary market, there can be some play in the relationship between supply and demand. If a fishmonger does not sell his catch, he can, at the end of the day, cut his price – or even freeze the haddock for the following day. Electricity isn't like that. Supply has to exactly equal demand every single minute of every single day. If it doesn't, the entire system can fail.

This system, therefore, had three vulnerabilities. First, it created an incentive for cut-throat competition, to provide power in the cheapest possible way, which meant with



Transmission towers and power lines leading to a substation after a snowstorm in Fort Worth, Texas, in February. The entire Texas power grid came within minutes of a collapse at one point during the cold wave.

machinery, wells, meters, pipes and also windmills that were not insulated against extreme cold – a rarity but not unknown, even in Texas. Second, it left prices free to fluctuate. Third, it assured that when prices rose the most, that would be at exactly those moments when the demand for power was the greatest.

In 2002, under Governor Rick Perry, Texas deregulated its electricity system. After a few years, the electrical free market, managed by a non-profit called ERCOT, was fully established. Some 70 or so providers eventually sprung up. While a few cities, including Austin, kept their public power, they were nevertheless tied to the state system.

The market system could, and did, work out most of the time. Prices rose and fell, and customers who didn't sign long-term contracts faced some risk. One provider, called Griddy, had a special model: for \$9.99 a month you could get your power at whatever the wholesale price was on any given day. That was cheap! Most of the time.

The problem with 'most of the time' is that people need electric power *all of the time*. And Texas's leaders *knew*, as of 2011 at least, when the state went through a short, severe freeze, that the system was radically unstable in extreme weather. But they did nothing. To do something, they would have had to regulate the

system. And they didn't want to regulate the system, because the providers, a rich source of campaign funding, didn't want to be regulated and to have to spend on weatherisation that was not needed – most of the time. In 2020, even voluntary inspections were suspended, due to COVID-19.

Enter the deep freeze of 2021. Demand went up. Supply went down. Natural gas froze up at the wells, in the pipes and at the generating plants. Unweatherised windmills also went offline, a small part of the story. Since Texas is disconnected from the rest of the country, no reserves could be imported, and given the cold everywhere, there would have been none available anyway. There came a point, on Sunday, 14 February or the next day, when demand so outstripped supply that the entire Texas grid came within minutes of a collapse that, we are told, would have taken months to repair.

As this happened, the price mechanism failed completely. Wholesale prices rose a hundred-fold – but retail prices, under contract, did not, except for the unlucky customers of Griddy, who got socked with bills for thousands of dollars each day. ERCOT was therefore forced to cut power, which might have been tolerable, had it happened on a rolling basis across neighbourhoods throughout the state. But this was

impossible: you can't cut power to hospitals, fire stations and other critical facilities, or for that matter to high-rise downtown apartments reliant on elevators. So lights stayed on in some areas, and they stayed off – for days on end – in others. Selective socialism, one might call it.

When the lights go off and the heat goes down, water freezes and that was the next phase of the calamity. For when water freezes, pipes burst, and when pipes burst, the water supply cannot keep up with the demand. So across Texas, water pressure is falling, as I type these words. Hospitals without water cannot generate steam, and therefore heat; and some of them are being evacuated right now. Meanwhile, ice is bearing down on the power lines.

For most of us, it's a waiting game. We know the power will come back soon, just as it is no longer so desperately needed. We don't know how long before water supplies are fully restored. Food is a matter of how well-prepared you were beforehand. Anyone without ready cash, anyone who relied on official information, anyone who just didn't get out before the storm – all those anyones have a problem.

Rick Perry has reassured us that as Texans we're prepared to sacrifice ourselves to avoid the curse of socialism. But it's too late now. In the aftermath of this debacle, we will return to New Deal-style municipal socialism, or this disaster of power, water and gas will happen again. Socialism is government, in technical matters, by engineers and others who know their stuff and not by ideologues who do not. Compared with Texas right now, it's not such a bad prospect. In the USSR, despite all its other flaws and the Russian cold, the power and the heat did stay on. Even in the worst of the post-Soviet free-market collapse, the Moscow metro, a triumph of municipal socialism, never stopped. ♦

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The fallacy of net-zero emissions being ambitious

Current targets for achieving net-zero carbon emissions fall far short of what is needed to contain climate change and allow the developed countries to evade their fair share of climate action.

Meena Raman

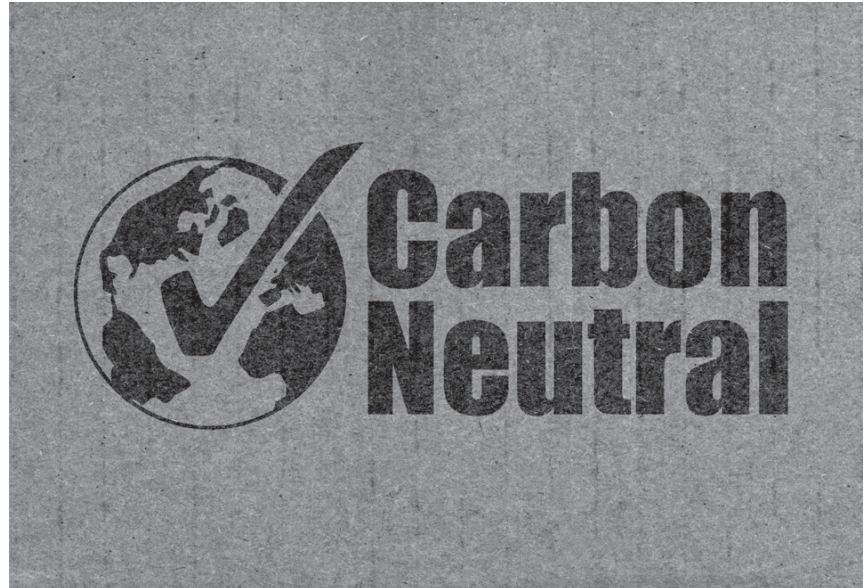
UN Secretary-General António Guterres, since early this year, has been calling on governments to come forward with significantly more ambitious actions by all parties under the Paris Agreement (PA) in order ‘to stop the climate crisis from becoming a permanent catastrophe’, which requires the limiting of temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius from pre-industrial levels.

The UNSG has called for 2030 targets from governments consistent with a net-zero pathway and has cited an exponential growth of the global coalition for net-zero emissions as a ‘central objective for the UN this year.’

According to a recent UN press release, ‘despite the current meaningful momentum in tackling the climate crisis – which includes countries representing current 70% of the world economy and 65% of global carbon dioxide emissions having now committed to net zero – the UN chief said this was not enough, with the world still way off target in keeping the global temperature rise to within the 1.5-degree limit of the PA.’

The UNSG’s call has been followed by intensive diplomatic outreach by representatives of the United Kingdom, which will host the 26th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 26) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), including by the incoming COP 26 President, Alok Sharma, to many capitals, including in the developing world, persuading them to update their climate pledges.

On Earth Day, 22 April, the



Current developed-country pledges to achieve net-zero emissions, or carbon neutrality, will not be enough to avert a climate crisis.

United States, which has rejoined the Paris Agreement, is convening a Leaders Summit on Climate of 40 countries, with US President Joe Biden as the host of the event, which will take place virtually. According to a White House briefing, Biden in his invitation urged leaders to use the summit as an opportunity to outline how their countries also will contribute to stronger climate ambition. The meeting also seeks to ‘address the role of nature-based solutions in achieving net zero by 2050 goals’.

These diplomatic efforts have seen responses from some Northern governments and several big corporations, including major fossil fuel companies which have announced net-zero targets.

While efforts to goad governments to undertake more climate action are laudable given that current pledges under the Paris

Agreement will take the world to 3°C–5°C warming, net-zero emissions by 2050, especially by rich countries and their corporations, will not be enough to save the world from a climate crisis.

Such net-zero announcements have drawn much flak from some academics from developing countries and climate justice groups for being unambitious, not going far and even dubious in the case of some.¹ They have been viewed as not enough in terms of what should be the fair and equitable effort, especially by rich countries, within a shrinking carbon budget to limit temperature rise to 1.5°C. These groups have called for ‘real zero’ and not ‘net zero’, starting first with developed countries, which must also be responsible for the provision of financial support to developing countries to head in that direction.

‘Far from signifying climate ambition, the phrase “net zero” is

being used by a majority of polluting governments and corporations to orchestrate escape clauses so as to evade responsibility, shift burdens, disguise climate inaction, and in some cases even to scale up fossil fuel extraction, burning and emissions. The term is used to greenwash business-as-usual or even business-more-than-usual. At the core of these pledges are small and distant targets that require no action for decades, and promises of technologies that are unlikely ever to work at scale, and which are likely to cause huge harm if they come to pass,' say these climate justice groups.

Much of these net-zero pledges are not grounded in deep decarbonisation and rely heavily on 'nature-based solutions' (NbS) as sinks to sequester carbon emissions. Much of them rely on carbon markets to deliver carbon offsets mainly in developing countries. What offsetting means is not a reduction of emissions domestically but paying developing countries to do the emissions reductions in their countries as it is seen as being more 'cost-effective', and buying the carbon credits to offset the emissions generated in the developed world.

With or without carbon offsetting, such pledges create a huge demand for sinks mainly located in the forests, wetlands and grasslands in the developing countries. There is no known published research yet that adds up the quantities of carbon removal that make up the net-zero pledges of these countries and corporations. What seems clear though is that the quantity of the sinks needed would exceed the sequestration capacity of the planet by several-fold. This will have negative implications for developing countries, including for conflicts over land use, local communities and indigenous peoples whose lands and forests are being sought to solve the emissions problem of the rich nations.

Climate justice groups have referred to this as 'carbon colonialism'.

Opposition to an equitable approach in emissions reductions

Limiting temperature rise to 1.5°C requires the sharing of the remaining carbon budget in an equitable manner. For a 50% probability of keeping warming below the limit, the carbon budget remaining is 480 gigatonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (GtCO₂eq).² At the current rate of emissions of 42 GtCO₂eq per year, the budget would be exhausted in about 12 years (see following article).

With a shrinking carbon budget, the right approach ought to be one where the developed world takes the lead in much deeper cuts in their emissions based on a fair-shares approach which takes into account their historical and current cumulative emissions, including on a per capita basis.

In the run-up to the adoption of the Paris Agreement, there were proposals from some developing countries (viz., India, Bolivia and Ethiopia) on the need for equitable access to atmospheric space in determining how the remaining carbon budget within a certain temperature rise threshold is to be shared on a per capita basis, taking into account historical responsibilities between developed and developing countries and their respective capabilities. Such equity-based proposals were not followed up on due to tremendous resistance from developed countries, especially from the US, on the grounds that no international agreement can dictate a top-down approach to emissions reductions for countries.

In fact, this fight for a top-down approach began well before the run-up to Paris. In the UNFCCC negotiations between 2007-10, the US was even opposed to any reference to a top-down aggregate reduction figure based on what science requires for developed countries, from which the developed-country national commitments would have to be added up to meet the aggregate reduction figure.³

This top-down aggregate system was what was agreed to in the negotiations for the second commitment period (for developed-country targets from 2013-20) of the Kyoto Protocol (KP) for developed countries which were parties to the Protocol. However, the US was not a party to the KP but was a party to the Convention, and it did not want any reference to the aggregate reduction figure in any decision under the UNFCCC.

In Paris in 2015, the only consensus possible in order to accommodate mainly the US was through the acceptance of a bottom-up approach, which paved the way for 'nationally determined contributions' (NDCs) under which each country would pledge what it can do voluntarily without any methodology to assess if such reductions are consistent with equity or fairness.

In fact, analysis by serious academics and progressive civil society groups has pointed out that rich countries are not doing enough at all and are very far away from what is needed to limit temperature rise.

For instance, one recent analysis 'rooted in the principle of equal per capita access to atmospheric commons' by Dr. Jason Hickel from the University of London, reported in *The Lancet*,⁴ pointed out that 'As of 2015, the USA was responsible for 40% of excess global CO₂ emissions. The European Union (EU-28) was responsible for 29%. The G8 nations (the USA, EU-28, Russia, Japan, and Canada) were together responsible for 85%. Countries classified by the UNFCCC as Annex I nations (i.e. most industrialised countries) were responsible for 90% of excess emissions. The Global North was responsible for 92%. By contrast, most countries in the Global South were within their boundary fair shares, including India and China (although China will overshoot soon).'

The Third World Network also compiled a table of what emission reductions of selected developed countries ought to be from a fair-shares perspective according to civil

Developed-country NDC mitigation component fair shares: Various civil society proposals

Under Article 4.4 of the Paris Agreement, 'Developed country Parties should continue taking the lead by undertaking economy-wide absolute emission reduction targets' in the context of the domestic mitigation measures that they are to pursue as part of their NDCs under the Agreement. Under paragraph 27 of the UNFCCC COP's decision 1/CP.21 that adopted the Paris Agreement, when Parties communicate their NDCs, they could also indicate 'how the Party considers that its nationally determined contribution is fair and ambitious, in the light of its national circumstances, and how it contributes towards achieving the objective of the Convention as set out in its Article 2.'

In this context, many civil society organisations have made proposals on what would be the mitigation fair share of developed-country Parties using various metrics and methodologies. These include the following:

- Climate Equity Reference Project – <https://climateequityreference.org/>
- The Civil Society Equity Review Reports – <http://civilsocietyreview.org/>
- Friends of the Earth International's Climate Fair Shares – <https://www.foei.org/climate-fair-shares>
- Climate Action Tracker – <https://climateactiontracker.org/>

Country-specific mitigation fair shares proposed by domestic civil society organisations in various developed countries include:

Developed Country	CSO Mitigation Fair Share Proposal	Source
Australia	Reduce emissions by at least 65-80% below 2005 levels by 2030 and provide at least AUS\$3.2 billion annually by 2020	Oxfam Australia, 'Bringing Paris Home: How Australia Measures Up Against the New Global Climate Agreement', 2016, at https://media.oxfam.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Oxfam-Australia-Bringing-Paris-Home-Report-1.pdf
Canada	Reduce emissions by at least 140% below 2005 levels by 2030, with at least 60% to be reduced domestically and the rest through support to developing countries, including increasing Canada's climate finance to at least US\$4 billion annually by 2020	CAN Canada, 'Canada's Fair Share towards limiting global warming to 1.5C', at https://climateactionnetwork.ca/2019/12/02/canadas-fair-share-towards-limiting-global-warming-to-1-5c/ . The climate finance fair share could include at least CDN\$1.8 billion annually by 2025/2026 through an additional CDN\$6.76 billion total increase between 2021-2025 over Canada's current CDN\$800 million climate finance allocation for 2020/2021. See AidWatch Canada and Canadian Coalition on Climate Change and Development, 'The Reality of Canada's International Climate Finance', September 2019, pp. 37-41, at http://December-2019-Climate-Report.pdf
European Union-27	Reduce emissions to at least 65% below 1990 levels in addition to increasing its annual climate finance allocation to US\$33-36 billion	CAN Europe, 'Climate target', at https://caneurope.org/work-areas/climate-action/#climate-target ; ACT-Alliance EU, 'Setting the Standard: Climate Finance from EU and EFTA Member States', 18 January 2021, at https://actalliance.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/ACT-Alliance_EU_SettingTheStandard.pdf
Japan	Reduce emissions by at least 45-50% below 1990 levels by 2030 and increase its climate finance to at least US\$9-10 billion annually	CAN Japan, 'The Japanese government should raise the target of greenhouse gas emission reduction', 23 January 2020, at http://www.can-japan.org/en/2684 ; Oxfam, 'Breaking the Standoff: Post-2020 climate finance in the Paris Agreement', 28 November 2014, at https://s3.amazonaws.com/oxfam-us/www/static/media/files/bp201-breaking-standoff-climate-finance-011214-en.pdf
New Zealand	Reduce emissions by at least 99% below 1990 levels by 2030 and provide between NZ\$423-797 million annually	Oxfam New Zealand, 'A Fair 2030 Target for Aotearoa: Option to reflect equity in New Zealand's nationally determined contribution under the Paris Agreement', September 2020, at https://www.oxfam.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Oxfam-NZ-Briefing-A-Fair-2030-Target-for-Aotearoa.pdf
Norway	Reduce its emissions by at least 53% below 1990 levels by 2030 and provide international climate support of at least US\$6.4 billion annually for renewable power and between US\$910 million-US\$1.95 billion for adaptation financing	Norwegian Church Aid, Stockholm Environment Institute, Rainforest Foundation Norway, Friends of the Earth Norway (NNV) and the Norwegian Forum for Development and Environment (ForUM), 'Norway's Fair Share of Meeting the Paris Agreement', 2018, at https://www.kirkensnodhjelp.no/globalassets/lanserte-rapporter/2018/norways-fair-share-2018_web.pdf
Switzerland	Reduce emissions to zero or negative emissions by 2030 and its climate finance to at least CHF1 billion annually	Climate Action Tracker, 'CAT Climate Target Update Tracker – Switzerland', 9 December 2020, at https://climateactiontracker.org/climate-target-update-tracker/switzerland/ ; Alliance Sud, 'Der Schweizer Beitrag an die internationale Klimafinanzierung', 15 May 2020, at https://www.alliancesud.ch/de/file/65403/download?token=l62y2q8f .
United Kingdom	Reduce emissions amounting to 200% below 1990 levels by 2030, including reducing domestic GHG emissions to zero by 2030 and providing commensurate climate finance support of up to GBP1 trillion between 2021 and 2050 (with most of it to be provided between 2021 and 2030) to developing countries to reduce global emissions by 800 MtCO ₂ eq	ActionAid, Christian Aid, War on Want, Friends of the Earth England, Wales and Northern Ireland, Friends of the Earth Scotland, 'The UK's Climate Fair Share', at https://www.christianaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-03/FairShareUK_Infographic.pdf and https://www.christianaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-03/UK%20Climate%20Fair%20Share%20-%20Technical%20Backgrounder.pdf
United States	Reduce emissions by 195% below 2005 levels by 2030, composed of 70% emission reductions domestically below 2005 levels by 2030 and a further 125% reduction achieved by providing the commensurate financial and technology support for emission reductions in developing countries – including at least US\$8 billion to be provided in terms of immediate climate finance	US CAN, 'The US Climate Fair Share', at https://usfairshare.org/

Regardless of the metric or methodology used for calculating developed countries' mitigation fair shares, the proposals put forward by civil society organisations all clearly show that the current emission reduction targets put forward by developed-country Parties are not fair nor ambitious and fall far short of their respective fair shares.

society groups (see box). The table shows the actual effort needed from developed countries in terms of emissions reductions, including the level of finance that they should be contributing to developing countries as part of their fair shares.

Instead of focusing on what the emission reductions ought to be from a fair-shares perspective in order to keep within the remaining carbon budget in an equitable way, the net-zero mantra allows developed countries to get away with targets which amount to doing too little too late, and passes on the responsibility to developing countries to do the heavy lifting, without commensurate finance and technology transfer.

If COP 26 is to be a success, its outcomes must reflect equity between developed and developing countries and must not undermine the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBDRRC) which underpins the implementation of the Paris Agreement. Equity between countries as underlined by the CBDRRC principle is the foundation of the UNFCCC, reflecting the historical responsibilities of developed countries for much of the greenhouse gas emissions since the Industrial Revolution, and the different capacities between the North and the South.

In the negotiations on the PA, how equity and CBDRRC would be reflected in the new agreement was hugely contested along North-South lines, with the US – led by John Kerry, the climate envoy under the Obama administration then (and now under Biden) – leading the charge in an effort at obliterating the principle and blurring the differentiation between developed and developing countries. This effort was thwarted in Paris by a strong group of Like-Minded Developing Countries (LMDC), which led to the PA's Article 2.2.

However, attempts at undermining equity and CBDRRC in the implementation of the PA obligations have not stopped, as exemplified by the push towards net zero by 2050. The PA does call for a

balance between human emissions and removal by sinks by 2050, but this is to be on the basis of equity and in the context of sustainable development and efforts to eradicate poverty. This is a global aspiration and not a country-wise aim. It cannot be country-wise, as this would lead to inequity.

The success of COP 26 is predicated by mainstream media on 'major emitters' updating and revising their climate targets to more ambitious levels, including in promising net-zero targets. Setting such expectations for the success of the COP is not only unrealistic but also, with regard to the claims that the net-zero targets are ambitious, misleading. Such net-zero targets for developed countries are neither ambitious nor equitable from the perspective of developing countries.

Instead of respecting equity and the CBDRRC principle, such calls for common action would lead to the sharing of responsibilities without differentiating between developed and developing countries and their different capabilities. Instead of CBDRRC, they promote the notion of 'common and shared responsibilities,' thus undermining equity between the rich and poor, North and South.

While it is well acknowledged that all countries have to do more in terms of improving their NDCs so as to limit temperature rise to 1.5°C, expecting similar actions between developed and developing countries is not only grossly inequitable but also misleading as it will not solve the climate crisis.

Following postponement of COP 26 from last year due to the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic, governments especially in the developing world are facing huge challenges dealing with the triple crises of health, economic recovery and climate change. The poorer economies, in particular, are having to borrow more money and getting further indebted as they try to keep their health systems intact and as they face growing poverty and

unemployment caused by the effects of the pandemic on their economies.

For many rich economies, adequate vaccine access to tackle the pandemic has been secured, but this is not the case for most of the world's poor countries, which are still struggling to get the needed supply. The Western world is also opposing proposals by developing countries to waive intellectual property rules in order to remove barriers to the development, production and approval of vaccines, therapeutics and other medical technologies necessary to combat the pandemic, so that more manufacturers, especially from developing countries, may independently contribute to the global supply.⁵

The fallacy of net zero needs to be exposed for what it is. It is no panacea in solving the climate crisis. The rich North cannot run away from what they must do today, which is to go to real zero and to assist developing countries to do their fair shares, through the provision of finance and technology transfer, as well as to build their capacities so that they do not repeat the mistakes of the North.

Net zero is indeed a mirage to delay further action; the sooner we realise this, the better, for the sake of the planet and the poor. ♦

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Notes

- ¹ https://demandclimatejustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/NOT_ZERO_How_net_zero_targets_disguise_climate_inaction_FINAL.pdf
- ² Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), Special Report on 1.5°C
- ³ Martin Khor and Meenakshi Raman, *A Clash of Climate Change Paradigms*, 2020, Third World Network
- ⁴ [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanph/article/PIIS2542-5196\(20\)30196-0/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanph/article/PIIS2542-5196(20)30196-0/fulltext)
- ⁵ https://www.twn.my/title2/intellectual_property/trips_waiver_proposal.htm

Deconstructing declarations of carbon neutrality

The current push for all countries to pledge to halt their net carbon emissions is both inadequate to keep global warming in check and unfair to the developing world.

**T Jayaraman and
Tejal Kanitkar**

THE Energy and Climate Intelligence Unit (ECIU),¹ a climate policy tracker, reported at the beginning of April that 32 countries have declared their intention, in some form, of achieving carbon-neutral status around mid-century. Of these, only eight have any firm status, the rest being in the form of proposed legislation or mentions in policy documents. Nineteen among these 32 are developed countries (Annex I Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)), while the rest are less-developed and emerging economies. The target year for most of them is 2050, while a few have declared that they would achieve this goal earlier. China has indicated its intent to reach this status by the year 2060. Even for carbon neutrality declarations so far into the future, only 24 of these countries have a published plan for reaching net-zero emissions.

However, over the last several months, the UN Secretary-General has taken the lead in sparking off an international chorus, led by global civil society organisations based in the developed countries and tacitly encouraged by their governments, that is urging all countries, including developing countries, to make such declarations.

Paris Agreement goals

The impetus for such declarations arises from Article 4.1 of the Paris Agreement which states that ‘In order to achieve the long-term temperature goal set out in Article 2, Parties aim to reach global peaking of greenhouse gas emissions as soon



Present moves to have countries pledge to achieve net-zero emissions postpone immediate and effective climate action.

as possible, recognising that peaking will take longer for developing country Parties, and to undertake rapid reductions thereafter in accordance with best available science, so as to achieve a balance between anthropogenic emissions by sources and removals by sinks of greenhouse gases in the second half of this century, on the basis of equity, and in the context of sustainable development and efforts to eradicate poverty.’

The temperature goal of Article 2, the much better-known declaration of intent of the Paris Agreement, declares the aim to be: ‘Holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, recognizing that this would significantly reduce the risks and impacts of climate change’.

It is evident that the balance of emissions and removals of greenhouse gases is not sought, under the Agreement, on a country-wise

basis but for the world as a whole. Both developed-country governments and international civil society outfits routinely misstate or misinterpret this as an individual commitment by all countries, applicable to their domestic emissions. The text of the Paris Agreement of course clearly indicates that this is indeed a global goal, based on considerations of equity and differentiation between the roles of developed and developing countries that are inbuilt into the agreement.

However, there are two related and more critical issues that are largely ignored. The first is the compatibility of the intent of Article 4.1 and Article 2: Is the achievement of carbon neutrality compatible with achieving the 1.5°C or 2°C goal? And, importantly, are the mid-century carbon neutrality goals of developed countries compatible with Article 2.2 which declares that the Paris Agreement ‘will be implemented to reflect equity and the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, in the light of different national circumstances’?

Pledges not compatible with remaining global carbon budget

The hard scientific reality is that such a three-way compatibility between temperature goals, carbon neutrality and equity not only is not guaranteed, but cannot be achieved for the 1.5°C temperature goal at all. And even for the 2°C goal, the current pledges are highly inadequate. In the light of this, current declarations of neutrality must be seen as yet another instance in the long record of prevarication by developed countries, postponing immediate and effective climate action with new slogans and ever-shifting goalposts.

This harsh conclusion follows from straightforward scientific considerations, accessible to all, based on the notion of the global carbon budget. Since the Fifth Assessment Report (AR5) of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), it is accepted that limiting global temperature rise is best understood as imposing limits on global cumulative greenhouse gas emissions from the pre-industrial era to the time when net emissions cease, namely reaching global carbon neutrality.

This finite quantum of global cumulative emissions, fixed according to the corresponding temperature goal (up to probabilistic uncertainty), is referred to as the global carbon budget. Thus, if carbon neutrality is independently posited as being reached in 2050, this will be compatible with the desired temperature goal only if the cumulative emissions till that time remain within the corresponding carbon budget. Hence the date of carbon neutrality, and the temperature goal with its associated global carbon budget, are two independent parameters that determine the future.

According to the IPCC Special Report on 1.5°C warming (SR1.5), a credible estimate of the remaining carbon budget from 2018 onwards is 480 gigatonnes (billion tonnes or Gt for short) of carbon dioxide equivalent (GtCO₂eq), for a 50%



Current pledges of carbon neutrality will not be able to meet the goal of limiting global warming to 1.5°C.

probability of restricting temperature rise to less than 1.5°C. At the current rate of emissions of about 42 GtCO₂ per year (the uncertainty being about 3 GtCO₂ either way), this budget would be consumed by default in 12 years. If global emissions start declining immediately by a fixed annual quantum and reach net zero by 2050, it would result in global cumulative emissions of 764 GtCO₂ between now and 2050, implying a greater than 70% probability of exceeding 1.5°C warming. If the remaining carbon budget of 480 Gt is to be adhered to, then with a steady linear decline in emissions, global carbon neutrality must be reached by 2039.

For a 50% probability of restricting temperature rise below 2°C, the budget is of course more generous, amounting to about 1,400 GtCO₂eq. This provides considerably greater room for manoeuvre. This budget would be exhausted by around 2050 at the current rate of emissions and by around 2078 with constant emissions reduction every year. However, if global emissions continue to grow for some more time and peak sometime beyond 2030, net zero emissions would have to be reached much before, even for the 2°C target.

Annex I Party emissions

The hollowness of many carbon neutrality declarations is brought out

more starkly when we consider individual declarations in more detail.

Greenhouse gas emissions in the United States (without considering land use, land use change and forest (LULUCF)-related emissions) peaked in 2005 and declined at an average rate of 1.1% from then till 2017, with a maximum annual reduction of 6.3% in 2009, at the height of a recession. If the US reaches net-zero emissions by 2050 by reducing a fixed quantum of emissions every year, starting immediately, its cumulative emissions between 2018 and 2050 would be 106 GtCO₂, which is 22% of the total remaining carbon budget for the entire world. Hence, US cumulative emissions by 2050 would be so high that unless others reduced emissions at even faster rates, the world would most certainly cross 1.5°C warming.

In fact, if the US is to stay within its fair share of the remaining carbon budget, it will have to reach net zero emissions by 2025. Even by such a reckoning, the US would still owe a carbon debt of 470 GtCO₂ to the rest of the world for having used more than its fair share of carbon space in the past. At a very moderate carbon price of \$30 per tonne of CO₂, this means a carbon debt of over \$14 trillion that the US owes the world.

Similarly, the European Union, to keep to its fair share of the remaining carbon budget, would have to reach net zero by 2033, with a constant annual reduction in emissions.

Individual countries will have different dates for a fair net zero – Germany's is 2030. If the EU reaches net zero only by 2050, it would consume at least 71 GtCO₂, well above its fair share. Either way, the EU owes the world a carbon debt of about \$9.3 trillion (at the same price of \$30/tonne of CO₂) for past emissions.

Table 1 shows the years in which net-zero emissions must be reached for some countries to keep within the fair share of the remaining carbon budget, assuming linear reductions. It also shows the carbon debt owed to the world for past emissions (at \$30/tonne of CO₂).

Just the 11 countries shown in the table (excluding the EU) owe the world a carbon debt of \$26 trillion, even at a moderate carbon price of \$30 per tonne of CO₂. And yet, the current contributions of developed countries, even in the form of low-cost loans, are many orders of magnitude lower than this.

Given their past emissions, developed countries should in fact consume none of the remaining carbon budget. Theoretically, they should stop emitting immediately and start removing CO₂ from the atmosphere, so that at least the remaining carbon budget is available to developing countries. However,

while such a demand makes an important political point, this is physically unfeasible, though of course the developed countries are nowhere near acknowledging this responsibility. They will therefore consume a part of even the remaining carbon budget.

As the extent to which higher levels of development, well-being and income are achievable through non-fossil-fuel-based development remains unclear, a minimum requirement for the future is that rich countries stay within a fair share of the remaining carbon budget. This is essential to the future of developing countries. However, as is clear, pledges to achieve net zero by 2050 by these countries violate even this basic minimum requirement.

Regrettably, an influential section of the climate policy modelling literature has promoted the illusion that the three-way compatibility between temperature goals, carbon neutrality and equity is feasible through large-scale recourse to speculative 'negative emissions', ostensibly through widespread expansion of carbon capture by the biosphere. They are also promoting the illusion that not resorting to any serious increase in emissions at all is indeed the means to guarantee the successful development of the Third

World.

Developing countries clearly should not and cannot join this game of carbon neutrality declarations. The least developed countries (LDCs) are owed a carbon debt of over \$7 trillion by developed countries (at the same price of \$30/tonne of CO₂). For the future, even if the developed countries stay within their fair share, what remains (as a fair share) for the LDCs is about 64 GtCO₂eq, for a 50% probability of limiting temperature below 1.5°C. This is almost the same amount as the LDCs have emitted in the past. There is no evidence to support the assertion that the LDCs will be able to achieve higher levels of development with such a severe constraint on their emissions.

Large emerging economies too find themselves in a similar situation. India does not owe a carbon debt to the world. India's cumulative emissions (non-LULUCF) are no more than 3% of global cumulative emissions prior to 1990 and about 4.5% since till 2018. Nor are India's current annual emissions such as to seriously dent the emissions gap between what the world needs and the current level of mitigation effort, even as India's mitigation efforts are quite compatible with a 2°C target.

The twin burden of low-carbon development and adaptation to climate impacts is onerous, especially for less developed economies, and no doubt requires serious, concerted action. But the current push for net-zero declarations from all is a pseudo-scientific discourse, based, in the final analysis, on empty and inadequate promises by the rich – an attempt yet again, for the umpteenth time since the climate convention was signed, to postpone serious and immediate mitigation. ♦

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This is an expanded version of an article published in The Hindu on 8 April 2021 (<https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/deconstructing-declarations-of-carbon-neutrality/article34266995.ece>).

Notes

¹ ECIU website, eciu.net

Table 1. Carbon debt and net-zero targets to stay within fair share of the remaining carbon budget for some developed countries

	Year to reach net zero with linear reductions (to keep within fair share of remaining carbon budget for a 50% probability of limiting temperature rise to below 1.5°C)	Carbon debt for past emissions, i.e., over-use of carbon space between 1850 and 2017 (\$ trillion – estimated at a carbon price of \$30/tCO ₂)
USA	2025	14
EU (28)	2033	9.3
Germany	2030	2.6
UK	2036	2.2
France	2036	1
Norway	2031	0.07
Switzerland	2041	0.04
Japan	2031	1.03
Russian Federation	2027	3.2
Australia	2024	0.6
Canada	2025	0.9
New Zealand	2026	0.1

As US rejoins Paris Agreement, Biden urged to do ‘fair share’

Civil society groups have called on the US to do its ‘fair share’ to curb climate change by phasing out domestic fossil fuel use and supporting developing countries’ own climate response efforts.

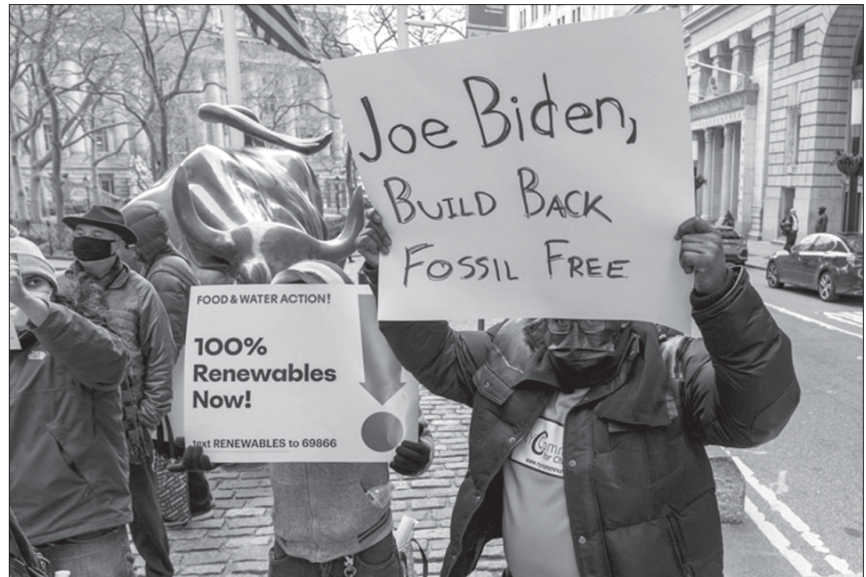
Victor Menotti

US civil society organisations (CSOs) are urging President Joseph Biden to do the US’ ‘fair share’ of global climate action – including significant international assistance – upon rejoining the Paris Agreement that former President Donald Trump dumped.

The US Climate Action Network (USCAN)’s 175 members assess, in conjunction with their international counterparts, that the US’ ‘fair share’ is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by a total of 195% below 2005 levels by 2030, reducing at least 70% within the US, and the remainder through support to developing countries to enable them to reduce their emissions faster than they otherwise could.¹ A broadening section of Biden’s base is now adopting the fair share figures.

Failure by Biden to choose equitable and ambitious targets will make it more difficult for the US – still the world’s largest historical emitter of greenhouse gases and now today’s top oil producer – to earn enough trust for much-needed breakthrough climate deals with other countries, which have repeatedly watched the US run from its responsibilities and avoid any accountability for its role in the climate crisis.

Working with allies internationally, new social movement forces aim to ensure that the domestic environmental justice champions whom Biden has appointed to his administration, and to direct government agencies, also aid in aligning his international climate agenda.



US climate campaigners increasingly underline that the only way to deliver the US’ fair share of climate action is by rapidly reducing fossil fuel use.

Bolstering Biden’s case for climate credibility

Following four years of Trump’s ‘American energy dominance’ as US foreign policy’s guidepost, young voters – and particularly women of colour² – powered Biden to the presidency,³ stirring up some promising opportunities, although significant obstacles remain.

Building beyond Barack Obama’s original Paris pledge, Biden promised during televised debates to ‘transition from oil’ as Vice-President Kamala Harris called for a ‘managed decline’ of fossil fuels, the source of 89% of global emissions.⁴

While the UN’s 2020 Production Gap Report warned the world to reduce fossil fuel production by 6% per year, despite governments still planning to *increase* productive capacity by 2% per year,⁵ both Biden and Harris championed

‘environmental justice’.

As the COVID-19 pandemic started to spread, a Russia-Saudi dispute over oil pricing strategy, amid a dramatic drop in oil demand, plunged the industry into unprecedented panic and contraction. Oil demand has still not recovered to its pre-pandemic record levels and industry analysts forecast further uncertainty, even as renewable energy and electric vehicles expand rapidly.⁶

Biden’s case for climate credibility rests on how fast – and how fair – his pivot is from fossil fuels to generate enough good-paying, green jobs in constructing electric charging infrastructure and other climate-friendly industries, all while building substantial political support for significant international climate finance assistance as an ‘America first’ agenda festers.

Submitting a new Nationally Determined Contribution

Biden's Executive Order on Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad advances potential elements of a fair fossil fuel phasedown but he has yet to propose any comprehensive programme.⁷

Appointing John Kerry (who negotiated the Paris Agreement as Obama's Secretary of State) as Special Climate Envoy, Biden announced he 'will reconvene the Major Economies Forum on Energy and Climate, beginning with the Leaders' Climate Summit', to 'pursue green recovery efforts, initiatives to advance the clean energy transition, sectoral decarbonisation, and alignment of financial flows with the objectives of the Paris Agreement, including with respect to coal financing, nature-based solutions, and solutions to other climate-related challenges'.

Biden then declared the US would aim to submit its 'Nationally Determined Contribution' (NDC) under the Paris Agreement in advance of the summit, since set for 22 April 2021.

The oldest American president to ever take office (78 years) also ordered the Treasury and State Departments to develop a new international climate finance plan within 90 days.

Communities of colour mobilise for justice mandate

Much more detailed is Biden's Executive Order's domestic plan to engage the government in direct dialogue with energy workers and disadvantaged communities to ensure environmental justice and economic opportunity in the transition.

With every federal agency – except, strangely, the State Department – involved, Biden established the Interagency Working Group on Coal and Power Plant Communities and Economic Revitalization as well as the White House Environmental Justice Interagency Council, both elaborating

processes and relationships for community input.

Surprisingly strong appointments to top leadership positions in the White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Department of the Interior, among other agencies, signal significant strides by environmental justice communities of colour in effectively organising political power among supporters surrounding not only Biden but the broader Democratic party leadership,⁸ save the State Department, but more on that below.

Defining and aligning a fair-share US NDC

The US fair share has been defined by a decades-long dialogue among global civil society actors to assess each country's 'common responsibilities and respective capabilities', per commitments in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).⁹

Paris Agreement pledges (NDCs) assessed by the CSO Equity Review coalition found that so far only China had pledged to do its fair share, with most other countries' targets far from pledging their fair shares.

Most recently, USCAN's adopting the figures from the international assessment increased US targets to contribute its fair share, as agreed by CSO advisers, analysts and activists.

As Members of Congress ask climate campaigners what international measures must be included, global justice groups are advancing ideas and proposing policies for legislators to consider for delivering the US fair share.

US climate campaigners increasingly underline that the only way to deliver the US fair share is by rapidly reducing fossil fuel use through a science-aligned phasedown that is both fast and fair.

An NDC drafting process is now under way while faith and especially environmental justice groups are asserting there that the fair share also

includes elements their international allies have been advising, including ingredients listed below as intended deliverables the US can include in its NDC.

Domestic demands from the frontlines of fossil fuel expansion: Phaseout fast and fair

Going beyond Obama's old agenda, which centred around executive actions at electric power plants, Biden also advocates emissions-free electricity by 2035 and, now, net zero by 2050. Such slogans are easy to advance from the campaign trail but translating them into policy takes an epic effort.

Several sophisticated grassroots articulations of equitable and ambitious climate agendas explain in detail what US civil society is demanding President Biden do. Among the most compelling with broad support and impacting policy are 'Climate President',¹⁰ the 'Build Back Fossil Free Executive Action Blueprint'¹¹ and the 'Frontlines Climate Executive Action Platform'.¹²

For frontline communities fighting fossil fuel extraction, meaningful action on climate change mitigation means full fossil phaseout with immediate measures to end expansion, fair phasedown of production, and support for just transitions for communities and countries, including:

• End the expansion

– *Cancel oil pipelines* like Line 3 and the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) for not only failing the climate test but also violating indigenous peoples' rights and even territories under existing treaties. Biden duly denied the Keystone XL pipeline its federal permit on his first day in office, but now he has additional actions to take. In the Line 3 project, a Canadian company aims to drill an oil pipeline through the headwaters of the Mississippi River in Northern Minnesota, the continent's largest river running



US civil society organisations are calling on the government to cancel oil pipelines like Line 3. Picture shows a rally against Line 3 in Minnesota state.

through the heartland, to send almost a million barrels a day of tar sands crude to tidewater in Lake Superior and global markets beyond. Indigenous communities organising against the pipeline are calling on Biden to cancel the construction permit and respect the treaties protecting indigenous territories. He also has to decide on the DAPL, which had been cancelled by Obama and then approved by Trump, which would more competitively connect fossil fuels from the shale fields of North Dakota to more markets globally. Indigenous youth from these communities are leading a national week of action with events in Washington DC to tell Biden to cancel permits.

– *Reject new fossil fuel facilities*, especially for expanding export infrastructure. Two massive oil export terminal projects proposed for the Texas Gulf Coast face rising community opposition: 1) Bluewater Terminal LLC (a partnership of Phillips 66 and scandal-ridden top oil trader Trafigura) ‘wants to build a massive oil export terminal for very large crude carriers near Port Aransas, Texas’, where ‘giant carriers would take crude oil from Texas and Oklahoma to burn in other countries’. 2) Texas GulfLink (Sentinel Midstream) is a proposed massive crude oil storage facility and oil

export terminal off the coast of Brazoria County, Texas, south of Houston, just seven miles away from the proposed Sea Port Oil Terminal (SPOT), which has been delayed due to strong local opposition and environmental concerns amid intensifying extreme weather due to climate change. The GulfLink project would load very large crude carriers (VLCCs) – massive tanker ships – with two million barrels/day of oil.

– *Reinstate the ban on crude oil exports*. Biden is also being called upon to declare a Climate Emergency under the National Emergencies Act to reinstate the crude oil export ban on an annual basis. A 2020 report¹⁴ found that US oil exports have increased by 750% since December 2015, when the Obama-Biden administration, in the final days of the Paris talks, ended the crude oil export ban in exchange for a budget deal (including \$1 billion for the Green Climate Fund (GCF)) from a Congress then in thrall to the oil billionaire Koch brothers. As of October 2019, 24% of all crude extracted in the US was exported.

• *Phase down production*

– Permanently phase out the oil leasing programme from federal lands. This was ‘paused’ by Biden’s

Executive Order and is still being assessed but leasing public land must be ended.

– End fossil fuel subsidies, starting with the perverse tax incentives for investors that are found nowhere else in the tax code.¹⁵

– Enforce existing laws to their fullest extent, especially the Clean Water Act and the Clean Air Act. Presidents can also order the EPA to issue a strict pollution prevention rule for the oil and gas sector, effectively ending harmful energy extraction such as fracking.¹⁶

• *Support just transitions in all communities and countries*

– Engage energy communities in dialogue to envision economic revitalisation plans, prioritising the application of the Just Transition Principles,¹⁷ Feminist Green New Deal Principles¹⁸ and other authentic articulations of global climate justice.

– Establish national employment programmes to restore abandoned oil wells, repair water pipes, construct clean energy charging infrastructure, and retrofit schools, residences and big buildings.¹⁹

– Extend just transition principles and programmes from domestic to diplomatic action by supporting – with funding and staffing – other countries’ efforts to exit fossil fuels while developing their economies and adapting to climate change.²⁰

Increased international support for developing countries

Too few organisations active in the US focus on delivering international policy changes and the diplomatic agenda required for meeting the US responsibilities, yet coordination among global justice groups allows policy demands to be developed for delivering fair shares as defined by global civil society’s post-Paris process for equity indicators.



An oil pump jack in operation in Texas. President Biden is being called upon to reject two massive oil export terminal projects proposed for the Texas Gulf Coast.

• Finance

Complications in calculating contributions to the GCF continue but some say it could be between \$6 billion and \$12 billion by 2025. Biden's upcoming infrastructure bill is potentially one important opportunity to deliver new climate finance. His bigger challenge is shifting broader private capital flows to be climate-friendly by using public financing, tax incentives, subsidies, standards and other policy tools. Dealing with growing public debt especially in developing countries is key to facilitating climate action since government spending can become severely constrained even in the wealthiest of developing countries. The US should somehow support the several ongoing initiatives addressing the debt and climate crises, especially the rising risks of stranded assets.

• Technology

The US has so far not offered meaningful technology cooperation, too few climate advocacy groups prioritise the issue, and it remains to be seen what new approaches can be created to address outstanding questions about how to scale up and speed up deployment of climate-friendly technologies. It continues to be challenging to develop dialogue in the US on international action without concerns about China dominating the discussion, so new ways of

approaching the issues are needed as endless opportunities exist if political will can be created, including open-source patents (unlimited, non-exclusive licences to be granted by a patent holder), cooperative sourcing of supplies, and research and development (R&D) partnerships.

• Adaptation

It appears any funds for adaptation would be included in the above amounts of GCF funding. US CSOs advancing a fair-share US NDC are asking the US to acknowledge that its fair share of adaptation finance is in the range of \$52 billion-112 billion per year by 2030, based on estimates in the Adaptation Finance Gap Report of developing countries' adaptation needs.²¹

• Loss and damage

Organisations advocating fair shares are currently trying to calculate potential ranges of reparations along the lines of loss and damage, and also face an uphill battle of even getting the US government to recognise its responsibilities when all it needs to do is stop blocking.

US diplomatic action must align with domestic justice agenda

When Biden hosts his Leaders' Climate Summit to urge other

countries to up their ambition for climate action, US CSOs will have been demanding that the US do its fair share, a definition which has been carefully calculated in conjunction with the CSO Equity Coalition, duly adopted by USCAN, and currently advocated by a broadening coalition of civil society that demands global climate justice. ♦

Victor Menotti is a Senior Fellow at the US-based Oakland Institute.

Notes

- ¹ <https://usfairshare.org/>
- ² <https://now.tufts.edu/news-releases/youth-vote-significantly-2020-young-people-color-pivotal>
- ³ <https://www.businessinsider.com/young-voters-record-voting-turnout-biden-trump-presidential-election-2020-11>
- ⁴ <https://www.clientearth.org/latest/latest-updates/stories/fossil-fuels-and-climate-change-the-facts/>
- ⁵ http://productiongap.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/PGR2020_FullRprt_web.pdf
- ⁶ <https://www.iea.org/reports/oil-2021>
- ⁷ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/27/executive-order-on-tackling-the-climate-crisis-at-home-and-abroad/>
- ⁸ <https://ajustclimate.org/index.html#platformSign>
- ⁹ <https://usfairshare.org/>
- ¹⁰ <https://www.climatepresident.org/>
- ¹¹ <https://buildbackfossilfree.org/biden-executive-action-blueprint/>
- ¹² <https://www.demos.org/policy-briefs/frontlines-climate-justice-executive-action-platform>
- ¹³ <https://p2a.co/StopBluewater>
- ¹⁴ <https://www.greenpeace.org/usa/research/crude-export-ban-carbon/>
- ¹⁵ <https://www.investopedia.com/articles/07/oil-tax-break.asp>
- ¹⁶ <https://www.climatepresident.org/>
- ¹⁷ <https://climatejusticealliance.org/just-transition/>
- ¹⁸ <http://feministgreennewdeal.com/principles/>
- ¹⁹ <https://www.bluegreenalliance.org/resources/new-report-card-on-infrastructure-shows-dire-need-to-build-back-better/>
- ²⁰ <https://stanleycenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/CCAI-FourDsOfOilsJustTransition92820.pdf>
- ²¹ <https://unepdtu.org/publications/the-adaptation-finance-gap-report/>

Climate change and peace and security – the Chinese and Indian views

On 23 February, a high-level debate was convened at the United Nations Security Council by the United Kingdom. The UK is the host of the 26th Conference of the Parties (COP 26) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) taking place in Glasgow, Scotland, in November. The UN Security Council event, entitled ‘Maintenance of international peace and security: Addressing climate-related risks to international peace and security’, was convened virtually and chaired by UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who called for action now. ‘Whether you like it or not, it is a matter of when, not if, your country and your people will have to deal with the security impacts of climate change,’ Johnson said, calling for global leadership to keep the world safe. Among the developing countries which took part in the debate were China and India. The Third World Network (TWN) obtained the statements of Xie Zhenhua, the Chinese Special Envoy on Climate Change Affairs, and India’s Minister for Environment, Forests and Climate Change, Prakash Javadekar. Some of the main messages from their speeches are set out below.

Working together in response to climate change

Xie Zhenhua:

Climate change has become an urgent and serious threat to human survival, development and security. The Paris Agreement reached in 2015 is a milestone in addressing climate change globally and has built the institutional foundation for the international community to strengthen action and international cooperation in response to climate change after 2020. Currently, addressing climate change globally has entered a critical stage for full implementation of the Paris Agreement. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has posed a severe challenge to global efforts for a response to climate change. China hopes that the international community will unite further and jointly head in the right direction to respond to climate change.

First, resolutely implement the international consensus. Tackling climate change is still a long process.



‘We must aggressively promote the development of new energy, environmental protection and other environment-friendly industries...’ A solar and wind power farm in China’s Jiangsu province.

The major task is to fully and effectively implement the Paris Agreement, to ensure the achievement of the goals, and jointly respond to the challenges of global climate change.

Developed countries and developing countries have differentiated historical responsibilities, and different development stages and coping capacity. It is a must to

abide by the principles of ‘common but differentiated responsibilities’, equity and their respective capabilities, respect and support various countries to determine contribution targets based on their national circumstances, and avoid ‘one size fits all’. Developed countries must fulfil their obligation to take the lead in mitigation of emissions, and fulfil their

commitments tangibly, and provide stronger financial and technical support to help developing countries improve their capacities to respond to climate change. Developing countries should also make all effort to take active action on climate change.

Second, actively promote 'green resilience'. The COVID-19 pandemic once again warns human beings to respect and adapt to nature more. In the post-pandemic era, when countries work for economic recovery, we cannot be back on the old path. We must aggressively promote the development of new energy, environmental protection and other environment-friendly industries, and continue to innovate in the path of green and low-carbon transformation. We should build an ecosystem that respects nature and protects global biodiversity. We should advocate a green and environmentally friendly lifestyle, and promote humanity living in harmony with nature.

Third, promote sustainable development with great effort. After all, the issue of climate change is a development issue. Sustainable development is the 'master switch' to find solutions to all problems and the 'golden key' to eliminate the root causes of conflicts. The international community should help countries in conflict areas, the least developed countries and small island developing states to increase their capacity for development. Each country should be encouraged to integrate climate change into its national economic and social development programmes and, by various means, make every effort to achieve the goals of synergistic development of economic growth, poverty eradication, employment promotion, health protection, environmental protection and response to climate change.

Fourth, always uphold multilateralism. In facing the challenge of climate change, humankind must move towards a common destiny. The international community should continue to relate to the UNFCCC as its main channel to promote cooperation in response to climate change under the framework of the Convention and the Paris Agreement. The Convention



Collecting water. Since women are often the providers of food, water and energy for their families, they are likely to face increased challenges in accessing resources due to climate change.

secretariat, the United Nations development system and resident coordinators should actively respond to needs of relevant countries in responding to climate change and economic and social development in accordance with their respective mandates, and provide targeted support.

The role of the Security Council in addressing climate change should be in line with its own mandates.

China is not only an important contributor to reaching the Paris Agreement, but also an active practitioner in the implementation of the Agreement:

- We insist on taking responsibility. Last September, President Xi Jinping announced that China would strive to reach the peak of carbon dioxide emissions by 2030 and strive to go carbon-neutral by 2060, which has been widely praised by the international community. At the Climate Ambition Summit in December, President Xi further announced a series of new measures for China to scale up its nationally determined contribution (NDC). From a carbon peak to carbon neutrality, it will take 50 to 60 years for developed countries, and China will make arduous efforts and strive to achieve this aim in 30 years. This reflects China's efforts and ambition in response to climate change.

- We will pursue development in a green way. China's carbon intensity (of GDP) was 48.4% lower in 2020

than in 2005, the base year of its NDC target. By the end of 2019, China's non-fossil energy had accounted for 15.3% of primary energy consumption, fulfilling the 2020 commitment target ahead of schedule. Up to now, China's forest stock volume has kept growth for 30 consecutive years, with an increase of more than 4.5 billion cubic metres compared with 2005, and has exceeded the 2020 target. China has become the country with the largest number of new energy vehicles. It has been ranked first in the world for consecutive years in the number of patents, investments, installed capacity and power generation in renewable energy, and the installed wind power and photovoltaic power has accounted for more than 30% of the world total.

- We pursue win-win cooperation. China and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) jointly initiated an international 'Belt and Road' green development alliance to help countries along the route build hydropower, wind power, photovoltaic and other renewable energy projects.

China and other developing countries are building low-carbon demonstration zones and implementing climate change mitigation and adaptation projects under the framework of South-South cooperation to promote green development in all countries.

This year, China will host the 15th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity. We look forward to discussing new strategies for the post-2020 global biodiversity framework with all parties.

We strongly believe that as long as all countries work together to promote full and effective implementation of the Paris Agreement, establishment of a mutually beneficial and equitable climate regime, and sustainable development, we will be able to have a clean and beautiful planet with enduring peace, universal security and common prosperity.

Towards a development pathway based on need, not greed

Prakash Javadekar:

Climate change is a defining issue of our time. Without drastic actions by us collectively, adapting to its impacts in the future may well be impossible but definitely more difficult and costlier.

The global community has addressed the issue of climate change through various mechanisms, central to which are the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement negotiated under the Framework. Together they represent a delicately balanced global democratic effort to take climate action in a nationally determined manner based on certain fundamental agreed principles, the foremost amongst which is 'common but differentiated responsibility and respective capabilities' and which must underlie all future discussions on climate change. Therefore, before we start discussing the issue of securitisation of climate, we need to ensure that we are not building a parallel climate track where these mechanisms and principles are brushed aside or not duly considered.

The 2019 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Special Report 'Climate Change and Land' says that extreme weather and climate or slow-onset events may lead to increased displacement, disrupted food chains, threatened livelihoods, and could contribute to exacerbated stresses for conflict. Even the best

science available claims that climate change only exacerbates conflict and is not a reason for conflict and does not threaten peace and security.

There is no common, widely accepted methodology for assessing the links between climate change, conflict and fragility. Fragility and climate impact are highly context-specific. In addition, both peace and conflict assessments, as well as vulnerability assessments, face significant challenges when it comes to data availability and impact measurement.

In a number of fragile contexts, where governments are struggling to provide basic services due to capacity and legitimacy issues, instances of chronic emergency conditions and famine risks are largely driven by continued political violence disrupting harvests and aid supplies rather than by climate factors alone. This underscores the idea that a complete picture of climate vulnerability only emerges with an assessment of the state's capacity to be the primary responder to interrelated environmental, social, economic and security dynamics.

The nationally determined contributions (NDCs) are largely about mitigation commitments and adaptation requirements that, collectively, determine whether countries will achieve the Paris goal of limiting the global average temperature increase to well below 2°C. Parties are nowhere required to communicate on climate-related security risks in their NDCs.

Moreover, an in-depth analysis of the NDCs submitted in the first round has shown that member states see climate change as a risk to the well-being of their citizens and to some degree their economies, but never as a risk to social stability, national sovereignty or the functioning of the state. Of the 16 countries that had submitted their updated NDCs to the UNFCCC Secretariat by October 2020, none have framed climate change as a risk to peace and stability.

The idea of climate action should not be to move the climate ambition goalpost to 2050. It is important for countries to fulfil their pre-2020 commitments. Climate action needs to go hand in hand with the

framework for financial, technical and capacity-building support to countries that need it.

While climate change does not directly or inherently cause violent conflict, its interaction with other social, political and economic factors can, nonetheless, exacerbate drivers of conflict and fragility and have negative impacts on peace, stability and security. It is for precisely this reason that developing-country NDCs included information on adaptation activities, and the need for finance, technology development and transfer, capacity-building, and transparency. However, while the commitment by developed countries to jointly mobilise \$100 billion per year by 2020 in support of climate action in developing countries has been central to the climate accords since 2009, the delivery on this commitment has been elusive.

The impacts of climate change and its associated security risks have important gender dimensions. Women and girls experience the interplay between climate change and peace and security in direct and profound ways. Since women are often the providers of food, water and energy for their families they are likely to face increased challenges in accessing resources due to climate change.

As the primary caregivers, women are often living on the frontlines of climate change and have distinct knowledge and experience to contribute to building effective adaptation strategies. There is an urgent need to promote and support the meaningful participation of women and marginalised groups in national-level climate change policy and planning processes.

India has taken significant steps to fight climate change and we have delivered on our commitments. Our mitigation strategies have emphasised on clean and efficient energy systems; safe, smart and sustainable green mass urban transportation network; planned afforestation; and integrating green thinking across all production and consumption sectors.

India is the only country on track among the G20 nations to meet its climate change mitigation commitments. We are not only

meeting our Paris Agreement targets but will also exceed them. India currently has the fastest-growing solar energy programme in the world. We have expanded access to clean cooking fuel to over 80 million households. This is among the largest clean energy drives globally. Our recent commitments of installing 450 GW of renewable energy, elimination of single-use plastic, 100% railway electrification, and creation of an additional carbon sink by restoring 26 million hectares of degraded land among other measures have only added to our climate ambitions.

India strongly believes that the only way to generate persistent, long-term and positive action in the climate change domain is through partnerships by undertaking collective action to make a lasting and sustainable impact. The International Solar Alliance (ISA) and the Coalition for Disaster Resilience Infrastructure (CDRI) are two such initiatives by India that have been launched to address challenges of climate change and adaptation.

There is a significant opportunity for countries to integrate low-carbon development in their COVID-19 rescue and recovery measures and long-term mitigation strategies that are scheduled to be announced for the reconvened COP 26 in 2021.

To better integrate climate change adaptation and peacebuilding we would suggest the building of robust governance structures at the local, national and regional levels to address climate and fragility-related risks. This not only improves public perception of government legitimacy but also shores up capacity of states to address climate risks before they become fragile. Donor countries should provide greater financial, technological and capacity-building assistance to help fragile states to put in place necessary adaptation and mitigation strategies to combat the impact of climate change.

Mahatma Gandhi once said that 'there is enough for everybody's need and not for everybody's greed'. Let us then make the transition to a more climate-friendly lifestyle by adapting to a low-carbon development

pathway, based on our needs and not on our greed.

Let us view climate change as a wakeup call and an opportunity to strengthen multilateralism and seek equitable and inclusive solutions to

leave a greener, cleaner and a sustainable world for our future generations. ◆

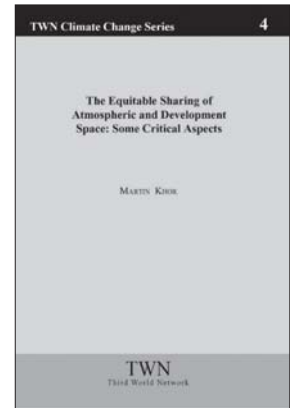
The Chinese statement was made available to TWN in Mandarin and was translated into English by TWN.

The Equitable Sharing of Atmospheric and Development Space: Some Critical Aspects

by Martin Khor

Tackling the climate change crisis demands urgent actions to cut atmospheric emissions of the heat-trapping greenhouse gases that are causing global warming. The responsibilities this entails should at the same time be divided equitably between developed and developing countries, as recognised in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

The equity imperative is rooted in the development needs of the developing countries and in the fact that emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases over the years mostly originated in the developed countries. This paper fleshes out how this historical "carbon debt" and other equity considerations could be taken into account in the sharing of the global atmospheric space. Such an arrangement would, as envisioned by the UNFCCC, involve the developed countries taking the lead in emission reductions and in providing financial and technological support for a shift by developing countries to low-emission growth pathways.



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Pressure mounts to commence negotiations virtually at UNFCCC

Moves to conduct the UN climate change negotiations in a virtual setting have raised concern among developing countries worried this could hamper their effective participation in the already difficult and highly charged talks.

Meena Raman

EFFORTS are underway within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to get agreement to commence negotiations virtually.

The Bureau of the UNFCCC's Conference of Parties (COP) has been meeting since February this year to discuss possibilities to begin negotiations virtually.

The meetings of the UNFCCC Subsidiary Bodies (SBs) are supposed to convene in June, while the 26th session of the COP (COP 26) is scheduled to be held in November in Glasgow, United Kingdom.

[The Bureau is comprised of the COP President (which is currently Chile), representatives of Parties from the five UN regional groups and small island developing states. The Bureau oversees the organisation of the sessions and the operation of the UNFCCC Secretariat, especially at times when the COP is not in session.]

The pressure to commence virtual negotiations is also coming from the UN Secretary-General himself, to prevent a further postponement of COP 26 this year after the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic led to the inability to convene the event last year.

At its most recent meeting, held on 15 April, the Bureau agreed to hold a virtual 'informal' session of the SBs from 31 May to 17 June.

According to a communication to governments and observers from the UNFCCC Secretariat, 'Work during the session will be organized informally, and no decision will be taken until the Parties can meet in



There are attempts to begin virtual negotiations under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. Picture shows the last session of the Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC, held in Madrid in 2019.

person again. Informal documents will be prepared by the presiding officers to ensure transparency in the discussions and to capture progress. These documents will not have formal status.'

Said the letter further, 'Taking into account current recommendations and practices, as well as the challenges of working across time zones, the number of working hours per day will be limited and meetings will be scheduled in pre-established timeslots based on the principle that no region benefits or is affected disproportionately. The Chairs of the Subsidiary Bodies, with the support of the secretariat, taking into account the views and concerns expressed, will prepare scenario notes to further elaborate the modalities for the organization of work in their respective bodies.'

Challenges of virtual talks

According to sources, some developing-country representatives on the Bureau have been opposed to the commencement of formal negotiations by virtual means, pointing to serious challenges posed by the inability of their members to engage effectively due to the digital divide, problems of network connectivity, lack of interpretation services, difficulties in coordinating positions among negotiators from negotiating groups, time-zone issues etc.

Developed-country representatives, on the other hand, have supported virtual-based negotiations.

Given the divergent views, the compromise reached at the most recent Bureau meeting seemed inevitable, with an 'informal' session with no decision taken until a face-



A virtual United Nations briefing is shown on a screen at UN headquarters in New York. There are concerns that developing countries may not be able to engage effectively if formal negotiations are held virtually, due among others to connectivity problems.

to-face meeting is held.

According to several senior negotiators from developing countries who spoke to the Third World Network (TWN), the climate change negotiations under the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement, unlike other international processes (such as in the UN in New York or under the Convention on Biological Diversity), have been very highly charged, deeply political and complex due to the economic transformation needed for countries to tackle climate change and the consequences that follow. The climate talks have been riddled with a massive trust deficit especially along North-South lines.

One of the most difficult and challenging issues that is pending resolution under the Paris Agreement is the rules for implementation of Article 6, which deals with market and non-market approaches to addressing climate change, including carbon markets. This is one major outstanding matter on which agreement could not be achieved in the previous COPs either in Poland in 2018 or in Spain in 2019, largely due to divergent views and understandings over the approaches/

mechanisms envisaged.

According to one seasoned observer who has followed the climate talks for decades, even with face-to-face meetings, the Article 6 negotiations were very complicated, intense and difficult, what more in a virtual setting. Developing countries will face immense difficulties in terms of coordinating among themselves and engaging in a dynamic fashion when Internet connectivity and language barriers pose a tremendous challenge, added the observer.

Another senior diplomat and experienced negotiator from a developing country was of the view that instead of focusing on pushing negotiations by virtual means, efforts should be made by the UN, with the cooperation of developed countries, to facilitate the attendance of delegates at face-to-face meetings for the SBs and the COP, by treating them in the same fashion as frontline workers in the health sector, where all measures are taken to ensure their safety, including in the provision of vaccines to developing countries and in following all health protocols, without travel restrictions and the need for quarantine.

Another delegate from a major developing country said countries do not need to wait for a COP in order to take strong climate action, adding that the Paris Agreement has already come into effect and what is needed now is implementation, through ambitious emission reduction targets by developed countries consistent with their fair shares, taking into account their historical and cumulative emissions. Added the delegate further, one does not need a COP to increase the provision of finance and enable technology transfer to developing countries, as these are pre-existing obligations of developed countries under the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement. To portray to the outside world that a COP is needed to implement these commitments is not correct, said the delegate.

Several developing-country representatives who spoke to TWN expressed concerns that virtual negotiations pose serious handicaps to them, in not being inclusive and transparent on how decisions are made. They expressed real worries that this could result in unbalanced outcomes that do not meaningfully reflect or address their views and concerns. It was not about not wanting progress in the climate talks but was about the difficulties in a virtual process which is disadvantageous to them and which can lead to unfavourable outcomes for developing countries.

The informal virtual June session of the climate talks will indeed be challenging, especially for developing countries. How the discussions go, what outputs will be produced and how they will capture the views of the various Parties will indeed be closely watched and scrutinised.

Whether a face-to-face COP 26 meeting will be possible later this year in Glasgow remains to be seen, amidst the uncertainties of the pandemic which has yet to wane.

The June session will be an important indicator as to whether and how advances can be made in the climate talks in the run-up to COP 26. ♦

Climate-related migration a reality in South Asia

Over 60 million people are at risk of displacement by 2050 just due to slow-onset impacts of climate change, finds a study on climate-related migration across South Asia.

Indrajit Bose

MALEKA, a 16-year-old from Miarchar village in Bangladesh, wanted to be a teacher, but she ended up as a domestic help in Dhaka to help her family in the village tide over one crisis after the next. Floods and unusually heavy rainfall have repeatedly damaged Maleka's house in the village. On one occasion, while trying to fix the house, her father suffered an injury, rendering him immobile. Her mother is afflicted with health issues which do not permit her to work. Food shortage, lack of basic needs and sanitation, and diseases stare the family of seven in the face, as do debts. Maleka had to drop out of school and move out to find menial work. 'My dream does not matter anymore. God had a different plan perhaps,' she says.

In Afghanistan, 50-year-old Ali Mohammad lives in the Shaiday camp in Herat province. He moved to the camp following the 2019 floods in Afghanistan, which claimed his house, his son and two daughters. Mohammad moved to Shaiday camp with his lone surviving daughter. Their trauma persists. Mohammad lacks motivation to find regular work and his daughter hardly ever steps out of the tent. They survive on bare minimum support from external agencies. 'I am grateful for the support I receive, but it is not enough to cover the basic human needs for my daughter and me. We go mostly cold and hungry,' says Mohammad.

In Pakistan, 37-year-old Rajo has moved to three different locations in the past three years due to severe drought in the country's Tharparkar



People across South Asia are getting displaced due to floods and other climate disasters.

district. She has had to move to earn money to avoid starvation and in the process has undergone immense mental and physical trauma. 'I was seven months pregnant when we migrated to earn money. I worked as a labourer and lifted weight, which caused a miscarriage. We had to borrow money from the landowner to pay for my medical bills. We faced many problems when migrating, our children got ill, and then we had to spend our earnings on their health and travel fares,' says Rajo.

These stories of Maleka, Mohammad and Rajo have come to light following studies on climate-change-related migration in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka by ActionAid and Climate Action Network-South Asia (CAN-SA). The studies carried out in the six South Asian countries have revealed several such stories of suffering as climate change impacts continue to wreak

havoc on people's lives in the region – people are getting displaced due to extreme weather events as well as drought and sea-level rise. A related policy note published states: 'Cities in the region are running out of water; people are getting sicker or poorer; they are losing incomes and livelihoods and, in many cases, even their homes. Sometimes, they are left with no choice but to move to survive. Sometimes, they pay with their lives.'¹

Increased displacement linked to climate impacts

South Asia is a disaster hotspot. Temperatures and sea levels are rising; cyclones are striking with fiercer intensity; glaciers are melting; and stories of floods and droughts abound. While the region is already experiencing some of the highest fatalities due to extreme weather conditions, future projections see South Asia as an epicentre of extreme

weather, afflicted by a combination of unsurvivable heatwaves, chronic droughts, rising sea levels and intensified cyclones.

The South Asian study, 'Costs of climate inaction: displacement and distress migration', which modelled climate change projections related to migration linked to slow-onset impacts (sea-level rise, water stress, crop yield reductions, ecosystem loss, and drought), found that even if the global community acted on their greenhouse gas (GHG) mitigation pledges and targets, about 37.4 million people would still be displaced by 2030 and an estimated 62.9 million by 2050 in five countries in South Asia (Afghanistan was excluded from this assessment).²

The World Meteorological Organization (WMO)'s Statement on the State of Global Climate in 2019 revealed that the global mean temperature for 2019 was around 1.1°C higher relative to the pre-industrial period. Current global pledges and targets see us on track for a rise of between 2.1°C and 3.3°C in global mean temperature.

The South Asian study also reveals that undertaking more ambitious action for meeting the Paris Agreement goals of limiting global warming to between 1.5°C and 2°C would restrict the number of people displaced or driven to move to about 22.5 million people by 2030 and roughly 34.4 million people by 2050, and prevent at least 44.5 million people having to flee their homes by 2050.

'These numbers do not include those who are likely to be displaced by sudden onset climate disasters such as flooding and cyclones, to which South Asia is particularly vulnerable. These numbers also assume that countries will start taking action towards meeting their pledges and targets,' the study states.

'Our country-level research in these five countries shows that climate change is either directly displacing people or accentuating hardship resulting in distress migration. Rivers eroding banks in Bangladesh, flooding in Pakistan and

India, melting glaciers in Nepal, rising seas in India and Bangladesh, periods of unusually dry months followed by heavier than normal rains on rice and tea estates in Sri Lanka, or cyclones and inhospitable temperatures across all countries are contributing to climate-induced migration,' the study states.

According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC)'s latest Global Report on Internal Displacement 2020 (GRID 2020), there were over 9.5 million newly displaced people in 2019 due to disasters in South Asia, the highest figure since 2012. South Asia accounted for 38.3% of the global total number of displacements in 2019.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)'s Special Report on Climate Change, Desertification, Land Degradation, Sustainable Land Management, Food Security, and Greenhouse Gas Fluxes in Terrestrial Ecosystems also speaks to the issue. 'Climate change can amplify environmentally-induced migration both within countries and across borders, reflecting multiple drivers of mobility and available adaptation measures,' the report states. The report also warns that 'extreme weather and climate or slow-onset events may lead to increased displacement, disrupted food chains, threatened livelihoods, and contribute to exacerbated stresses for conflict'.

Reports also say people will suffer 'stress and mental trauma' from displacement and loss of livelihoods and property. According to a 2020 study by McKinsey Global Institute, 'without strong mitigation and adaptation measures, slow-onset climate impacts could cause countries in South Asia to lose nearly 2 per cent of their GDP by 2050, rising to a loss of nearly 9 per cent by 2100, without counting for losses due to extreme weather events. Other estimates acknowledge that people living in poverty will be hardest hit by climate hazards, and countries in South Asia could see 7-13 per cent of their GDP at risk every year by 2050'.

Impact on women

The studies in the countries also found that women and girls are especially impacted by climate change and deeply rooted gender norms would make this worse in the future. Studies have also found that women are more likely to be killed by extreme weather events in countries where their socioeconomic status is below that of men. Women end up with less social, material and environmental options and coping mechanisms to respond to climate impacts. For instance, when crop yields are impacted by droughts and floods, established food hierarchies translate into women and girls getting food last, if at all.

'Women's mental and physical health suffer and they are exposed to heightened risks of violence during times of climate related shocks and stressors. Their lack of land ownership, productive assets, and access to credit and information, among other rights, makes them particularly vulnerable to crop failures or other climate-related impacts. In addition, women in South Asia face several socio-cultural and economic barriers that make them less prepared for disasters. Lower participation in household or financial decision-making, lack of mobility, and exposure to insecurity or gender violence only increases their vulnerability to the impacts of climate disasters,' the study states.

When evacuated to flood shelters or embankments during flooding in Bangladesh or India, for example, women described lack of privacy and security as an issue during field research for the study. In drought-affected areas of Pakistan, women talked about having to go longer distances to fetch water, increasing their work burden. Lack of maternal and child health facilities following flooding events in Pakistan was also noted. In Nepal, women in flood-affected districts shared that in the absence of male members, who often migrate for work, women find life very difficult back at home. They are left behind to take care of household

chores and agricultural activities, look after children and the elderly, and manage livestock. Doing all this single-handedly is often a struggle for them. This is further aggravated by their exclusion from existing social protection schemes or policy frameworks.

Climate justice for the poor in South Asia

Historically, South Asia has contributed less than 5% of historical cumulative emissions to the climate crisis, despite making up a fourth of the global population, the study states. Yet, at the same time, it faces some of the most steep climate change impacts, including those that result in displacement and distress migration. This requires an approach to mitigation that is just and fair.

‘Wealthy countries with the greatest historical responsibility for causing the climate crisis need to implement just transitions to radically transform their energy, agricultural, construction, transport and economic systems to bring their emissions down sharply, and provide international climate finance, in order to do their fair share of action towards meeting the 1.5°C target. Developed countries are currently failing. The EU and USA are only contributing to about 1/5th of their fair share of mitigation effort. This failure will drive distress migration and extreme hardship in South Asia and across developing countries,’ the study states.

The study also states that global efforts towards achieving the 1.5°C warming limit – as well as adaptation funding – must be equitable and consistent with the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)’s principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities. It cites an example of the inequity by stating that the annual emissions footprint of an average US citizen is over 51 times greater than that of the average Nepali citizen. ‘Genuine and ambitious reductions in accordance with historical responsibility for addressing industrialised countries’

climate debt [are] necessary,’ the study states.

A number of challenges exist at the national level as well.

The road ahead

The movement of people at present takes place largely without targeted support. That millions of people will continue to be displaced regardless of climate action is already established – but this will require strong social policies to protect the right to move with dignity, the study states.

The study calls for strengthening social protection schemes in the countries and ensuring universal access so that the rights of all are protected, regardless of their exposure to climate and other shocks. ‘Financing the level of social protection required and ensuring universal access will need a significant re-shifting of state budgetary priorities, from the creation of sovereign wealth funds to debt relief on an international scale,’ the study states.

That migration cannot be directly attributed to climate change is also a concern, especially in terms of financing and designing interventions. For people who cannot cope with the impacts of climate change and move due to better income opportunities, such migrants are often generically termed ‘economic migrants’, since it is difficult to establish a direct causal relationship between migration and climate change. Data is often limited, and it is not always possible to attribute an extreme rainfall event or a drought to climate change. Therefore, it is difficult to establish people being displaced due to such events as ‘climate migrants’. This points to the need for more robust research rather than being in denial that climate-related migration occurs, the study states.

The study also points to several instances where even after moving, families may not necessarily be safe. Several community members especially in Bangladesh, India and

Pakistan who had already experienced displacement and migration, spoke of significant social hardships at the destination. The study calls for justice-centred disaster preparedness and risk management and reduction policies. ‘Disaster response must also be designed to ensure gender sensitive relocation. Pregnant women must be ensured sufficient nourishment, and women unable to breastfeed must receive formula milk or other appropriate alternatives. Therefore, gender appropriate health and social care must be available with temporary shelters,’ the study states.

The study also recommends that the South Asian governments can ‘support rural communities to adopt more agroecological approaches to farming in ways that can strengthen resilience by using natural materials instead of chemicals to improve the health and water carrying capacity of soils, diversify locally adapted seeds and crops and combat pests and disease’.

The study recommends that loss and damage should be addressed and those on the frontline of climate change impacts within South Asia, that is, the poor who contribute minimally to GHG emissions, should not be left to pay for a crisis they did not cause. ‘Wherever it is possible to guarantee non-repetition of losses and damages (through improved infrastructure development, social protection and disaster preparedness, for example) communities could be safely returned to their homes. There is also the opportunity to increase resilience upon return,’ the study states. ◆

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Notes

¹ <https://actionaid.org/sites/default/files/publications/ActionAid%20CANSa%20Policy%20brief%20Final%20-%20SAMAC%20-%20May2020.pdf>

² https://cansouthasia.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/SouthAsia_Climate_Migration_regional.pdf

What does a post-coal future for India mean?

If an economy is to be decarbonised, planning for it should begin now, but just transition plans in developing countries may look very different from those in the developed world, says a study in India.

Indrajit Bose

WITH climate change impacting countries globally, there is significant pressure on especially larger developing countries to shift away from a fossil-fuel economy. But before making such a move, a country needs to know what the transition will look like, how the transition can be just, and how the workers and the local communities should not shoulder the burden of such transition. A just transition would also look very different in a developing as compared with a developed country, a study in India has found.

The study, titled ‘Just transition in India: An inquiry into the challenges and opportunities for a post-coal future’ (<https://iforest.global/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Just-Transition-book-preview.pdf>), was undertaken to understand what a just transition means in the context of India’s coal-mining areas and what the essential components of a just transition framework should be. It was carried out by the International Forum for Environment, Sustainability and Technology (iFOREST), a Delhi-based organisation.

The study was undertaken in a major coal-mining district called Ramgarh in Jharkhand state in eastern India. According to the study, four key observations relevant for understanding a just transition in the country emerge from Ramgarh. These centre on the informal sector’s dependence on coal mining; there being a co-relation between distance from mines and dependence on mining; how coal mining has not



Transitioning away from coal usage in India will be ‘a complex and long-term process involving all stakeholders and governments at all levels’.

changed people’s lives for the better; and how dependence on coal is ‘constructed’.

The study states that dependence on coal mining for income is significantly high and the dependence is largely informal in nature. ‘In Ramgarh, one in four households derives some sort of earning directly from mining and related activities. But this dependence is largely informal and does not provide a decent income. Two-thirds of households reported an income between USD 85 and USD 140 per month. This group largely includes the “non-inventoried” people of the coal-economy, such as coal gatherers and sellers, casual labourers, and daily wagers. Only 7 per cent of the households had a member with a formal job in coal mining or related industry.’

The study states there is a direct co-relation between distance from the mines and dependence on coal

mining. ‘While more than 40 per cent of the households within a radius of 3 km from the mines derive direct income from coal (coal gatherers and sellers, casual labourers, and contractual workers), the proportion sharply declines to less than half for households living beyond 3 km of a mine,’ the study states. Beyond 10 km from coal-mining areas, agriculture is the most significant source of employment.

It is noteworthy that coal mining has not benefitted the region in terms of social and physical infrastructure and the district has poor human development indicators. ‘The district has extremely poor primary healthcare infrastructure, with a nearly 50 per cent deficit in the required number of primary healthcare centres. Moreover, even the existing ones do not meet the necessary Indian Public Health Standards in terms of medical staff, treatment facilities, etc. The same

situation is with access to education and clean drinking water,' the study states.

The study also states that a focus on coal mining and related industry over decades has stymied the development of other sectors and the diversification of the economy, leading to a 'constructed dependence' on coal. 'In Ramgarh, agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and service sectors have suffered from an undue focus on coal mining,' according to the study.

Given the observations, the study states that 'just transition in India will not be a linear question of substituting a "mono" industry (coal) along with its workforce. Instead, it is an economy-wide transition that provides an opportunity to reverse the "resource curse" in coal mining areas.'

This does not mean that coal mines can be closed quickly. The mines must be closed in a planned manner to avoid social and economic disruption. The study proposes a six-pillar planning architecture for a just transition in Ramgarh:

1. Defining timeframe for a just transition: In the context of Ramgarh, it would be 20-25 years, considering the life of the existing mines, etc.

2. Establishing an inclusive transition planning mechanism: Stakeholder dialogue and local engagement are critical components of planning a transition.

3. Providing alternative employment opportunities for formal and informal workers in the short term: For formal workers, strategies could include retraining and reskilling; early retirement options with severance benefits; ensuring pension payments; and temporary financial assistance. For informal workers, the study states that providing alternative livelihood opportunities and income substitution is a far more complicated process than for formal workers. The study recommends a broad-based approach for securing alternative livelihood opportunities for this category, which could include government-employment generation schemes; employment in building the new



A coal-fired power plant in India. Some 47% of the country's primary energy supply and 71% of electricity generation are dependent on coal.

social and economic infrastructure; and skill development.

4. Planning economic diversification, including industrial restructuring: Diversify into agriculture and allied activities; forest-based livelihoods; aquaculture; tourism, etc.

5. Improving social and physical infrastructure.

6. Identifying financial resources to support a just transition.

Based on the Ramgarh study, an indicative just transition framework for the country has also been proposed (further details below). The study cautions that the coal face of India is complex and further in-depth work is required to capture the diversity in coal-mining districts and develop various policies, strategies and investment plans.

Why a just transition?

India is the second largest producer and consumer of coal in the world. With an estimated resource of 326.5 billion tonnes, coal is the most abundant fossil fuel in the country – 47% of the country's primary energy supply and 71% of electricity generation are dependent on coal. Also, nearly 15 million people are dependent on coal directly and indirectly for employment and income.

Reaching Paris Agreement goals of limiting global warming well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase even further to 1.5°C necessitates a massive reduction in the use of coal, as it accounts for nearly 44% of global carbon dioxide emissions, the study states. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) too has recommended phasing out coal-based power plants by 2050 and adopting a 'system transition' in electricity generation, largely relying on renewable energy sources.

India is also the fifth most vulnerable country to climate change impacts, as per the Global Climate Change Risk Index 2020. Studies suggest that the country risks losing 2.5-3% of its gross domestic product (GDP) due to the climate crisis by 2050 under a business-as-usual scenario. It is in India's interest therefore that global emissions are reduced significantly and a serious effort is made globally to meet the 1.5°C goal, according to the study.

Coal-based electricity has already started to face headwinds globally – a mix of environmental and energy policies and competition from cost-efficient renewables is steadily squeezing it out of the global electricity mix. 'For instance, the contribution of coal to global

electricity generation has reduced from 40% in 2010 to 36.4% in 2019,' the study states.

In India, the dominance of coal in the power sector appears to be declining due to competition from renewable energy. Projections by India's Central Electricity Authority (CEA) show that renewable energy will have an increasingly dominant role in the power sector. The CEA has projected a significant reduction in coal-based power installation and generation capacity over the next 10 years – the percentage share of renewables in the total installed capacity will be nearly twice that of coal and lignite-based sources.

Also, while coal mining is overall still a profitable industry in the country, almost 70% of mines of Coal India Limited, India's largest coal producer, are running into losses, raising questions about the future of the coal industry, according to the study, and are closing down. The closing of unprofitable and exhausted mines has huge socioeconomic implications for districts and sub-districts (blocks) where these mines are located. 'In fact, there are districts where the majority of mines have already closed down, and the remaining are likely to close in the next 10-20 years. These districts suffered due to coal mining and are now suffering because of its unplanned closure,' the study states.

It is critical to reverse the resource curse in coal-mining areas, where the coal-mining districts are economically backward and local people have been facing displacement and deprivation due to resource extraction. 'Considering the various environmental, social, and economic factors and the imperative to avoid unplanned closure of coal mines, it is time we begin planning a transition away from a coal-based economy in a deliberate and phased manner. However, such a shift will not be a simple one. It will be a complex and long-term process involving all stakeholders and governments at all levels,' the study states.

The basic idea of a just transition then is to ensure decent work

opportunities and social support systems for the people whose livelihood is likely to be affected by the transition.

Just transition in the Global North

The study also provides some examples of just transition processes and approaches in the Global North, and says that while a timely and well-planned just transition could lead to overall positive economic, social and environmental outcomes, the experience of closing down coal mines in the Global North has been largely triggered by unprofitability of the coal industry.

Also, unlike say in India where there is a huge dependence among informal workers on the sector, a just transition in the Global North is 'primarily about restructuring the formal economy and creating alternatives for formal coal mining workers'. The study looks at the experience of closure of mines in the Netherlands, Wales in the UK and in Germany, and underscores the need for long-term planning, given that a just transition process has a significantly long gestation period. 'National government's engagement in developing policies (on just transition) early on is crucial for facilitating a well-planned transition. At the same time, they also underscore the vital role of the regional and local governments to successfully implement policies and transition measures. And finally, the workers and local communities must be engaged in the process so that the measures are inclusive and tailored to the local context,' the study states.

It is also important to note that since the socioeconomic situation in developed countries is very different from that in developing countries, 'a just transition framework for socioeconomically backward regions of a developing country with profitable as well as unprofitable coal mines will have to be conceptualised differently, keeping in mind the developed countries' learnings'.

Indicative just transition framework for India

The study proposes an 'indicative just transition framework' structured around seven pillars:

1. Strong national and state government policy and financial support, accompanied with a coherent policy architecture, where provisions of just transition are integrated in plans and policies of national, state and local governments.

2. Diverse coalition among various actors and stakeholders, including joint just transition proposal and engagement with local communities.

3. Effective communication strategy to reach out to all stakeholders, from national to local levels, to clearly convey the objective, need and timeframe for a just transition.

4. Develop an economic diversification plan taking into consideration local resources, manpower etc, besides planning for social security for the people.

5. Coal sector transition: This would involve enabling restructuring of Coal India Limited and its subsidiaries (for diversification into solar, wind, energy storage) and creating a special 'Workforce Transition Fund' to provide relief measures for displaced workers.

6. Social and physical infrastructure development – investment in education, healthcare, clean water, energy, connectivity and urban amenities to improve social capital, and to attract businesses and investors.

7. Public and private investments for transition: Identify local, national and international funding sources and create a dedicated public fund; use public funds to attract private investments.

'If the decarbonisation of the economy must happen, planning for it should start now. Any hastened or abrupt decision will lead to more chaos than resolution,' the study concludes. ◆

The political economy of COVID-19 vaccines

Vaccine grabs, the refusal to relax patents to enable mass production, and the use of vaccines for diplomacy run the risk that poorer nations may not be protected against COVID-19 quickly enough. This will prolong the pandemic, even for the richer nations.

Jayati Ghosh

THE COVID-19 pandemic has been unusual in several ways: the disproportionate extent to which people in rich countries (particularly in Europe and North America) have been affected; the sheer scale of the policy response for containment; and the speed and urgency of the global response.

The active interest in controlling the pandemic in rich countries shaped individual national responses as well as global policy. There was a massive push for vaccine development, through large subsidies for research and development to drug companies, pre-orders of vaccines, and other support by the US, Russia, China and European countries.

This led to the rapid development of multiple COVID-19 vaccine candidates and even more rapid regulatory approval to several of them. Typically, vaccines take several years to be developed and approved, partly because of extended clinical trials to check for all possible responses. But some COVID-19 vaccine candidates were given official approval in Russia and China even before the essential Phase III trials were completed. Even in the US and Europe, regulatory processes were accelerated, sweeping aside the usual demands for complete data and without checking for possible side-effects.

Despite such proactive policy, the production and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines have exposed and intensified global inequality. Three features stand out: blatant



Rich countries like the US have cornered early doses of COVID-19 vaccines.

vaccine grab by rich countries; protection of patent rights by governments in advanced countries, which prevents wider production of vaccines; and the use of vaccine distribution to promote both nationalism and diplomatic 'soft power'.

The great vaccine grab

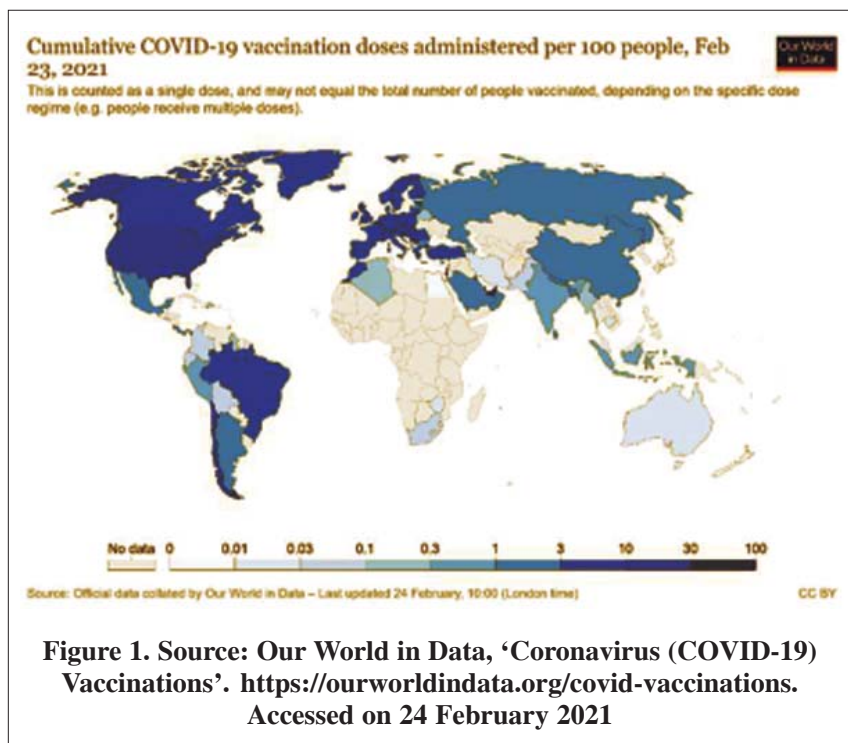
It seems obvious that a pandemic can be overcome only when it is overcome everywhere. The delayed vaccination of people across the world increases the possibility of virus mutation, reducing the ability to control the pandemic even in rich countries that have bagged vaccines. Prolonged fear of infection, because of inadequate vaccination, affects economic prospects, inhibiting and delaying global economic recovery. These risks are so great that rich countries would still benefit even if they decided to pay on their own for

vaccinating all of the world's population.

An 'every-country-for-itself' approach is irrational and even counterproductive. Yet that is exactly what has happened.

When three major vaccine candidates (from Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna and AstraZeneca) were approved in the US and Europe, rich countries scrambled to lay claim to vaccine doses, confirming that wealthy countries and individuals would monopolise early doses of any effective vaccine. As a result, by late February 2021 COVID-19 vaccinations were heavily concentrated in the developed world (Figure 1).

This need not have occurred. The COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access Facility (COVAX), led by the World Health Organization (WHO), the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations, and Gavi, was established precisely to prevent this



outcome, to prevent hoarding by rich countries and ensure access for the world's poor. COVAX aims to accelerate COVID-19 vaccine development, secure doses for all countries, and distribute those doses fairly, beginning with the highest-risk groups. By early 2021, 190 countries, representing most of the world's population, had joined. In February, the United States (which had been kept out by former president Donald Trump) also joined. Higher-income and middle-income countries will have access to the vaccines in the COVAX list and pay for their doses individually. The 92 lower-income member countries are to receive their doses free of charge.

The COVAX plan is to distribute vaccines in two phases. In the first phase, all participating countries would receive doses proportionate to their populations, beginning with enough doses to immunise the 3% of their population at highest risk, especially frontline workers in health and social care. Additional doses would then be delivered to cover 20% of each country's population, beginning with others most in danger, such as the elderly and those with comorbidities. In the second phase,

vaccines would be delivered to specific countries based on how quickly the virus is spreading; whether other pathogens (like measles) are also spreading; and how vulnerable the country's health infrastructure is to being overwhelmed. Eventually, everyone would be covered.

This is a fair system, given constraints on production. But the facility still remains underfunded, thus far raising only \$4 billion of its modest target of \$6.8 billion for 2021. Even worse, it has not been able to purchase the vaccines required for free distribution to poor countries as much as planned. This is because the COVAX facility allows member countries to make their own separate purchases directly from pharmaceutical companies. As a result, rich countries have competed to secure bilateral deals with pharmaceutical companies outside of COVAX. Within a month of the regulatory approval being granted to the first three vaccines, advanced countries, accounting for only 14% of the world's population, had placed orders for around 85% of the estimated entire production for 2021.

Much of this was in the form of

pre-orders even before regulatory approval was granted. Thirteen of the 48 firms engaged in COVID-19 vaccine development had made advance sales by mid-November 2020, promising to deliver 7.5 billion doses of vaccines, mostly to advanced countries, even before emergency-use authorisation had been granted. In some cases, this happened even before the clinical trials necessary for regulatory approval had been completed.

Forty-four bilateral deals between governments and pharmaceutical companies (dominated by rich countries) were signed last year, and at least 12 have already been signed this year. Canada has ordered vaccines that could provide for more than 10 times its population – and then sought to get vaccines from COVAX as well. The US has ordered vaccines equivalent to more than four times its population. Rich countries are now stockpiling vaccines that they have grabbed but are unable to distribute. Firms preferred to sell in these bilateral deals because they could charge higher prices than offered by COVAX. They typically keep secret the basic elements of the deal, including the price at which the vaccines were being provided to these governments.

This vaccine grab by rich countries meant that most of the world would get safe and approved vaccines only in 2022, and in some cases not even until 2024. In mid-January 2021, the head of WHO noted that while 39 million vaccine doses had already been administered in the rich countries, in one poor country only 25 doses (in total) had been given, and 170 poorest countries had received no vaccines at all. He said: 'I need to be blunt: the world is on the brink of a catastrophic moral failure – and the price of this failure will be paid with lives and livelihoods in the world's poorest countries.'

The unjustified protection of intellectual property

Insufficient production is an

important reason for the poor and unequal distribution. Yet this scarcity is completely unnecessary and could be easily and rapidly remedied. The major factor limiting supply of approved vaccines is the persistence of patent rights that give pharmaceutical companies a monopoly on production, confining supplies to their own capacities and the few production licences they choose to issue to others.

Patents are usually seen as providing a necessary financial reward for invention/innovation, without which technological change would either not occur or be more limited. Big Pharma (which has been the major lobby pushing for inclusion of intellectual property rights in the World Trade Organization (WTO) and in subsequent trade and economic partnership agreements) argues that developing new drugs requires such incentives because the costs are very high and drugs may not succeed even after years of effort.

Yet for COVID-19 vaccines, many big pharma companies received massive subsidies from governments that have mostly and in some cases completely covered research and development costs. In the US alone, the six major vaccine companies received over \$12 billion in public subsidies for developing COVID-19 vaccines. Other rich-country governments have provided similar subsidies. Private pharma companies also benefitted from prior public research and reduced costs of clinical testing, because of more unpaid volunteers for trials.

The 'leader' vaccines may have already received what could be considered as reasonable returns on their own investment, and more. For example, while Pfizer did not receive direct subsidies from the US government, it received pre-orders for 100 million doses for \$1.95 billion. Moreover, it relied on technology from BioNTech, which had received \$445 million from the German government for their research. Pfizer claims costs of \$3.1 billion to develop this vaccine, while estimated sales in 2021 will be worth \$15 billion.



Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine cost \$2.5 billion to develop, apparently entirely funded by the US federal government. While they claim patent incentives are needed to cover their drug development costs, many big pharma companies received massive government subsidies to develop COVID-19 vaccines.

Developing the Moderna vaccine cost \$2.5 billion, apparently entirely funded by the US federal government. The recently approved Johnson and Johnson vaccine benefitted from US government subsidies and a pre-order of 100 million doses likely to cover costs.

The case of the AstraZeneca vaccine is particularly instructive, also because it is seen as viable for developing-country use. (Significant quantities of this vaccine are being produced by the Serum Institute of India under a collaboration agreement.) The vaccine was entirely developed by a publicly funded lab at Oxford University. The original distribution model was for an open-licence platform, designed to make the vaccine freely available for any manufacturer. However, the Gates Foundation, which had clout because it had donated \$750 million to Oxford for vaccine development, persuaded the university to change course completely and sign 'an exclusive vaccine deal with AstraZeneca that gave the pharmaceutical giant sole rights and no guarantee of low prices'.

Oxford and AstraZeneca promised not to make profits from sale of the vaccine, but the details were left vague. While Oxford will receive no royalties during the

pandemic, it could subsequently gain from patents including those held by Vaccitech, a for-profit spinoff.

Meanwhile, AstraZeneca is charging differential prices for its vaccines sent to different countries, with some poorer countries paying higher rates. The European Union pays \$3.50 per dose, while Bangladesh pays \$4, and South Africa as much as \$5.25. (The more expensive vaccines are being provided by the Serum Institute of India.)

This variation in prices is not confined to the AstraZeneca shot. Because of competition for doses and opacity in contracts, the range of reported prices of vaccines is vast: from \$2.19 to as much as \$44 per dose, as of 1 March.

This restricted production creating unseemly vaccine grabs, overpriced and differentially priced doses determined by private suppliers, and inadequate provision for most of the world's population, could all have been avoided if a proposal brought by India and South Africa to the WTO in October 2020 had been accepted. The proposal was for a waiver of obligations to enforce patents and other intellectual property rights related to COVID-19 products.

This would mean that WTO

member states could choose not to grant or enforce patents and other intellectual property related to all COVID-19 drugs, vaccines, diagnostics and other technologies, including masks and ventilators, for the duration of the pandemic. They could also more easily collaborate in research and development, technology transfer, manufacturing, scaling up and supplying COVID-19 tools.

Most developing countries have supported this, but advanced countries have repeatedly blocked it in the TRIPS Council of the WTO. This is surprising, because such suspension would also benefit populations in the advanced countries by making available more vaccines quickly. A larger supply would reduce costs of additional vaccines, making them cheaper for governments and taxpayers across the world.

The blocking of the proposal at the WTO is presumably because of the lobbying power of multinational pharma companies, which have thus far been successful in preventing the TRIPS Council from approving this on five separate attempts. (Incidentally, Bill Gates has refused to back this proposal.)

Figure 2 indicates how responses to this proposal in the WTO have closely tracked the persistent divide between global North and South. Rich countries that are home to the major multinational pharma companies have blocked it. These countries have already secured more than their requirements of COVID-19 vaccines. (It is a different matter that most of them have been less successful in distributing them quickly within their own countries, so they are now stockpiling vaccines.)

Some have argued that this proposal is not necessary, since the WTO agreement on TRIPS already allows for compulsory licensing. The 2001 Doha Declaration on the TRIPS Agreement and Public Health explicitly mentions public health emergencies as adequate cause to issue compulsory licences. A compulsory licence is an authorisation granted by a

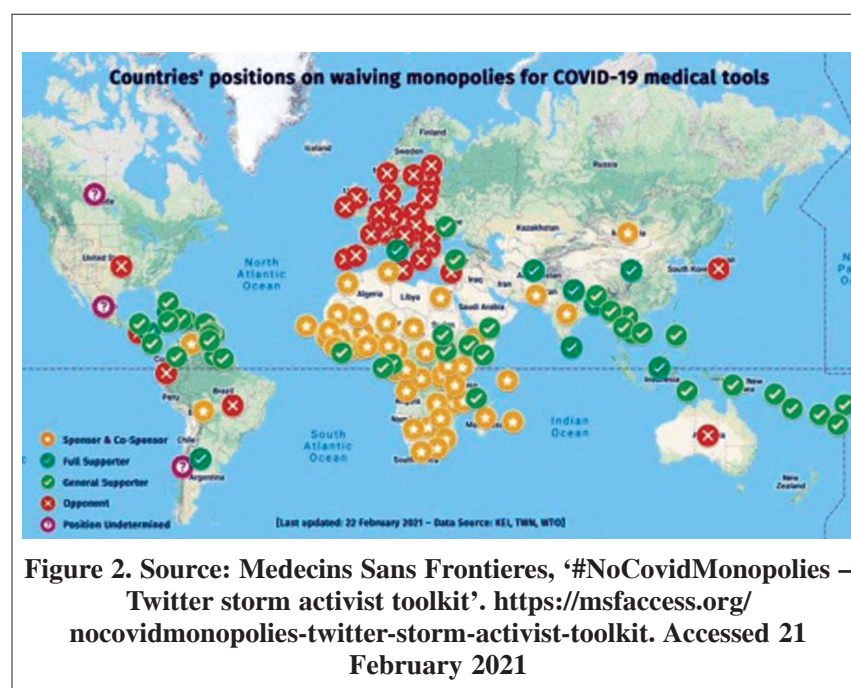


Figure 2. Source: Medecins Sans Frontieres, ‘#NoCovidMonopolies – Twitter storm activist toolkit’. <https://msfaccess.org/nocovidmonopolies-twitter-storm-activist-toolkit>. Accessed 21 February 2021

government to a third party to produce a patented product or process, without the express consent of the patentee. It allows a government to override the patentee’s exclusive right to keep others from using its patented inventions. The idea is to prevent monopolistic behaviour, like preventing others from producing and charging excessively high prices. Conditions for compulsory licensing are obviously met in this pandemic, which is clearly a public health emergency. Some countries, like Chile and Israel, have already passed resolutions for such licences to be issued in the wake of the pandemic.

However, the difficulty with issuing compulsory licences in individual developing countries is that the transfer of technology by the inventor to other licensed producers is not compulsory. For pharmaceuticals, if the chemical composition of the product is known, the product can be reverse-engineered and produced by other companies. When the precise technology for producing the vaccine is not known, compulsory licensing works only when patent holders are willing to make available the technology to licensed producers. In the case of COVID-19 vaccines, the big pharma companies are happy to supply rich

countries that are already competing for privileged access to the limited vaccine supply, and therefore are not really concerned about access to smaller or less well-endowed markets. A global waiver would change those incentives for companies.

Therefore, a global move for suspension and/or modification of intellectual property rights for matters relating to essential public health concerns is essential. Since there is as yet no information on the immunity period offered by most of the vaccines, the suspension might be required for a more extended period. Such exemptions would be required not just for vaccines but for other treatments, tests and products related to the pandemic, which may be required for the next few years.

Another idea is that of ‘voluntary pooling’, proposed by Costa Rica and supported by WHO, which has created the COVID-19 Technology Access Pool (C-TAP). This creates a pool of rights to tests, medicines and vaccines, with free access or licensing on reasonable and affordable terms for all countries. But so far only 40 (developing) countries have joined, and the major players have kept away. Lack of international support has meant that C-TAP is not really effective thus far – but it may become

significant in future, extending beyond the current COVID-19 pandemic to health emergencies in the future.

Regulatory approval and public trust

Other vaccine candidates being developed elsewhere also have the potential to combat the pandemic and ease the current shortages. The Sputnik V vaccine developed in Russia and the Sinovac and Sinopharm vaccines developed in China are reportedly effective. There are other vaccines being developed in India, Cuba and elsewhere. Some have concerns about inadequate testing and hasty regulatory approval without the required trials and other processes. But even when these vaccine candidates are found to be safe and effective through clinical trials, there are further hurdles to their being accepted internationally.

This is largely because WHO's approval process is heavily skewed in favour of vaccines developed in the rich countries. WHO has a list of 'stringent regulatory authorities' it trusts for quality control, which are only from developed countries in Europe, the US, Canada, Australia and Japan. For the rest of the world, vaccine (and other drug) candidates are required to go through 'prequalification' – a much more complicated and extended process. This greatly prolongs the time taken before vaccines from other countries are approved.

For example, WHO approved the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine at the end of 2020, less than two months after application, because WHO collaborates with the European Medicines Agency (EMA). However, the Russian (Sputnik) and Chinese (Sinovac and Sinopharm) vaccines, which had applied for approval even before the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, have still not received the WHO approval. All three of these companies can each produce up to 1 billion doses of vaccine in 2021 and have licensed production to other producers in developing countries.

In this pandemic, the usual regulatory standards have been greatly relaxed across the world, including in developed countries. No COVID-19 vaccine has been developed or released as transparently as it should have been. Even if WHO feels the regulatory standards in other countries might be less stringent, it could still work with different national regulatory authorities to ensure that all vaccine candidates are treated on an equal footing. Given the global scarcity that is denying people in poor countries access to vaccines, WHO should take a proactive approach to enable global distribution of such vaccines when they meet some harmonised standards.

WHO could work with different national regulatory authorities to ensure that all vaccine candidates are treated on an equal footing.

If this is done, it may be possible to circumvent the stranglehold of the big pharma companies on COVID-19 vaccines, which enables private profiteering in the midst of a health crisis and widespread economic distress. Some countries have already approved these other vaccine candidates for domestic use and have benefitted from this access.

For example, by late February 2021 Chile had managed to provide vaccine doses to 17% of its population by relying on imports of China's Sinovac vaccine, which is also being used in Bolivia, Brazil, Indonesia and Turkey. Several countries have approved the Sinopharm vaccine, including the UAE, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Serbia, Morocco, Hungary and Pakistan. The Sputnik V vaccine is likely to be produced and distributed in several countries across Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Latin America.

India should have been a prime example of successful production and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines. It has a number of major vaccine companies, has a long and successful history of inoculation drives, and until recently, there was a high degree of public trust in vaccines. Unfortunately, over-enthusiastic attempts by the government to first promote and then push particular vaccine candidates (Covaxin produced by Bharat Biotech) even before the required clinical trials were completed may have proved to be counterproductive, reducing public trust within and outside India. There have been many reports of people in India – including health workers – refusing to be vaccinated with Covaxin.

This is unfortunate, since once such trust has been lost, it takes time to be remedied and reversed. It also has an impact on India's ability to export vaccines now and in the future. A recent YouGov poll of 19,000 people in 17 developed countries found that vaccines developed in Russia, China and India ranked lowest in popular perceptions of efficacy, just above Iran which has very little vaccine production. India has also been plagued by major issues in distribution, belying expectations and past experience of vaccination drives.

To be fair, most countries have shown poor performance in vaccine rollout, including the developed countries that have sought to grab many multiples of their required shares of global supply. Overall, domestic distribution of vaccines has mostly mirrored the global distribution: unequal, unjust and incompetent. This approach will delay the resolution of the ongoing pandemic and creates concerns about humanity's ability to cooperate to address the even greater challenges ahead. ♦

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Protests erupt in Overseas France against pesticide poisoning

Over two decades of use of the pesticide chlordecone in banana plantations in Guadeloupe and Martinique have left behind a toxic legacy in these French Caribbean territories.

T Rajamoorthy

IN February, international media outlets such as the BBC and Radio France International carried reports that the peoples of Martinique and Guadeloupe were staging demonstrations against the failure of France, as the colonial power, to protect them from chlordecone poisoning by the banana industry.

France colonised these two islands in what is now called the Caribbean in the 17th century. They still remain its colonies despite claims to the contrary. The French continue to maintain the fiction that these territories are not colonies but overseas 'departments' (overseas regions) of France.

Colonisation began first with the extermination or marginalisation of the indigenous Amerindians and their replacement with slave labour from Africa to work on the plantations established by French planters. With the abolition of slavery in 1848, the slaves became wage workers, quite often in name only. Whether as slaves or as wage workers, their labour has been an essential component of the colonial project. Without them, it would not be possible to establish plantations in the tropics and extract profits from them.

Sugarcane was initially the main crop cultivated in these plantations as it was probably the most profitable. However, bananas were introduced into the French West Indies in 1736, first as a food crop for the slaves, with each slave being required by royal decree to plant 25 banana trees. Unlike these plantain bananas which are used for cooking, the desert



A demonstration in Martinique on 27 February against France's failure to protect the territory from pesticide poisoning.

banana (Cavendish) was introduced nearly two centuries later, but even then it played a subordinate role in the economies of these colonies compared with coffee and cocoa, the two other plantation crops.

However, a powerful cyclone in 1928 which devastated these islands changed all this. Although all the three plantation crops had experienced the full brunt of the destruction, it was decided to revive and expand the banana plantations to replace the coffee and cocoa crops. The decision to forgo coffee and cocoa for bananas alone was made to recoup losses faster as the latter crop has a shorter growth cycle.

The decision to go for large-scale banana cultivation was to have fateful consequences. From 1972, the banana plantations began using chlordecone, a toxic pesticide, to eliminate pests, specifically a beetle called the weevil. However, chlordecone, better known

under the brand name Kepone in the United States, is an organochlorine compound related to DDT. It is carcinogenic and the continued use of this pesticide on the soil led to a contamination that was 'long lasting, generalised and deleterious to public health'.

Already in 1960, the pesticide had been identified as dangerous in the US, and it was banned in that country in 1975. Four years later, the chemical was classified as potentially carcinogenic by the World Health Organization.

But it took more than a decade, until 1990, before it was banned in France. But the ban had no immediate effect on the situation in Overseas France, where its use continued for a further three years.

In 1991 the European Union had issued a directive calling on France to ban the use of chlordecone in Guadeloupe and Martinique. Two

successive agriculture ministers in François Mitterrand's government chose to derogate on the directive, due in part to 'intense lobbying' by the islands' planters. It was also revealed that some elected officials in Guadeloupe and Martinique pushed for the continued use of the so-called 'miracle molecule' on the grounds of protecting the territories' economic well-being.

Irreparable damage has been done to the health of the peoples of Guadeloupe and Martinique. The planters had dumped on 2,000 hectares of land some 300 tons of a chemical for which there was no viable decontamination method and which could persist in the soil for a couple of hundred years. Not surprisingly, the health impacts on the people were horrendous. Surveys showed more than 90% of the people tested in Martinique and Guadeloupe had chlordecone in their bodies. They had the highest rate of prostate cancer diagnosis in the world. They were also afflicted with a variety of nervous system disorders, including a new disease locally known as 'Kepone syndrome', as well as stomach and pancreatic cancers. Mental problems such as stress and depression and suicides became more prevalent as well.

Women and children were particularly vulnerable to the health impacts of the chemical. Expectant mothers had to endure the risk of premature births and the likelihood of transmitting the chemical to their offspring through their placenta during the pre-natal period and subsequently through breast milk during the post-natal period. There was also increased risk of adverse brain development in children.

In 2009, chlordecone was included in a list of persistent organic pollutants under the Stockholm Convention, which banned its production worldwide. However, it took nearly a decade for France to admit its responsibility for use of the pesticide in Guadeloupe and Martinique, when President

First chlordecone, then glyphosate...

After the public health calamity caused by chlordecone, another agrochemical used in Martinique and Guadeloupe has also been found to have harmful effects: glyphosate.

Glyphosate, which has been marketed as a herbicide under the brand name Roundup, is also carcinogenic. In 2015, the World Health Organization identified glyphosate as a probable human carcinogen and since then hundreds of legal suits have been filed against its inventor Monsanto, now owned by the German firm Bayer.

Quite apart from the hazards posed by its carcinogenic properties, the use of glyphosate in the two West Indian islands from 1997 onwards resulted in increased soil erosion. This had disastrous consequences, as a team of researchers led by Pierre Sabatier of the University of Savoie Mont Blanc discovered. The increased soil erosion resulted in the chlordecone which had hitherto been trapped within the soil (so that, by and large, it was only the land that had been polluted) being now released into the waters off the coasts of Guadeloupe and Martinique, and ultimately polluting the water table.

Source: XiaoZhi Lim, 'Glyphosate weed killer releases a banned pesticide into islands' waters through soil erosion', C&EN (Chemical & Engineering News), Vol. 99, Issue 7, March 1, 2021.

Emmanuel Macron in 2018 called it an 'environmental scandal' that was enabled by 'collective blindness'. But, not for the first time, Macron, a master of soundbites, proved himself to be a shifty politician. Less than a year later, he was denying the devastating effects of chlordecone, insisting that 'it should not be said it is carcinogenic'.

A French parliamentary commission which released its findings in November 2019 found that the French government consistently failed to respond to warnings about the environmental and health implications of chlordecone use from as far back as 1969.

In 2006, seven organisations filed a complaint against the government for 'reckless endangerment'. After almost 15 years, the case was finally heard at the High Court of Paris in January 2021. But during the hearing, the organisations were told that French statute of limitation rules may apply to the case, which would prevent them from pursuing their action. The announcement was met with anger in Guadeloupe and Martinique, where demonstrations

took place on 27 February – involving up to 15,000 people in Martinique, according to organisers (5,000, according to the police) – demanding 'No Impunity'.

The bitterness was cumulative. The people had never been warned or alerted that the pesticide used was carcinogenic or dangerous to their health. While the authorities could plead ignorance, this plea was not tenable once they had come to know the truth about the carcinogenic nature of the pesticide. The fact that they chose to continue the use of the pesticide after the official ban makes them criminally liable.

Moreover, the whole future of the people on the islands is now uncertain. If the soil and water table are seriously contaminated, how are they to survive? In fact, since 2003, local authorities have restricted cultivation of crops and fishing because of contamination.

The bitterness of the islanders was succinctly summed up by Tim Whewell in a November 2020 BBC News report from Martinique: 'First we were enslaved. Then we were poisoned.'

Biden's package and its pitfalls

The massive fiscal stimulus package put forward by US President Joe Biden will not benefit the developing countries but instead widen the gulf separating them from the rich economies. *Prabhat Patnaik* explains why.

US President Joe Biden's \$1.9 trillion rescue package is one of the most ambitious measures to revive the US and, with it, the world economy. Coming on the heels of Donald Trump's \$2 trillion package last year and a further \$900 billion package announced in December 2020, it seeks not just to provide relief from the pandemic but to start a new boom in the US which, it is expected, will have spillover effects for the world as a whole, notwithstanding the protectionist measures against imports introduced in the US under Trump. It will also raise the US fiscal-deficit-to-GDP ratio to a level unprecedented in its postwar history.

The long post-Second World War boom was sustained in the capitalist world by active State intervention through fiscal means. The continuation of such a boom however became impossible as finance became globally mobile: its usual opposition to fiscal deficits and to taxes on the rich for financing expenditure by national governments became thereby decisive, since globalised finance was now facing a nation-State which had to kow-tow to its whims for fear that not doing so would precipitate capital flight. In other words, if any state persisted with active fiscal intervention, then finance would simply leave that country and go elsewhere.

The US however was largely free from this pressure, since its currency was considered 'as good as gold', and hence a safe medium for holding wealth, which ruled out any large-scale capital flight from the US. But in the case of the US, higher State expenditure caused a 'leakage' of demand abroad, so that it got



US President Joe Biden's rescue package is based on the untenable assumption that a policy of stimulating the economy through fiscal means can be followed without putting any restrictions on the movements of finance.

externally indebted even while creating employment abroad rather than at home. And this fact acted as a deterrent on State fiscal intervention. Trump introduced protectionism for this reason, so that the fiscal stimulation of the US economy would generate employment at home rather than abroad. Despite such protection, however, the recent fiscal stimulation of the economy has widened the US trade deficit significantly, which means that there has still been a significant 'leakage' of demand abroad. It is noteworthy that Biden has nonetheless chosen to stimulate the US economy fiscally without in any way tightening protectionism, at least for the present.

The obvious implication of this for the Indian economy, according to most observers, would be to stimulate it, as India's exports would grow with a revival of US, and world, demand. There is however a fundamental difference between the immediate postwar context, when a State-stimulated US boom would have had multiplier effects on the Indian economy, and the current context. The

difference is that at that time there had been no globalisation of finance, while today finance is globalised.

One consequence of this is that every country's interest rate has to be aligned with that of the US. If for instance the interest rate in India is lower than a figure which equals the sum of the US interest rate and a compensation to offset the perceived risk of making a financial investment in India as compared with the US, then finance would simply flow out of India into the US.

Now, for quite some time when the US eschewed fiscal activism, it tried to stimulate the economy through monetary policy alone, and drove interest rates down to almost zero. Switching to fiscal activism, on the other hand, would mean some rise in US interest rates, which in fact has already started happening; and this in turn would mean correspondingly higher interest rates in countries like India. Already the Reserve Bank of India, the country's central bank, is facing problems of keeping down the interest rates on bonds because of the rise in US bond yields; but this problem will become more acute over time. And with increases in interest rates, there will be a further discouragement of investment.

There is an additional reason for such dampening, which is inflation, an issue that is being strongly debated in the US at present. Many economists belonging to the centre-right spectrum are worried that stimulation of the US economy to the extent proposed by Biden will unleash inflation in that country, while others belonging to the centre-left spectrum pooh-pooh such inflation fears. Surprisingly, however, this entire



Sacks of Indian cotton. The US stimulus will almost certainly raise the demand for and prices of primary commodities, hence raising the inflation rate in Third World primary commodity suppliers like India.

discussion on inflation has remained focused exclusively on the US, without exploring the possibility of inflation in other countries that the US stimulus may generate. This issue is particularly important for India and other Third World countries which provide a variety of primary commodities to the US, and to the advanced capitalist world in general.

The US stimulus will almost certainly raise the demand for primary commodities and hence their prices, and while this may not be of much consequence for the US inflation rate, it will certainly raise the inflation rate in Third World primary commodity suppliers like India. The policy response to such an increase in primary commodity inflation will be precisely the opposite under a regime of globalised finance to what it should have been, and what it would have been under the postwar dirigiste regime. The rise in primary commodity prices because of a sudden increase in demand should ideally enlarge State efforts to raise the supply of such commodities by increasing public investment in spheres crucial for such production. But under a regime of globalised finance, the policy response will be to curtail public investment, and public spending in general, so that it is not supply that is augmented, but domestic demand that is curtailed, to keep inflation in check. Austerity, in

short, will be imposed on the primary commodity supplying economy so that its level of activity and hence its growth rate is restrained for this reason.

Thus for an economy like India, while there will be some increase in exports on account of Biden's package, this would be accompanied by an overall compression in the level of activity and growth, so that enough primary commodities are squeezed out from domestic absorption to curb excess demand pressures and hence inflation.

This was not the case during the post-Second World War boom. Governments were not obliged to obey the diktats of finance. Hence a rise in primary commodity prices was accompanied by government effort, including larger government investment, to increase the supplies of such commodities, rather than curtailing their domestic absorption through reducing government spending. For this reason, a world boom in that period could only have a stimulating effect on the Indian economy, and not a contractionary effect.

Biden's package, in short, is based on an untenable assumption, namely that a Keynesian policy of stimulating the economy through fiscal means can be followed while the Keynesian injunction that 'finance above all must be national' is ignored.

This untenable assumption in turn derives from the illusion that the world economy as a whole can come out of the protracted crisis to which neoliberal capitalism has consigned it without putting any restrictions on the movements of finance, i.e., that the hegemony of finance does not really matter for the level of world economic activity. But while the US State, or even the States of the advanced countries as a whole acting in a coordinated fashion, may not be hamstrung by the hegemony of finance, the States in Third World countries are not so fortunate. Instead of asking for a change in the international economic order whereby the nation-States once again reacquire their autonomy vis-à-vis finance that is now globalised, the Biden package simply presumes that within the current order we can return to the days of Keynesian demand management to the benefit of all countries.

The basic untenability of this assumption will express itself in the fact that the pursuit of the extraordinarily ambitious fiscal stimulus visualised by Biden will only accentuate the global divide, with the advanced countries forging ahead with growth while the Third World countries remain mired in acute unemployment and fiscal austerity. The International Monetary Fund (IMF)'s discriminatory policies are working in this direction; but even without the IMF, this is the spontaneous direction that the finance-dominated world economy, if it breaks out of its current generalised stagnation through US or more generally advanced-country initiative, will take.

Biden's package is well-meaning and has the support of the left in advanced countries, but this left also needs to be more sensitive to the predicament of the Third World countries. ♦

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Neoliberal finance undermines poor countries' recovery

Having borne the adverse impacts of financial liberalisation, developing countries now find themselves in dire need of funds to weather the COVID-19 crisis.

Anis Chowdhury and Jomo Kwame Sundaram

AFTER being undermined by decades of financial liberalisation, developing countries now are not only victims of vaccine imperialism, but also cannot count on much financial support as their COVID-19 recessions drag on due to global vaccine apartheid.

Developing countries have long been pressured to liberalise finance by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. The international financial institutions claimed this would bring net capital inflows. This was supposed to reduce foreign exchange constraints to accelerating growth, creating 'a rosy scenario, indeed'.

Globalisation's claim naively expects 'more birds to fly into rather than out of an open birdcage'. Instead, financial globalisation meant net capital flows from capital-poor developing countries to capital-rich developed countries, dubbed the 'Lucas paradox'. A decade later, flows 'uphill' had 'intensified over time'.

The past decade saw the largest, fastest and most broad-based foreign debt increase in these economies in half a century. Total foreign debt of emerging market economies rose from around 110% of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2010 to more than 170% in 2019, while that of low-income countries (LICs) increased from 48% to 67%.

Pandemic woes

Developing countries saw private finance drop by \$700 billion in 2020, while foreign direct investment flows to developing countries declined by



The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly worsened developing countries' debt distress.

30-45% in the same year. Remittances fell by 7% in 2020, and are expected to fall by another 7.5% in 2021.

Meanwhile, developing countries' indebtedness increased as total aid flows had long fallen short of even half the long-promised 0.7% of donor countries' incomes. In 2020, when developing countries needed it most, donor governments cut bilateral aid commitments by almost 30%.

With limited access to other finance, developing countries, especially LICs, face much higher borrowing costs, even in normal times. With the pandemic, developing countries have been downgraded by rating agencies, further raising borrowing costs. Facing falling foreign exchange earnings needed to import essential drugs, vaccines and other vital supplies, including food, most countries have to borrow. In 2020, official foreign debt probably rose by 12% of GDP in emerging market economies, and by 8% in LICs.

The pandemic thus greatly worsened developing countries' debt distress. Before the pandemic, more than a quarter of official revenue went

to servicing debt. With the worst recession since the Great Depression in 2020, as well as declining revenue and foreign exchange inflows, debt is now blocking finance for more adequate relief and recovery in many countries.

Many – even World Bank Chief Economist Carmen Reinhart, once a 'debt hawk' – have called for debt relief, but little has happened. IMF debt service relief of about \$213.5 million for 25 eligible LICs ended six months later in mid-October 2020, as scheduled.

The G20's 'Debt Service Suspension Initiative for Poorest Countries' for 73 mainly LICs for May-December 2020 covered around \$20 billion of bilateral public debt owed to official creditors by International Development Association and least developed countries (LDCs).

The G20 initiative did not provide lasting relief, not even reducing foreign debt burdens and barely addressing immediate needs. It merely kicked the can down the road. Debt still had to be repaid in full during 2022-24 as interest continues



A new allocation of Special Drawing Rights by the International Monetary Fund is seen as vital to helping poorer countries recover from the COVID-19 crisis.

to accumulate. It also offered middle-income countries (MICs) nothing. Also, private creditors refused to join in or help out. UNCTAD estimates that in 2020 and 2021, lower MICs and LICs will pay between \$0.7 trillion and \$1.1 trillion to service debt, as upper MICs pay \$2.0-2.3 trillion. Meanwhile, some countries have used \$11.3 billion of IMF funds meant 'for health budgets and food imports' to service private sector debt.

SDRs to the rescue?

Undoubtedly, distressed developing countries desperately need foreign exchange to cope. But IMF Managing Director Kristalina

Georgieva's call to boost global liquidity with 'a sizeable SDR' (Special Drawing Right) allocation was blocked by the Trump administration, who objected that it would give China, Iran, Russia, Syria and Venezuela access to new funds.

The *Financial Times* (FT) argues that the proposed new SDR 1 trillion (\$1.37 trillion) issuance – almost five times the \$283 billion issued in 2009 – is justified by the scale of the crisis. For the FT, it would be 'the simplest and most effective way to get additional purchasing power into the hands of the countries that need it'.

It is now widely agreed that 'new issuance of SDRs is vital to help poorer countries'. It would augment the IMF's \$1 trillion lending capacity, already inadequate to address the ongoing pandemic and economic crises.

SDRs can only be used to pay other

central banks, the IMF and 16 'prescribed holders', including the World Bank and major regional development banks. Thus, SDRs can help foreign-exchange-constrained countries, especially if rich countries transfer their unused SDRs to the IMF or for development finance. The IMF could thus expand two existing special funds for LICs: the Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust provides interest-free loans, while the Catastrophe Containment and Relief Trust pays interest and principal due on their IMF obligations.

But SDRs are not an equitable magic bullet as apportionment reflects the size of a country's economy. In other words, rich countries would get much more, regardless of need, as during the 2008-09 global financial crisis.

With 85% of the IMF votes required to issue new SDRs, and the US effectively holding veto power with 16.5%, Biden administration support is vital.

For SDR issuance under \$650 billion, the White House only needs to consult rather than get approval from the US Congress.

US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen has urged the IMF and World Bank to do everything they can 'to ensure that developing countries have the resources for public health and economic recovery'. She has supported new SDRs despite conservative opposition, e.g., from Rupert Murdoch's *Wall Street Journal*.

But Fund and Bank resources still pale in comparison with the challenge. With preferred creditor status, they can borrow at the much lower interest rates available to them. By so intermediating, they can help developing countries, especially LICs and LDCs, to more cheaply access desperately needed funds. – IPS ♦

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US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen has urged the IMF and World Bank to do everything they can 'to ensure that developing countries have the resources for public health and economic recovery'.

Why do farmers in India feel the deck is stacked against them?

India's new farm laws threaten to leave farmers at the mercy of large agribusiness and undermine the country's food security.

Biswajit Dhar

MANY have described the controversial farm legislations recently adopted in India as a major step towards introducing a free market in agriculture. The Indian government, too, has contributed to this narrative by emphasising that the legislations would allow the farmers to 'freely' negotiate the best deals with large traders and agribusinesses.

The problem with this narrative is that the free market in agriculture is a myth which has frequently been sold, in the context of both domestic as well as international trade. The reality is that in most economies, agricultural markets are tightly regulated by governments and/or oligopolies, and in recent decades, the latter have gained ascendancy.

In keeping with the times, the Indian government has introduced three laws which are nothing but an ensemble of instrumentalities for handing over regulatory control of agricultural markets to traders and large businesses.

Therefore, when the Contract Farming Act promises 'a national framework ... that protects and empowers farmers to engage with agri-business firms, processors, wholesalers, exporters or large retailers for farm services and sale of ... farming produce at a mutually agreed remunerative price framework in a fair and transparent manner', the farmers have refused to accept that this legislation can protect their interests. Their stance is fully justified since the legislation does not include any enabling provisions for effectively protecting and/or empowering the farmers – it essentially lays down the conditions



Farmers protesting in New Delhi against the new farm laws, 'which are nothing but an ensemble of instrumentalities for handing over regulatory control of agricultural markets to traders and large businesses'.

that the farmers have to fulfil while entering into agreements with large businesses.

The second legislation, the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020, complements the first by promising 'the creation of an ecosystem where the farmers and traders enjoy the freedom of choice relating to sale and purchase of farmers' produce which facilitates remunerative prices through competitive alternative trading channels...'. However, the Act only provides a litany of procedures and the controversial dispute resolution mechanisms that can only increase the transaction cost for the farmers.

While the government is waxing eloquent about the 'freedom' the farmers have to negotiate with the traders, it is important to understand whether an ordinary Indian farmer has the ability to negotiate with large businesses and to get remunerative prices for their products.

The reality of Indian farmers has been revealed by the government in

its submissions to the World Trade Organization (WTO): 99.43% of the country's farmers are 'low income or resource poor'. This figure is an admission of the fact that the farmers operating marginal, small and medium holdings – agricultural holdings up to 10 hectares – are 'low income or resource poor'. Thus, in the government's view, only the large farmers, or 0.57% of the total, are well-endowed.

There cannot be a better indicator describing the vastly unequal bargaining powers between India's farmers and large businesses. When have negotiations between entities with vastly unequal strengths benefitted the weaker parties?

The Contract Farming Act has several provisions that could potentially put the farmers in an even worse bargaining position, as large businesses have been allowed to impose a slew of conditions in their agreements with the farmers, which include complying with quality, grade and standards, among others for pesticide residue in the products. The



India's public distribution system for food grains will collapse if the government stops procuring these grains by offering a minimum support price.

Act clarifies that the standards may be 'formulated by any agency of the Central Government or the State Governments, or any agency authorised by such Government for this purpose'. This implies that besides the standards introduced by government agencies, which are adopted by following transparent processes, the Act allows businesses to introduce private standards, which are often arbitrary and can be used to impose unfair terms on the farmers.

The Act further provides that 'quality, grade and standards shall be monitored and certified during the process of cultivation or rearing [of animals], or at the time of delivery, by third party qualified assayers to ensure impartiality and fairness'. This provision highlights the deeply intrusive nature of contract farming, and the curbs it could impose on the freedom of the farmers to carry out their activities, leave alone get 'remunerative prices'.

What is worse, the Contract Farming Act allows the inclusion of a number of contentious conditions like good farming practices and labour and social development standards in the farming agreements. Attempts to impose labour and social standards on Indian farmers are ironical, for India has consistently resisted the pressures of industrialised countries to incorporate these standards in global trade rules as they are instruments for undermining the

legitimate rights of workers in the developing world. How can a government which speaks of helping the farmers to double their incomes introduce these grossly unfair instruments that can only increase their exploitation by large businesses?

The MSP issue

The absence of any mention of minimum support prices (MSP) in the legislations should be interpreted as a quiet withdrawal of the government from the public procurement system. Since its significant involvement in agricultural markets from the mid-1960s, the government has facilitated India's transformation from an import-dependent country to one that has large food grain stocks. Public procurement has had three advantages: one, providing incentives for farmers in the form of assured returns; two, dampening arresting price volatilities of major agricultural commodities in India, which are a common occurrence in global markets; and finally, helping to build food grain stocks for sustaining the public distribution system (PDS). It is a no-brainer that if the government stops procuring food grains by offering the MSP, the PDS will collapse.

The government can ill-afford to withdraw the PDS as high incidence of undernourishment afflicting a sizable section of our countrymen

remains one of its most formidable challenges. The Global Hunger Index for 2020 gave a grim reminder of this reality: India was ranked 94 out of the 107 countries for which the numbers were provided. Further, the *State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World* report showed that during 2017-19, 'prevalence of undernourishment in the total population' in India was 14%, the second highest among South Asian countries.

It is a sad commentary that while hunger and undernourishment have remained a major problem, whose intensities have increased in the pandemic-induced economic crisis, the government is planning to transform India as an agricultural export hub. A member of the government's NITI Aayog policy think-tank has recently argued that given the emerging demand-supply scenario in the country, India will be required to sell 20-25% of the incremental agri-food production in overseas markets in the coming years.

This argument refuses to accept that given the scale of undernourishment among the country's population, food stocks are a manifestation of inadequate implementation of the National Food Security Act (NFSA). In fact, over the past few years, budgetary allocation for the implementation of the NFSA has been falling in real terms.

Since it embarked on economic liberalisation policies three decades ago, India has consistently submitted in the WTO that its agricultural policies are designed to ensure food security and protect farmers from the uncertainties of market forces. India could therefore justify the imposition of high import tariffs in order to protect its agriculture from the heavily subsidised products that are traded in international markets. Can the government justify its moral high ground for protecting agriculture now that it wants to make the country an agricultural export hub? ♦

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The CFA franc as a vivid symbol of colonial continuities in Francophone Africa

Monetary policy in Africa has been dominated by a consensus formed in Europe and the United States. In France's former colonies in West and Central Africa, this has helped preserve the substance of empire long after its formal end.

Ndongo Samba Sylla

THE history of money and finance in the former French colonies south of the Sahara presents remarkable continuities, despite the political and institutional changes that occurred with the decolonisation process in the 1960s. The most obvious symbol of these continuities is no doubt the CFA franc. The acronym of this currency created in 1945 by the French provisional government originally stood for 'franc of the French colonies in Africa'. The currency still circulates in eight countries in West Africa and six countries in Central Africa without its founding principles having been altered.

To have a proper sense of the history of French monetary imperialism in Africa, one has to go back at least to the mid-19th century. With the abolition of slavery in France in 1848, the French state had to compensate French slave owners for the loss of their 'movable' property. Part of the financial compensation had been used to set up colonial banks under the authority of the Bank of France. This was the case with the Bank of Senegal, created in 1853 by a decree of Louis Napoleon. Unlike the other colonial banks whose headquarters were located in metropolitan France, the Bank of Senegal was based in Saint-Louis, in the north of Senegal. It started in 1855 as a loan and discount bank. Being under the financial control of the Bordeaux trading houses, its role was to promote their export and import activities to the detriment of their local rivals who suffered discrimination in accessing credit. Following its dissolution in 1901, the

Bank of Senegal was succeeded by the Bank of West Africa, a private bank that had a monopoly on the issuance of francs in the French colonial empire south of the Sahara.

African people had for a long time resisted the imposition of the French currency. For their trade, but also for religious purposes, they used currencies like the cowries, a shell from the Indian Ocean, and the manilla (a bracelet). They were aware that the acceptance of the colonial currency would disrupt their trade and, more importantly, would make them economically subordinated to the dictates of their colonial masters. If you no longer have control over your currency as a nation, you no longer have control over what you produce, consume and exchange. As the ban on the import of cowries and the obligation to pay taxes in the colonial currency were not always effective, colonial administrators were often obliged to use legal sanctions and physical force. Their sense of masculinity often suffered from the defiant attitude of African women who did not want to use the franc in their daily trade. Only the creation of the CFA franc would end decades of resistance from ordinary people against the French imperial monetary order.

The Bank of West Africa was replaced in 1955 by two public issuing institutions that four years later became the Central Bank of West African States and the Central Bank

of Equatorial African States and Cameroon, renamed the Bank of Central African States. These two central banks each separately issue a currency whose acronym is the CFA franc: the franc of the African financial community in the first case; the franc of financial cooperation in Central Africa in the second. In the mid-1970s their headquarters were moved to Dakar (Senegal) and Yaounde (Cameroon) respectively. Their staff were 'Africanised' in the same process.

The 'Africanisation' of the management of the Central Bank of West African States and the Bank of Central African States did not put an end to the colonial character of the monetary system. The CFA franc still functions according to the same principles and purpose established during the colonial period. Its rigid peg to the French currency (franc, then euro from 1999) and the freedom of transfers between France and countries using the CFA franc were not abolished after independence. Similarly, the French government's direct control over monetary and exchange rate policy is still exercised through its representation in the organs of the two central banks with a veto power that has become implicit over time, and the obligation for the latter to deposit part of their foreign exchange reserves with the French Treasury (50% since the mid-2000s).

The purpose of this 'monetary arrangement' from its origin to the present day is to maintain satellite economies that are 'complementary' to the French economy. That is, economies that serve as cheap sources

of raw material supplies and captive outlets.

The fixed parity reduces transaction costs and protects French companies (and now all foreign companies operating in euros) from exchange rate risk. The structural overvaluation of the CFA franc, the artificially high level of its value against the reference currencies, tends to favour imports, including luxury goods, to the detriment of exports.

The fixed parity thus constitutes a kind of trade preference granted to the eurozone, since African countries cannot use their exchange rate as an instrument to boost at times the price competitiveness of their exports. Finally, it deprives the Central Bank of West African States and the Bank of Central African States of the possibility of using the exchange rate to absorb shocks. Thus, in the event of a crisis, the need to defend the peg implies a reduction in public expenditure and credits to the economy, as well as an increased dependence on external financing flows.

As for the freedom of transfer, it allows for the free investment and disinvestment of French capital as well as the repatriation of profits, dividends, etc. In resource-rich CFA countries, this freedom is often associated with significant financial bleeding. For example, over the period 1970-2008, illicit financial flows from Côte d'Ivoire and Cameroon are respectively estimated in 2008 US dollars at 66.2 billion and 33 billion, 6 times and 13 times higher than their respective stocks of external debt.

In addition to the handicaps resulting from an overvalued exchange rate and the outward transfer of local economic surpluses, the behaviour of the banking sector retains its colonial character.

In CFA countries, credits to the economy remain low, with short maturities and prohibitive interest rates. Loans are mainly oriented towards the trade sector to the detriment of investment in agriculture and manufacturing. Bank loans are primarily targeted at large companies and governments to the detriment of small and medium enterprises

(SMEs) in general. The decline in the market share of French banks in CFA countries has not changed this general observation. The banking landscape has become less oligopolistic but is still largely dominated by foreign banking groups. In Senegal, for example, the latter control more than 90% of banking assets.

The persistence of neo-colonial monetary and financial relationships has favoured neither structural transformation nor regional integration.

Thus, domestic production in CFA countries is penalised, on the one hand, by the low level and inadequacy of credits to the economy and, on the other, by the overvaluation of the exchange rate. This pattern is aggravated by trade liberalisation policies and those dictated by the ideology of fiscal austerity.

The persistence of neo-colonial monetary and financial relationships has favoured neither structural transformation nor regional integration, and has done even less for the economic development of the CFA countries, nine out of 14 of which are among the least developed countries. In terms of health and education achievements, CFA-franc-using countries occupy the lowest ranks worldwide. Among a total of 189 countries, Niger, Central African Republic and Chad had the lowest score on the 2020 Human Development Index. Looking from a long-term perspective, average real incomes have stagnated or declined in five of the biggest CFA-franc-using economies: Côte d'Ivoire, Cameroon, Gabon, Senegal and the Republic of Congo.

If this monetary bond did not prevent the commercial and financial decline of France in its sphere of influence, it has nonetheless contributed to the institution of centralised political regimes that are more responsive to the priorities of the French government, French

companies and foreign investors than to the interests of their citizens. For example, in oil-exporting CFA countries such as Chad, Gabon, the Republic of Congo and Equatorial Guinea, the 'president for life' model remains the norm, notwithstanding the frequent organisation of formal elections with a foregone conclusion.

In other words, the CFA franc existence favours a particular type of political leadership. Those who can aspire to lead CFA countries are those who will not question its limitations. It is these leaders that have enjoyed the active solidarity and support of the French government over the last six decades.

In the face of growing protests against this colonial relic led by pan-Africanist social movements and intellectuals, France, in alliance with Côte d'Ivoire, decided in December 2019 to soften its stance on the West African CFA franc. As with previous CFA franc reforms, the current one is very limited in scope. Its motivation is to tackle the embarrassing symbols – the name of the currency, French representation within the Central Bank of West African States and the control of the French Treasury over the latter's foreign exchange reserves – while ignoring the points that African economists criticise: the existence of a formal link of monetary subordination between France and the CFA countries, the fixed parity with the euro, the freedom of transfers, and also the existence of two monetary unions that have no other foundation than colonial history.

While the abolition of the CFA franc does not in itself guarantee that its member countries will develop more equitably and rapidly, extending its life expectancy cannot but hinder any prospect of political and economic emancipation of African peoples. ♦

Dr Ndongo Samba Sylla is a Senegalese development economist and researcher at the West Africa Office of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation. He is the co-author with Fanny Pigeaud of Africa's Last Colonial Currency: The CFA Franc Story (London: Pluto Press, 2021). The above article first appeared in Tax Justice Focus (Vol. 12, No. 1, First Quarter 2021) published by the Tax Justice Network.

Endemic violence against women 'cannot be stopped with a vaccine' – WHO chief

A UN report has found that violence against women is 'devastatingly pervasive', affecting a third of all women.

OVER the past decade, violence against women has been 'endemic in every country and culture', according to a new study released by the UN health agency on 9 March.

Latest available data from the World Health Organization (WHO) and partners revealed that violence against women remains 'devastatingly pervasive and starts alarmingly young'.

Some 736 million women – that translates to a third of all women – have been subjected to physical or sexual violence across their lifetimes.

'Violence against women is ... causing harm to millions of women and their families and has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic,' said WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. 'But unlike COVID-19, violence against women cannot be stopped with a vaccine.'

Moreover, the violence starts early, with a quarter of 15- to 24-year-olds in a relationship having experienced violence by an intimate partner by the time they reach their mid-twenties.

'It's deeply disturbing that this pervasive violence by men against women not only persists unchanged but is at its worst for young women aged 15-24 who may also be young mothers,' said UN Women chief Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka.

While intimate partner violence is the most prevalent, affecting around 641 million women globally, 6% of women report being sexually assaulted by someone other than their husband or partner.

And given the high levels of stigma and under-reporting of sexual abuse, the true figure is likely to be significantly higher.



A shelter for abused women in Dawei, Myanmar. A third of all women have been subjected to physical or sexual violence in their lifetimes.

'We can only fight it with deep-rooted and sustained efforts – by governments, communities and individuals – to change harmful attitudes, improve access to opportunities and services for women and girls, and foster healthy and mutually respectful relationships,' Tedros said.

COVID 'shadow pandemic'

Based on data from 2000 to 2018, the report represents the largest-ever study on the prevalence of violence against women, which Mlambo-Ngcuka pointed out was rising even 'before the pandemic stay-at-home orders'.

WHO warned that COVID has further increased women's exposure to violence because of measures such as lockdowns and disruptions to vital support services.

'We know that the multiple impacts of COVID-19 have triggered a "shadow pandemic" of increased

reported violence of all kinds against women and girls,' the head of UN Women said.

Though many countries have seen more intimate partner violence reported to helplines, police and other service providers during lockdowns, the report notes that the pandemic's full impact will only be established with further data collection.

'Every government should be taking strong, proactive steps to address this, and involving women in doing so,' Mlambo-Ngcuka underscored.

Breakdown by region

An estimated 37% of women in the poorest countries have experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence in their lives – with the figure in some countries being as high as half, according to the study.

Broken down by region, the highest rates of intimate partner

UN agencies urge Turkey not to abandon international accord protecting women

UNITED Nations agencies on 20 March called on Turkey to reconsider its withdrawal from a key regional treaty on preventing violence against women, including domestic violence, and bringing the perpetrators to justice.

Dubbed the Istanbul Convention, the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence is the 'first and most comprehensive' international treaty specifically addressing these issues, the UN agencies said in a statement.

'We are concerned that

Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention would undermine the significant efforts invested so far to prevent and combat violence against women and may hinder progress towards further strengthening of national legislative, policy and institutional frameworks,' they said.

Violence against women is a particular concern in Turkey, with the latest National Research on Violence against Women (2014) reporting that 38% of ever-married women were subjected to physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime.

'In its most extreme form, and often as the final act on a continuum

of violence, hundreds of women are murdered every year,' the agencies said.

They also noted that in 2012, Turkey became the first country to ratify the Convention, and that it also took key steps to align its national legislation with the accord, including by adopting a law on protecting families and preventing violence against women.

'We urge the Government of the Republic of Turkey to continue protecting and promoting the safety and rights of all women and girls, including by remaining committed to the full implementation of the Istanbul Convention,' the agencies added. – *UN News*



UN Women chief Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka: 'We know that the multiple impacts of COVID-19 have triggered a "shadow pandemic" of increased reported violence of all kinds against women and girls.'

the study.

Preventing violence requires addressing systemic economic and social inequalities, ensuring access to education and safe work, changing discriminatory gender norms and institutions, reforming discriminatory laws and strengthening legal responses.

'To address violence against women, there's an urgent need to reduce stigma around this issue, train health professionals to interview survivors with compassion, and dismantle the foundations of gender inequality,' said WHO's Claudia Garcia-Moreno. 'Interventions with adolescents and young people to foster gender equality and gender-equitable attitudes are also vital.' –

UN News

violence among women aged 15-49 are in Oceania, Southern Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, ranging from 33% to 51%.

At 16% to 23%, Europe had the lowest rate, followed by Central Asia at 18%, East Asia at 20% and South-East Asia at 21%.

Long after it ends, violence can impact a woman's health and well-being throughout her life, often associated with depression, anxiety, unplanned pregnancies and many other health problems, according to

How to end violence at a national level:

- Introduce gender-transformative policies – from childcare to equal pay.
- Bring in laws supporting gender equality.
- Strengthen survivor-centred health systems.
- Encourage educational interventions challenging discriminatory beliefs.
- Target investments in evidence-based prevention strategies.
- Strengthen survey and data collections on violence against women.
- Improve measurements on forms of violence experienced by women.

Remembering Nawal El Saadawi, the feminist pioneer who paved the way for women around the world

The great Egyptian writer Nawal El Saadawi, who passed away on 21 March, waged a courageous lifelong struggle against patriarchy and oppression.

PERSECUTED, imprisoned, mutilated and silenced, Nawal El Saadawi could have lived it all in the almost nine decades of her life.

The pioneering Egyptian feminist, writer and psychiatrist passed away on 21 March at the age of 89, leaving an immense legacy for her fight against oppression and misogyny in the Middle East and the rest of the world.

In fact, if today the world is aware of practices such as female genital mutilation, it was precisely because of the courage of El Saadawi, who recounted her own experience when she saw the floor of her home bathroom filled with her own blood when she was six years old.

Born in a town outside Cairo in the 1930s, El Saadawi was the second child of nine, the daughter of a public servant and a wealthy mother.

From an early age, El Saadawi opposed patriarchy when she refused to marry at age 10. She studied medicine at the University of Cairo and specialised in psychiatry.

But it was her literary work that would transform her into an international icon and public enemy of the Egyptian regime for much of the 20th century.

In 1972, her book *Women and Sex* confronted and contextualised the attacks perpetrated against women's bodies, including mutilation. The book would become a foundational text for the second wave of feminism.

The success of *Women and Sex* would cost El Saadawi her position in the Ministry of Health, her health magazine, and the position of deputy general secretary in the Egyptian Medical Association.

Between 1973 and 1976, El Saadawi worked as a researcher on women's issues and neurosis at the Ain Shams University School of Medicine. In the late 1970s, she would work as an advisor to the United Nations for the Women's Programme in Africa and the Middle East.

But it would be the magazine *Confrontation* that would lead her to consolidate herself as a radical feminist against the aggressive Arab system. She was labelled a 'dangerous woman' by Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and imprisoned in September 1981.

'Nothing is more perilous than truth in a world that lies.'

However, the prison could not confine Nawal El Saadawi. While she was detained, she formed the Arab Women's Solidarity Association, the first legal and independent feminist group in Egypt. During her time in jail, she also wrote her memoirs on toilet paper with an eyebrow pencil.

'Danger has been a part of my life ever since I picked up a pen and wrote,' she reflected. 'Nothing is more perilous than truth in a world that lies.'

El Saadawi was released after the assassination of President Sadat, but her work was censored and her books were banned, the BBC explained.

Memories from the Women's Prison and Woman at Point Zero

would be two of her works inspired by her time in jail.

Once the threats to her life from Islamist fundamentalists were too much, El Saadawi left for the United States, where she taught at Duke University as well as the University of Washington. Her career as an academic took her to major institutions such as Harvard, Yale, Columbia, the Sorbonne, Georgetown and the University of California.

El Saadawi returned to Egypt in 1996, continued her activism, and joined the Tahrir Square demonstrations in 2011 that would detonate the so-called Arab Spring.

When BBC presenter Zeinab Badawi suggested during an interview in 2018 that she tone down her criticism, El Saadawi replied: 'No. I should be more outspoken; I should be more aggressive because the world is becoming more aggressive, and we need people to speak loudly against injustices.'

'I speak loudly because I am angry.'

Her work has been translated into more than 40 languages, and there is not a woman of colour whose life has not been impacted, in one way or another, by El Saadawi's struggle.

In 2020, *Time* magazine included her on its list of 100 women of the year, dedicating a cover to her.

However, her only dream was to be recognised by her own country, where she was always considered an *agent provocateur*.

El Saadawi died in a hospital in Cairo at the age of 89, but her work will live forever. – *BELatina.com* ♦

René Depestre (1926-) is a poet, essayist and novelist seen as one of the leading figures in Haitian and Caribbean literature.

Black ore

René Depestre

When all of a sudden the stream of Indian sweat was dried up by the sun
 When the gold-fever drained out the final drop of Indian blood in the marketplace
 And every last Indian vanished from around the mines
 It was time to look to Africa's river of muscle
 For a changing of the guard of misery

And so began the rush to that rich and limitless
 Storehouse of black flesh
 And so began the breathless dash
 To the noonday splendour of the black-skinned body
 Then all the earth rang out with the clatter of the picks
 Digging deep in the thick black ore

How many a chemist all but turned his mind
 To making some new precious alloy formed
 With this black mineral
 How many a lady almost set her heart on finding pots and pans
 Of black Sengalese or a fine tea-service
 Of stocky Caribbean pickaninny

Who knows what parish padre somewhere
 Almost gave his solemn word
 To get a churchbell cast in the sonority of black blood
 Or what nice Santa Claus almost dreamed
 Of little black tin soldiers for his yearly rounds
 Or what valiant man at arms
 Would have gladly hewn his blade from his ebony metal

The earth rang out with the shake and shatter of the drills
 Deep in the entrails of my people
 Deep in the black man's muscled mineral bed
 From centuries now they have dug from the depths
 The wonders of this race

O mines of ore that are my people
 Limitless vein of human dew
 How many pirates have plunged their weapon deep
 To probe the recess of your flesh
 How many plunderers have hacked themselves a path
 Through the lushed illumined vegetation of your body
 Strewn over your passing days, dead stalks and pools of tears

O pillaged people dug up from top to bottom
 Like land beneath the plough
 People harrowed to enrich
 The great markets of the world
 Store up your firedamp deep in your body's secret dark of night
 Then none will dare to cast more cannons and more golden coins
 From that black metal of your fury's rising flood.

Translated by Norman R Shapiro