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Rising temperature, declining nature

Tackling the twin threats of climate change and biodiversity loss

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The intersecting crises of climate change and shrinking biodiversity are threatening life on a planet in peril. 7

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Stopping cholera in Malawi: Firefighting measures are not enough

As Malawi continues to face a rampant cholera outbreak, local activists stress the need to strengthen the health system and improve living conditions to complement short-term solutions.

MALAWI continues to struggle with a cholera outbreak that started in March 2022, which has claimed over 1,000 lives so far and continues to threaten tens of thousands of people. This is only one of the cholera outbreaks registered last year, along with those in Haiti, Syria and Lebanon. As always, the disease has hit the poorest people the hardest, including those living in refugee camps and rural areas without access to safe drinking water and sanitation. The surge in cholera outbreaks has been accompanied by an increased concern about the availability of vaccines and the capacity of health systems in the Global South to respond to the flare-ups as they continue to deal with the pressures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.


UNICEF Malawi

Health workers attending to a patient at a health centre in Nkhatabay, Malawi.

As the World Health Organisation (WHO) warns about the possible impacts of the outbreak on the overall health system in Malawi, especially in the light of a surge in the number of cases towards the end of 2022, the *People's Health Dispatch* met with **Wilson Asibu** from the People's Health Movement (PHM) Malawi to learn more about the context in which the outbreak is unfolding.

People's Health Dispatch (PHD): *Can you tell us a bit more about the context in which the cholera outbreak happened, especially taking into consideration the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic?*

Wilson Asibu (WA): As you will be aware, most of the health systems in sub-Saharan Africa are dealing with many challenges, especially when it comes to human resources for health. When the COVID-19 pandemic began, we saw huge gaps in our healthcare system exposed even further. For example, the deficit of over 7,000 community health workers (CHWs) in rural areas, where approximately 84% of people live, meant that the effects of the pandemic were all the harsher for those in hard-to-reach areas.

At the same time, we were not dealing only with the COVID-19 pandemic, but also with the HIV/AIDS pandemic. That was a huge pre-existing challenge, and COVID-19 only added to the strain that was already there. We saw a downward trend in HIV/AIDS interventions as the COVID-19 pandemic began, and that was because there were not enough resources to deal with both at the same time. Because all the health resources got reallocated for dealing with COVID-19, we saw falling numbers of the people taking HIV/AIDS treatment, among other things.

In that regard, the COVID-19 pandemic had a great impact on the health system in Malawi. It showed that we do not have the capacity to tackle multiple problems at the same time, and that long-lasting challenges get sidelined if something as acute as COVID-19 comes up. This was not the case with HIV/AIDS alone, but also with conditions related to social determinants of health. I think that this is one of the reasons why this cholera outbreak has picked up so intensively: because issues related to living conditions, such as access to water and waste management, fell down on the agenda in the period we are talking about. Simply put, the cholera outbreak is also a challenge that is coming from the strain that was perpetrated on the health system by the COVID-19 pandemic.

PHD: *The ongoing cholera outbreak started in early 2022, but instead of being brought under control, it actually became more serious by the end of the year. There is currently no sign that it might end soon. What happened over the course of the past year that made things go this way?*

WA: As of 9 February, there were 36,943 recorded cases and over 1,210 deaths in the ongoing cholera outbreak. These are official figures; the real numbers might be even higher, both in the case of confirmed cases and deaths. And at this point, the outbreak has spread to all 29 districts of Malawi. It's a problem affecting the whole country.

One reason behind this is probably that the government treated this outbreak as a small-scale problem, thinking that it would not escalate. It has to be said that this is the usual approach to the problem in Malawi, because almost every year, we have an outbreak of cholera. My opinion is that the government's response hasn't been robust enough in the past, and has opened the doors to something more serious. I remember that even 10 years ago, we struggled with the same issues, which means that the problem was not addressed in an adequate way. Since the beginning of COVID-19, this was perhaps in part due to the strain caused by the recent pandemic and the HIV/AIDS pandemic, but also because of changes in government, and other factors. To that we have to add a lack of adherence to sanitation and hygiene practices, as well as lack of awareness-raising on these issues by the government and the media. There's been a serious lack of proper public health interventions about these issues.

But I think we cannot ignore the fact that this particular disease is a disease of poverty, and it has been spreading because of that also. A lack of efforts to improve sanitation infrastructure and the availability of safe drinking water, especially in the rural areas, has also contributed to the situation we are facing today. I believe that a combination of these factors – a long-lasting failure to improve living conditions and implement public health interventions, the failure to address the outbreak in its early stages, including through instilling good hygiene practices, and the pressure on the health system caused by COVID-19 and HIV/AIDS – have led us to the point where cholera cases are found all over the country and are putting people's lives at risk.

PHD: *Looking at what can still be done, would you say there is still space for meaningful intervention? What should be done at the local and international levels to help the people and communities affected by the cholera outbreak?*

WA: Right now, I believe we need international support for the Malawi government in terms of resources to contain the outbreak. Failing that, the outbreak could even intensify and cross the borders to Mozambique, Zambia and also Tanzania, making this a regional problem. I think Malawi should be given the resources to fight the outbreak, but it should also be provided with technical support on how to handle the situation. This is the short-term part of the solution. But we have to look beyond that. Organisations like the People's Health Movement (PHM) Malawi have been working on raising awareness about cholera and other poverty-related diseases among the people, since there was no real attempt to do that by the government. Supporting those efforts is also important for addressing the current situation.

In the long term, we have to work on addressing the poverty aspects of cholera outbreaks. We need to improve access to safe drinking water. It is unacceptable that it is taking so long to ensure that everyone has access to potable water. The same goes for waste management. Some cities in Malawi, for example Lilongwe, still don't have proper sites for waste disposal. Finally, we need to ensure that there are enough health workers in the health system. Not only should we have enough health workers in general, but we need health workers who are trained to respond in emergencies like this one. Of course, we have seen that a deficit of such a health workforce is not a problem particular to Malawi, but is shared by most countries in Southern Africa.

I believe we have to give proper attention to the long-term aspects of the response. Otherwise, these issues will keep re-emerging, they will keep coming and claiming people's lives. Right now, we are talking about over 1,210 lives lost. Should we wait for more to die? Now is the time for governments and international organisations like WHO to provide resources to contain the problem and to strengthen the local health system.

PHD: *Do you see any particular areas of the health system where interventions can be implemented to counter, and perhaps prevent, outbreaks of other poverty-related diseases in the future?*

WA: For that, I think we have to rethink the health system that we have at the moment. The health system should not be all about reacting to diseases, but should instead focus on prevention. Robust strategies should be put in place by governments and international organisations, including WHO, to prioritise prevention and promotion of health instead of the firefighting method we have witnessed during the COVID-19 pandemic. We have seen that some of the diseases that are claiming a lot of lives are preventable in nature. If we can support the prevention of these diseases and look at health promotion, we could make sure that the number of lives lost is significantly smaller than now. Of course we need to have good curative services for the immediate issues at hand, but without prevention, our problems will continue.

Second, especially in low- and middle-income countries like Malawi, governments should find a way to make the most of the technology we have today. We need to see how this technology can help us increase access to good quality healthcare.

Finally, as I have already said, many of the diseases we are fighting against are diseases of poverty. We are actually witnessing an increase of this kind of disease, and governments should address the elements that are driving or exacerbating these problems. This means strengthening health systems, but it also means fighting against unemployment, corruption or lack of drinking water. We still have a long battle to fight when it comes to poverty-related diseases, and we will be defeated if governments do not begin to address the root causes of poverty.

To change the current status, we need to see much more cooperation and joint action. COVID-19 has provided us with good illustrations of what happens if people work in their own silos and ignore what is happening around them. We cannot say that the cholera outbreak in Malawi is only a Malawian problem or just an African problem. These problems must be dealt with in cooperation between countries, organisations and movements, otherwise we will fail. In order to bring about change, we need to see a lot more solidarity on the global scale. ◆

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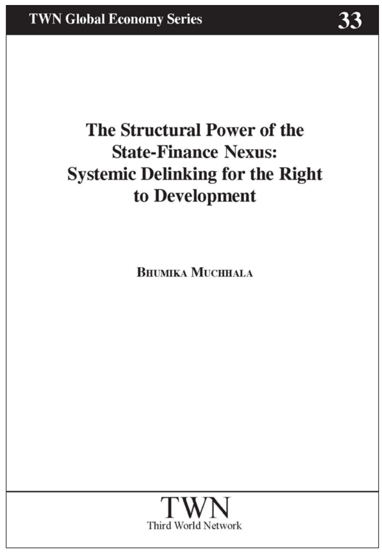
TWN Global Economy Series No. 33

The Structural Power of the State-Finance Nexus: Systemic Delinking for the Right to Development

By Bhumika Muchhala



The current era of financial hegemony is characterized by a dense financial actor concentration, an exacerbated reliance of many South countries on private credit, and an internalized compliance of South states with financial market interests and priorities. This structural power of finance enacts itself through disciplinary mechanisms such as credit ratings and economic surveillance, compelling many South states to respond to creditor interests at the expense of people's needs.

As a human rights paradigm, the Declaration on the Right to Development has the active potential to redress the structural power of finance and the distortion of the role of the state through upholding the creation of an enabling international environment for equitable and rights-based development on two levels of change. The first comprises structural policy reforms in critical areas of debt, fiscal policy, tax, trade, capital flows and credit rating agencies. The second area of change envisions systemic transformation through delinking as articulated by dependency theorist Samir Amin, which entails a reorientation of national development strategies away from the imperatives of globalization and towards economic, social and ecological priorities and interests of people.

Available at https://twn.my/title2/ge/ge33.htm

Who's winning and who's losing the economic war over Ukraine?

Even as it cuts a wide swath of death and destruction, the conflict in Ukraine is proving fabulously profitable for some.

Medea Benjamin and Nicolas JS Davies

Mysterymanblue

Among the big winners of the war in Ukraine are the 'big five' US weapons makers, including Northrop Grumman.

WITH the Ukraine war having reached its one-year mark on 24 February, the Russians have not achieved a military victory but neither has the West achieved its goals on the economic front. When Russia invaded Ukraine, the United States and its European allies vowed to impose crippling sanctions that would bring Russia to its knees and force it to withdraw.

Western sanctions would erect a new Iron Curtain, hundreds of miles to the east of the old one, separating an isolated, defeated, bankrupt Russia from a reunited, triumphant and prosperous West. Not only has Russia withstood the economic assault, but the sanctions have boomeranged – hitting the very countries that imposed them.

Western sanctions on Russia reduced the global supply of oil and natural gas, but also pushed up prices. So Russia profited from the higher prices, even as its export volume decreased. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) reports that Russia's economy only contracted by 2.2% in 2022, compared with the 8.5% contraction it had forecast, and it predicts that the Russian economy will actually grow by 0.3% in 2023.

On the other hand, Ukraine's economy has shrunk by 35% or more, despite $46 billion in economic aid from generous US taxpayers, on top of $67 billion in military aid.

European economies are also taking a hit. After growing by 3.5% in 2022, the euro area economy is expected to stagnate and grow only 0.7% in 2023, while the British economy is projected to actually contract by 0.6%. Germany was more dependent on imported Russian energy than other large European countries so, after growing a meagre 1.9% in 2022, it is predicted to have negligible 0.1% growth in 2023. German industry is set to pay about 40% more for energy in 2023 than it did in 2021.

The United States is less directly impacted than Europe, but its growth shrank from 5.9% in 2021 to 2% in 2022, and is projected to keep shrinking, to 1.4% in 2023 and 1% in 2024. Meanwhile India, which has remained neutral while buying oil from Russia at a discounted price, is projected to maintain its 2022 growth rate of over 6% per year all through 2023 and 2024. China has also benefited from buying discounted Russian oil and from an overall trade increase with Russia of 30% in 2022. China's economy is expected to grow at 5% this year.

Other oil and gas producers reaped windfall profits from the effects of the sanctions. Saudi Arabia's GDP grew by 8.7%, the fastest of all large economies, while Western oil companies laughed all the way to the bank to deposit $200 billion in profits: ExxonMobil made $56 billion, an all-time record for an oil company, while Shell made $40 billion and Chevron and Total gained $36 billion each. BP made 'only' $28 billion, as it closed down its operations in Russia, but it still doubled its 2021 profits.

As for natural gas, US LNG (liquefied natural gas) suppliers like Cheniere and companies like Total that distribute the gas in Europe are replacing Europe's supply of Russian natural gas with fracked gas from the United States, at about four times the prices US customers pay, and with the dreadful climate impacts of fracking. A mild winter in Europe and a whopping $850 billion in European government subsidies to households and companies brought retail energy prices back down to 2021 levels, but only after they spiked five times higher over the summer of 2022.

While the war restored Europe's subservience to US hegemony in the short term, these real-world impacts of the war could have quite different results in the long term. French President Emmanuel Macron remarked, 'In today's geopolitical context, among countries that support Ukraine, there are two categories being created in the gas market: those who are paying dearly and those who are selling at very high prices … The United States is a producer of cheap gas that they are selling at a high price … I don't think that's friendly.'

An even more unfriendly act was the sabotage of the Nord Stream undersea gas pipelines that brought Russian gas to Germany. The investigative journalist Seymour Hersh reported that the pipelines were blown up by the United States, with the help of Norway – the two countries that have displaced Russia as Europe's two largest natural gas suppliers. Coupled with the high price of US fracked gas, this has fuelled anger among the European public. In the long term, European leaders may well conclude that the region's future lies in political and economic independence from countries that launch military attacks on it, and that would include the United States as well as Russia.

The other big winners of the war in Ukraine will of course be the weapons makers, dominated globally by the US 'big five': Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Northrop Grumman, Raytheon and General Dynamics. Most of the weapons so far sent to Ukraine have come from existing stockpiles in the United States and NATO countries. Authorisation to build even bigger new stockpiles flew through the US Congress in December, but the resulting contracts have not yet shown up in the arms firms' sales figures or profit statements.

The Reed-Inhofe substitute amendment to the FY2023 National Defense Authorization Act authorised 'wartime' multi-year, no-bid contracts to 'replenish' stocks of weapons sent to Ukraine, but the quantities of weapons to be procured outstrip the amounts shipped to Ukraine by up to 500 to one. Marc Cancian, a former senior official at the White House Office of Management and Budget, commented, 'This isn't replacing what we've given [Ukraine]. It's building stockpiles for a major ground war [with Russia] in the future.'

Since weapons have only just started rolling off production lines to build these stockpiles, the scale of war profits anticipated by the arms industry is best reflected, for now, in the 2022 increases in their stock prices: Lockheed Martin, up 37%; Northrop Grumman, up 41%; Raytheon, up 17%; and General Dynamics, up 19%.

While a few countries and companies have profited from the war, countries far from the scene of the conflict have been reeling from the economic fallout. Russia and Ukraine have been critical suppliers of wheat, corn, cooking oil and fertilisers to much of the world. The war and sanctions have caused shortages in all these commodities, as well as fuel to transport them, pushing global food prices to all-time highs.

So the other big losers in this war are people in the Global South who depend on imports of food and fertilisers from Russia and Ukraine simply to feed their families. Egypt and Turkey are the largest importers of Russian and Ukrainian wheat, while a dozen other highly vulnerable countries depend almost entirely on Russia and Ukraine for their wheat supply, from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Laos to Benin, Rwanda and Somalia. Fifteen African countries imported more than half their supply of wheat from Russia and Ukraine in 2020.

The Black Sea Grain Initiative brokered by the UN and Turkey has eased the food crisis for some countries, but the agreement remains precarious. It must be renewed by the UN Security Council before it expires on 18 March 2023, but Western sanctions are still blocking Russian fertiliser exports, which are supposed to be exempt from sanctions under the grain initiative. UN humanitarian chief Martin Griffiths told Agence France-Presse on 15 February that freeing up Russian fertiliser exports is 'of the highest priority'.

After a year of slaughter and destruction in Ukraine, we can declare that the economic winners of this war are: Saudi Arabia, ExxonMobil and its fellow oil giants, Lockheed Martin and Northrop Grumman.

The losers are, first and foremost, the sacrificed people of Ukraine, on both sides of the frontlines, all the soldiers who have lost their lives and families who have lost their loved ones. But also in the losing column are working and poor people everywhere, especially in the countries in the Global South that are most dependent on imported food and energy. Last but not least is the Earth, its atmosphere and its climate – all sacrificed to the God of War.

That is why, as the war enters its second year, there is a mounting global outcry for the parties to the conflict to find solutions. The words of Brazil's President Lula reflect that growing sentiment. When pressured by US President Joe Biden to send weapons to Ukraine, he said, 'I don't want to join this war, I want to end it.' ◆

Medea Benjamin and Nicolas JS Davies are co-authors of War in Ukraine: Making Sense of a Senseless Conflict*. Benjamin is co-founder of Global Exchange and CODEPINK: Women for Peace. Davies is an independent journalist and a researcher with CODEPINK.* *The above article was first published in Common Dreams (www.commondreams.org) under a*

Climate meet delivers landmark win on loss-and-damage fund

The grave challenge of climate change confronting humankind is being addressed in intergovernmental negotiations at the United Nations. The most recent UN climate conference set up an urgently needed fund for responding to loss and damage arising from climate change impacts, but produced little else of concrete significance.

Meena Raman

THE latest annual United Nations climate conference delivered on what was the 'litmus test' for its success – consensus on the establishment of a fund to deal with loss and damage associated with the adverse effects of climate change. What seemed impossible was made possible, largely due to the unity of the developing-country Group of 77 and China and the role of the Egyptian presidency of the conference. Also important were efforts by civil society groups that put pressure on the United States, which had been the main blocker to having the fund.

Until the final hours of the climate talks – which took place in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, on 6-20 November – it was uncertain whether the deal would be sealed, amid behind-the-scenes diplomacy by the conference presidency team. The G77/China was led by Pakistan, which wielded a strong moral voice at the conference, following the country's catastrophic and devastating floods which were attributed to climate change.

It was a big win for loss-and-damage issues at Sharm el-Sheikh, spotlighting what was once seen as an 'orphan child' of the UN intergovernmental climate negotiations, with usual priority given to climate change mitigation (i.e., reduction of greenhouse gas emissions) while adaptation to climate change impacts is treated as

Photo by IISD/ENB/Mike Muzurakis

The UN climate conference in Sharm el-Sheikh established a fund to deal with loss and damage associated with climate change.

the 'stepchild'.

However, the conference yielded nothing significantly meaningful on finance, given the overall stance of developed countries in the process, with the loss-and-damage fund remaining empty for now. The hope is that financing will be forthcoming when the fund is set up and is resourced in the coming years. The Santiago Network on Loss and Damage (SNLD), which is to be a technical assistance facility for developing countries, was also devoid of any financial commitments. The finance decisions adopted only exhorted developed countries to deliver on the $100-billion-per-year-by-2020 pledges and to double adaptation funding. New pledges, totalling more than $230 million, were made to the Adaptation Fund, a small sum given the scale of the needs in developing countries.

The Sharm el-Sheikh conference encompassed the 27th session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP 27), the 17th session of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP 17), the fourth session of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement (CMA 4), as well as sessions of the Convention's Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) and Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI).

An overarching source of alarm and agony of many developing countries during the talks was the persistent efforts by developed countries to not own up to their historical responsibilities for past emissions, and to delete or dilute the foundational principles of equity and 'common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities' (CBDRRC) between developed and developing countries under the Convention and the Paris Agreement.

These attempts were repeatedly called out by developing countries, especially from the Like-Minded Developing Countries (LMDC) grouping, the African Group, the Arab Group and ABU (Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay). The effort to remove differentiation between developed and developing countries was at the heart of the fight on many fronts, especially on the issues of mitigation and finance. Developed countries continued using terms such as 'major emitters', 'major economies' and the 'G20' in relation to who should show more ambition on mitigation, while in the discussion on finance, it was about 'broadening the donor base'. The retort from developing countries was that these issues had already been settled under the Paris Agreement and that the principles and provisions of the Agreement should be respected and implemented.

The climate talks were originally scheduled to end on 18 November but decisions were only gavelled in the early morning of 20 November, when the official plenary began at 4 a.m. Delegates were visibly exhausted and bleary-eyed following long days and nights of negotiations which were particularly intense in the final few days.

Apart from the loss-and-damage fund, other issues that had been deadlocked were the cover decisions (as to what they should contain), the mitigation work programme, the global goal on adaptation and matters related to finance.

Among the sticky issues in relation to mitigation were how the goal of limiting global warming to 1.5°C should be reflected, how to advance efforts following the controversial decision adopted at COP 26 on the phasedown of unabated coal power and phaseout of inefficient fossil fuel subsidies, and the peaking of emissions by 2025.

In order to avoid spats in the full glare of the public and world media given the wide divergence between Parties, the conference presidency team resorted to informal consultations and diplomatic efforts behind the scenes to find compromises on the difficult issues with draft texts which were reviewed by Parties. This was the reason for the delay in convening the final plenary, as Parties sought to assess the overall balance of the package of decisions among the key issues of mitigation, adaptation, loss and damage, and finance.

Following the eventual adoption of the various decisions, COP 27 President Sameh Shoukry, who is the Egyptian foreign minister, said that 'despite the difficulties and challenges of our times, the divergence of views, level of ambition or apprehension, we remain committed to the fight against climate change ... and that as much as sceptics and pessimists thought that climate action will be taking a back seat on the global agenda, we rose to the occasion, upheld our responsibilities and undertook the important decisive political decisions that millions around the world expect from us.'

Shoukry added: 'We listened to the calls of anguish and despair resonating from one end of Pakistan to the other, a country with literally more than a third of its area flooded, a resounding alarm of the future that awaits us beyond 1.5 degrees. A bleak future..., a future that I do not wish for my grandchildren nor for any child on this planet.'

'Today, here in Sharm el-Sheikh, we establish the first ever dedicated fund for loss and damage, a fund that has been so long in the making. It was only appropriate that this COP, the implementation COP in Africa, is where the fund is finally established. Millions around the globe can now sense a glimmer of hope that their suffering will finally be addressed, swiftly and appropriately,' he said, adding that 'we leave Sharm el-Sheikh with renewed hope in the future of our planet, with an even stronger collective will and more determination to achieve the temperature goal of the Paris Agreement.'

He said further that Parties 'just adopted the landmark Sharm el-Sheikh Mitigation Ambition and Implementation work programme that will hugely contribute to keeping 1.5°C within reach, and I trust that we all know what needs to be done to safeguard 1.5°C and ensure that we never go beyond.'

'We also leave Sharm el-Sheikh with an important agreement on tangible steps to enact the Paris Agreement's Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA), a long-running request by developing countries who bear the brunt of climate impacts despite being the least contributor to climate change, and who deserve to be accorded the needed finance, technical assistance and capacity to better enable them to adapt, to build resilience and to enhance their climate action overall. I trust that this work in progress on the GGA will be concluded at COP 28 next year to the best interest of this process and all its Parties.

'The Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Programme that we just adopted is an embodiment of what COP 27 was all about: implementation. It lays out a clear pathway that should guide our efforts in the coming years to implement commitments and honour pledges. Together we will implement, to save our planet from the threat of climate change, and to turn this climate challenge into an opportunity for growth and development, in a just, equitable, inclusive and balanced manner. Together we can, and together we will.'

Some of the significant decisions adopted are highlighted below.

The cover decisions – Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan

The cover decisions adopted under the COP and CMA are referred to as the Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan. The COP and CMA decisions are similar in many respects. Highlights of some of the main aspects of the decision adopted under the CMA are as follows:

The decision '[s]tresses that the increasingly complex and challenging global geopolitical situation and its impact on the energy, food and economic situations, as well as the additional challenges associated with the socioeconomic recovery from the coronavirus pandemic, should not be used as a pretext for backtracking, backsliding or de-prioritising climate action.'

It '[r]eaffirms the Paris Agreement temperature goal of 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, recognising that this would significantly reduce the risks and impacts of climate change'; and '[r]eiterates that the impacts of climate change will be much lower at the temperature increase of 1.5°C compared with 2°C and resolves to pursue further efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C'.

On enhancing ambition and implementation, the decision '[r]esolves to implement ambitious, just, equitable and inclusive transitions to low-emission and climate-resilient development in line with the principles and objectives of the Convention, the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement, taking into account this decision, the Glasgow Climate Pact (GCP) and other relevant decisions of the COP and the CMA.' (The developed countries have of late been mainly focusing on the GCP adopted at COP 26 in Glasgow in 2021 and much less on the Paris Agreement and even less on the Convention. Some major developing countries have raised concerns that the GCP is being put at the same level as the Convention and the Paris Agreement.)

On mitigation, the decision '[r]ecognises that limiting global warming to 1.5°C requires rapid, deep and sustained reductions in global greenhouse gas emissions of 43 per cent by 2030 relative to the 2019 level'; and '[a]lso recognises that this requires accelerated action in this critical decade, on the basis of equity and the best available scientific knowledge, reflecting CBDRRC, in the light of different national circumstances and in the context of sustainable development and efforts to eradicate poverty.'

It also '[n]otes with serious concern the finding in the latest synthesis report on nationally determined contributions (NDCs) that the total global greenhouse gas emission (GHG) level in 2030, taking into account implementation of all latest NDCs, is estimated to be 0.3 per cent below the 2019 level, which is not in line with least-cost scenarios for keeping global temperature rise to 2 or 1.5°C'; and '[e]mphasises the urgent need for Parties to increase their efforts to collectively reduce emissions through accelerated action and implementation of domestic mitigation measures in accordance with Article 4.2 of the Paris Agreement.' (Article 4.2 of the Paris Agreement states: 'Each Party shall prepare, communicate and maintain successive NDCs that it intends to achieve. Parties shall pursue domestic mitigation measures, with the aim of achieving the objectives of such contributions.')

The decision also '[c]alls upon Parties to accelerate the development, deployment and dissemination of technologies, and the adoption of policies, to transition towards low-emission energy systems, including by rapidly scaling up the deployment of clean power generation and energy efficiency measures, including accelerating efforts towards the phasedown of unabated coal power and phase-out of inefficient fossil fuel subsidies, while providing targeted support to the poorest and most vulnerable in line with national circumstances and recognising the need for support towards a just transition.' (This is a repeat of the decision from the GCP.)

A new and significant outcome is the establishment of 'a work programme on just transition for discussion of pathways to achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement'. The decision 'requests the Subsidiary Body for Implementation and the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice to recommend a draft decision on this matter for consideration and adoption by the CMA at its fifth session [in 2023], with the work programme to be implemented in a manner that builds on and complements the relevant workstreams under the Convention and the Paris Agreement, including the work programme for urgently scaling up mitigation ambition and implementation'. The CMA also '[d]ecides to convene, as part of the work programme on just transition, an annual high-level ministerial round table on just transition, beginning at its fifth session'.

On finance, the decision '[n]otes with concern the growing gap between the needs of developing country Parties, in particular those due to the increasing impacts of climate change and their increased indebtedness, and the support provided and mobilised for their efforts to implement their NDCs, highlighting that such needs are currently estimated at USD5.8-5.9 trillion for the pre-2030 period.' It also '[e]xpresses serious concern that the goal of developed country Parties to mobilise jointly USD100 billion per year by 2020 ... has not yet been met and urges developed country Parties to meet the goal.' It also '[u]rges developed country Parties to provide enhanced support, including through financial resources, technology transfer and capacity-building, to assist developing country Parties with respect to both mitigation and adaptation, in continuation of their existing obligations under the Convention, and encourages other Parties to provide or continue to provide such support voluntarily.' The decision also '[c]alls on the shareholders of multilateral development banks (MDBs) and international financial institutions (IFIs) to reform MDB practices and priorities, align and scale up funding, ensure simplified access and mobilise climate finance from various sources and encourages MDBs to define a new vision and commensurate operational model, channels and instruments that are fit for the purpose of adequately addressing the global climate emergency, including deploying a full suite of instruments, from grants to guarantees and non-debt instruments, taking into account debt burdens, and to address risk appetite, with a view to substantially increasing climate finance.'

It also '[c]alls on MDBs to contribute to significantly increasing climate ambition using the breadth of their policy and financial instruments for greater results, including on private capital mobilisation, and to ensure higher financial efficiency and maximise use of existing concessional and risk capital vehicles to drive innovation and accelerate impact.'

Further, the CMA decided to 'launch the Sharm el-Sheikh dialogue between Parties, relevant organisations and stakeholders to exchange views on and enhance understanding of the scope of Article 2.1(c) of the Paris Agreement and its complementarity with Article 9 of the Paris Agreement and requests the secretariat, under the guidance of the Presidency of COP 27, to organise two workshops in 2023 in this regard and to prepare a report to the CMA on the deliberations at these workshops.'

Developed countries, led by Switzerland for the Environmental Integrity Group (EIG), have been calling for Article 2.1(c) as a separate agenda item. The article refers to 'Making finance flows consistent with a pathway towards low greenhouse gas emissions and climate-resilient development,' and there have been divergences between developed and developing countries over what this actually means.

Loss-and-damage fund

In a separate decision, Parties agreed to 'establish new funding arrangements for assisting developing countries that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change, in responding to loss and damage, including with a focus on addressing loss and damage by providing and assisting in mobilising new and additional resources, and that these new arrangements complement and include sources, funds, processes and initiatives under and outside the Convention and the Paris Agreement.'

It was also decided, 'in the context of establishing the new funding arrangements..., to establish a fund for responding to loss and damage whose mandate includes a focus on addressing loss and damage.' Parties also agreed to '[e]stablish a transitional committee on the operationalisation of the new funding arrangements for responding to loss and damage..., to make recommendations based on, inter alia, elements for operationalisation..., for consideration and adoption by ... COP 28 and CMA 5 (November-December 2023) with a view to operationalising the funding arrangements...'.

Parties also agreed that 'the recommendations to operationalise the funding arrangements and the fund ... shall consider, inter alia: (a) Establishing institutional arrangements, modalities, structure, governance and terms of reference for the fund...; (b) Defining the elements of the new funding arrangements...; (c) Identifying and expanding sources of funding; (d) Ensuring coordination and complementarity with existing funding arrangements'. The transitional committee 'will be informed by the following, inter alia: (a) The current landscape of institutions, including global, regional and national, that are funding activities related to addressing loss and damage, and ways in which coherence, coordination and synergies among them can be enhanced; (b) The gaps within that current landscape, including the types of gap, such as relating to speed, eligibility, adequacy and access to finance, noting that these may vary depending on the challenge, such as climate-related emergencies, sea level rise, displacement, relocation, migration, insufficient climate information and data, or the need for climate-resilient reconstruction and recovery; (c) The priority gaps for which solutions should be explored; (d) The most effective ways in which to address the gaps, especially for the most vulnerable populations and the ecosystems on which they depend; (e) Potential sources of funding, recognising the need for support from a wide variety of sources, including innovative sources.'

Santiago Network on Loss and Damage

Parties also agreed to 'establish the Advisory Board of the Santiago network as part of the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage' and that 'the Santiago network secretariat will be accountable to and operate under the guidance of the governing body or bodies through the Advisory Board and hosted by an organisation or a consortium of organisations able to provide the necessary administrative and infrastructural support for its effective functioning'.

The decision also recalls what was agreed in Glasgow in 2021, 'in which it was decided that the Santiago network will be provided with funds to support technical assistance for the implementation of relevant approaches to averting, minimising and addressing loss and damage associated with the adverse effects of climate change in developing countries in support of the functions'; and also recalls the decision from 2021 'which urges developed country Parties to provide funds for the operation of the Santiago network and for the provision of technical assistance'. It also 'encourages others to provide support for the operation of the Santiago network and technical assistance' and 'welcomes the pledges that have already been made to the Santiago network'.

Mitigation work programme

The decision on the mitigation work programme '[c]onfirms that the objective of the work programme for urgently scaling up mitigation ambition and implementation ... shall be to urgently scale up mitigation ambition and implementation in this critical decade in a manner that complements the global stocktake.' Parties decided that 'the work programme shall be operationalised through focused exchanges of views, information and ideas, noting that the outcomes of the work programme will be non-prescriptive, non-punitive, facilitative, respectful of national sovereignty and national circumstances, take into account the nationally determined nature of NDCs and will not impose new targets or goals'. (This had been a subject of grave concern to many developing countries.)

It was also decided that 'the work programme shall function in a manner that is consistent with the procedures and timelines for communication of successive NDCs established in the Paris Agreement', and that 'the scope of the work programme should be based on broad thematic areas relevant to urgently scaling up mitigation ambition and implementation in this critical decade and include all sectors covered in the *2006 IPCC Guidelines for National Greenhouse Gas Inventories* of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), thematic areas in the contribution of Working Group III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the IPCC and relevant enabling conditions, technologies, just transitions and cross-cutting issues'.

It was also decided that implementation of the work programme would start immediately after CMA 4 and continue until CMA 8 (2026) 'with a view to adopting a decision on the continuation of the work programme at that session', and that 'the work programme will be carried out under the CMA'. The Chairs of the SBSTA and SBI were requested 'to appoint, well in advance of the fifty-eighth sessions of the subsidiary bodies (June 2023) and every two years thereafter, in consultation with respective constituencies, two co-chairs for the work programme, one from a developed country Party and one from a developing country Party'.

Global goal on adaptation (GGA)

The decision on the GGA '[r]ecognises that adaptation is a global challenge faced by all with local, subnational, national, regional and international dimensions, and that it is a key component of and makes a contribution to the long-term global response to climate change to protect people, livelihoods and ecosystems'.

Parties agreed to 'initiate the development of a framework for the global goal on adaptation to be undertaken through a structured approach under the Glasgow-Sharm el-Sheikh work programme in 2023 ... with a view to the framework being adopted at CMA 5'; and that 'the framework ... will guide the achievement of the global goal on adaptation and the review of overall progress in achieving it with a view to reducing the increasing adverse impacts, risks and vulnerabilities associated with climate change, as well as enhance adaptation action and support'.

New collective quantified goal on finance (NCQG)

The decision on the NCQG 'acknowledges the need to significantly strengthen the ad hoc work programme on the NCQG in the light of the urgency of scaling up climate action with a view to achieving meaningful outcomes from the deliberations on all elements and setting the new collective quantified goal in 2024 taking into account the needs and priorities of developing countries.'

It also 'acknowledges the need for substantive progress in the deliberations on the NCQG on climate finance, which will ... take into account the needs and priorities of developing countries and include inter alia, quantity, quality, scope and access features, as well as sources of funding, of the goal and transparency arrangements to track progress towards achievement of the goal, without prejudice to other elements that will also be considered as the deliberations evolve, including matters relating to time frame.'

It 'further acknowledges that deliberations on the NCQG should build on lessons learned from the goal of developed countries of mobilising jointly USD100 billion per year by 2020 ... and taking into account the needs and priorities of developing countries.' ◆

Meena Raman is Head of Programmes at the Third World Network and coordinates TWN's climate change work.

New implementation framework for Biodiversity Convention adopted

Hot on the heels of the climate conference came another major intergovernmental environmental gathering, concerned with the related problem of the planet's eroding biological diversity. While the Montreal meet adopted a blueprint to halt and reverse biodiversity loss, it failed to seriously tackle the resource extraction and overconsumption fuelling that loss.

Lim Li Lin

Photo by IISD/ENB/Mike Muzurakis

Participants in a celebratory mood at the conclusion of the COP 15 conference which, among others, adopted a global framework for implementing the Convention on Biological Diversity.

THE Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) under the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) was adopted in a package together with five other linked decisions in the early hours of the morning on 19 December after protracted negotiations.

This took place at the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the CBD (COP 15) in Montreal held from 7 to 19 December. COP 15 was originally to take place in Kunming, China, in 2020 but COVID-19 led to its postponement, and the eventual venue in Montreal where the CBD Secretariat is located.

The GBF focuses the implementation of the CBD up to 2030 on its four Goals and 23 Targets.

The agreement on the framework was marred by its adoption by the Chinese presidency of COP 15 over objections by the delegate from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), one of the world's most biodiverse countries being home to the second largest tropical rainforest located in the Congo Basin.

(Earlier, halfway through COP 15, developing countries also walked out of negotiating rooms in protest at the lack of progress in discussions on the provision on financial resources.)

The DRC said that it was unable to support the adoption of the GBF, because despite developing-country demands for a dedicated Global Biodiversity Fund to be established by COP 15, this was not part of the agreed outcomes.

More than 70 developing countries, including all of the Africa Group, had demanded for a new fund, under the authority of the COP, to be set up by COP 15. Developed countries were firmly opposed to this.

A compromise proposal by Colombia, Chile, Costa Rica, Mexico and Peru was to set up a Trust Fund under the Global Environment Facility (GEF) instead, and this proposal was reflected in the penultimate text. However, this is seen by most developing countries as inadequate, as, based on decades of experience, financial flows to developing countries through the GEF are beset with problems.

A last-minute further compromise introduced a sunset clause in 2030 to the new Trust Fund under the GEF, unless otherwise decided by the COP. The compromise also opened the door for consideration of a standalone Global Biodiversity Fund under the authority of the COP.

In addition, a multilateral mechanism for sharing of benefits arising from the use of digital sequence information (DSI) of genetic resources, including a global fund, was established. The fund decision in 2030 would decide if it was an adequate entity to receive and disburse revenue from the multilateral mechanism.

Uproar over process of GBF package adoption

The COP 15 President, China's Minister of Ecology and Environment Huang Runqiu, had informed the plenary that he would adopt the decisions one by one, and then adopt the package of six decisions (the GBF package) as a whole. He first tabled the decision on capacity building and development and technical and scientific cooperation for adoption, and this was when the DRC objected and asked for the GBF to be placed in brackets since that had not been adopted yet.

Mokhamad Edliadi/CIFOR

Coal mining in East Kalimantan, Indonesia. Resource extraction from developing countries that began since the colonial era and which continues today, driven by corporations, rich countries and global elites, caused the biodiversity crisis.

Mexico then took the floor to argue for the adoption of the GBF as a package without any changes. The delegate said that a perfect text would never exist, and that perfect was the enemy of the good. She further said that it was her birthday the next day and that she would like to have the GBF as her present. This was followed by prolonged applause from the floor and from the podium.

CBD Secretariat staff and the COP 15 presidency then furiously consulted on the podium. When the COP 15 President resumed the meeting, he announced that he had heard the arguments from Mexico and the acclamation from the floor and was therefore proposing the adoption of the whole package, and quickly gavelled this decision without a pause.

The stunned plenary gave way to other African countries expressing their unhappiness with the manner in which the GBF package was adopted. Cameroon objected to the President's force of hand and for twisting the procedure that he had previously announced.

Uganda raised a point of order and questioned whether the adoption was in accordance with the rules of procedure, as a Party had openly objected and the rules of procedure required consensus decision-making. If not consistent, it said, it would become a 'fraud'.

The legal advisor of the CBD was given the floor to explain the rules of procedure. He said that 'what happened today was free from any mistake in my legal opinion', as there was no formal objection from the DRC, only some comments, and 'what the President had done was consistent with the rules of procedure'.

The delegate from the DRC responded to say that 'My statement, that of my country, through my voice, was formal opposition'. And to the great astonishment of the entire world, 'we resorted to violence against our text' and 'history will never forgive us for it.'

Uganda also took the floor again and said that the adoption was a 'coup d'état against the sovereign COP 15'. He said that 'we do not accept the manner and the spirit under which the gavel fell in total disregard of the rules of procedure, the spirit of the Convention, the tenets of multilateralism and the best practices for international legal jurisprudence'. He said that 'due procedures should have been given time, and Parties should have been given their sovereign right to exercise their rights under the Convention,' and insisted that his reservation be put on record to avoid setting a bad precedent for future COPs.

Later that evening at the final plenary session on 19 December, the DRC Environment Minister Ève Bazaiba took the floor, reportedly after heavy lobbying to soften her stance, to 'make some clarifications', as the Chinese COP President put it. She acknowledged that the GBF had been adopted in a package with five other decisions, and spoke of 'truth, equity and justice' in the process of adoption.

Bazaiba expressed the DRC's sovereign right to make reservations regarding the resource mobilisation target and decisions related to funding and the financial mechanism. She asked for this to be clearly placed on record and included in the final report of COP 15. This move reconciled the DRC's objection with the adoption of the GBF package.

In the end, tensions over the Russian war in Ukraine, which unfolded by proxy through heated disagreements over the selection of Central and Eastern European (CEE) COP Bureau members, held up the final closing plenary session and prevented COP 15 from closing. Russia had insisted on a secret ballot to elect CEE Bureau members as it wanted a seat on the Bureau and accused other European countries of blocking its selection in the regional group process.

Due to a lack of quorum because of the late hour of the closing plenary, it was not possible to vote. As such, COP 15 was merely suspended at around 1 a.m. on 20 December, and a third meeting of COP 15 will have to be convened to resolve this issue and adopt its final report. [A largely ceremonial and procedural (and mostly virtual) first session of COP 15 was held in Kunming in 2021 to hand over the presidency from Egypt to China. COP 15 had been scheduled to be held in Kunming in 2020 but COVID-19 disrupted this.]

An actual standalone in-person meeting is not expected to be held to resolve this issue and formally close COP 15; it remains to be seen how this would be done. Meanwhile a short COP decision tabled by the COP 15 President requested current Bureau members and the Chairs of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) and the Subsidiary Body on Implementation (SBI) to extend their term until this matter is resolved.


Fabian Lambeck (CC BY-SA 4.0)

Language on respecting the roles, knowledge, culture and rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities was well reflected in the Global Biodiversity Framework.

Assessment of outcomes

Much hype had surrounded the GBF, with media reports touting a Paris Agreement (on climate change) moment for biodiversity. Yet the precursor to the GBF, the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity, and its Aichi Targets (2011-20) were negotiated with little fanfare and through the normal work streams of the CBD and COP. Unlike the Paris Agreement under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, which is a legally binding international treaty, the GBF was adopted as an Annex to a COP decision, by Parties who are legally bound by the CBD, and therefore obliged to implement it.

The hype was generated in part due to the failure to achieve any of the Aichi Targets and the determination of the international community to take much more serious action because of the growing scientific evidence and reports on the biodiversity crisis. However, the GBF, while meant to focus on implementation of the CBD, also cherry-picks its elements, raising fears that the implementation will be skewed by the intense political focus on the GBF.

Not to be discounted also was that the developed countries were using this opportunity to shift responsibilities onto the developing countries, as was the case with the Paris Agreement on climate change. Most of the world's remaining biodiversity is in developing countries, and as such, the burden for action lies heavily on them. At the same time, the developed countries were pushing strongly for an enhanced mechanism on planning, monitoring, reporting and review, while far from adequately meeting the demands of developing countries on the quantum of and mechanism for financial flows.

As such, entrenched North-South fights pervaded the negotiations, with developing countries insisting on the Rio 1992 bargain and the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. (The 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development, or Earth Summit, in Rio de Janeiro celebrated the conclusion of the Rio Declaration of Principles, Agenda 21 and three 'Rio Conventions' on biodiversity, combating desertification and climate change.)

Resource mobilisation issues dominated throughout as a strong demand by developing countries for developed countries to meet their legally binding obligations to provide financial resources to them under the CBD.

The other major North-South issue was access and benefit sharing (ABS) of digital sequence information of genetic resources. Since the Nagoya Protocol on access and benefit sharing was adopted in 2010, new technological developments have meant that the physical genetic resource no longer needs to be accessed, thus potentially undermining ABS rules. As such, developing country Parties have been forcefully arguing to include DSI and to work out a solution for ABS rules to apply.

The enhanced multidimensional mechanism on planning, monitoring, reporting and review that was finally agreed includes seven elements: (i) national biodiversity strategies and action plans (NBSAPs) aligned with the GBF and including national targets, (ii) national reports, (iii) global analysis of information to assess national contribution to the GBF,

(iv) global review of collective progress in the implementation of the GBF including on means of implementation, (v) voluntary peer reviews, (vi) further development and testing of a forum for voluntary country reviews, and (vii) information on non-state actor commitments. This is much enlarged from the CBD's requirements of NBSAPs and national reports.

A controversial section of the GBF known as 'B bis' was also drafted by the Co-Chairs of the Open-Ended Working Group on a Post-2020 GBF. This section was initially created to house the multiple references across the text to various principles and approaches, such as the Rio Principles and rights-based approaches, thus 'decluttering' the text. Many however raised fears that important principles would be housed there and not operationalised in the text, and that only the goals and targets had indicators for monitoring its implementation. Heated debate also took place over what the appropriate content of that section should be, and whether it should be called fundamental premises, or premises or principles, or guidelines and approaches.

In the end, the new section C was relegated to 'Considerations for the implementation of the framework' and is a laundry list of issues including: contribution and rights of indigenous peoples and local communities; different value systems; national circumstances, priorities and capabilities; collective effort towards the targets; right to development; human rights-based approach; fulfilment of the three objectives of the Convention and its Protocols and their balanced implementation; consistency with international agreements or instruments; principles of the Rio Declaration; inter-generational equity; cooperation and synergies; and biodiversity and health.

The GBF could be seen as a necessary compromise given very entrenched positions and vested interests among the Parties. Its mission to 'take urgent action to halt and reverse biodiversity loss to put nature on a path to recovery…' is indeed laudable. However, conservation groups were disappointed with the weak conservation targets, which may not amount to enough to achieve the GBF's mission and vision, and implementation of the GBF remains a concern.

Southern justice-oriented groups condemned the fact that the GBF was not transformational, and therefore not ambitious, as it does not address the root causes of the biodiversity crisis in a systemic way to bring about real transformational change (see box next page).

Language in the GBF targets on the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs), on gender equality, on participation which includes access to justice by IPLCs, and the protection of environmental human rights defenders was heralded as major wins by civil society.

In particular, language on respecting, inter alia, the roles, knowledge, culture and rights of IPLCs was well reflected in the GBF. In addition, in the conservation targets on spatial planning and protected areas, there is safeguard language with regard to respecting the rights of IPLCs. The customary use of biodiversity by IPLCs is also safeguarded in the targets.

The issue of protected areas had been hugely controversial, with a so-called 'High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People' comprising more than 100 countries, and large conservation organisations pushing for an increase in protected areas to 30% by 2030. This was met by a huge pushback by IPLCs and civil society organisations arguing that colonial 'fortress conservation' has resulted in massive human rights violations of IPLCs.

In this regard, the language of the target is now 'Ensure and enable that by 2030 at least 30 per cent' of all areas is 'effectively conserved and managed through ecologically representative, well-connected and equitably governed systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, recognising indigenous and traditional territories…'

In the new section C however, under 'Contribution and rights of indigenous peoples and local communities', the same recognition for the rights of local communities under the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP) was deleted, although the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) is recognised.

These gains in the recognition of the rights of IPLCs could however be systematically undermined by the failure of the GBF to seriously tackle the systemic issues driving biodiversity loss. Instead, governments seem to have ceded their public responsibilities to the private sector.

The target on regulating the corporate business and finance sectors is miserably weak without mandatory requirements, accountability measures or legal responsibility for damage done. Agribusiness interests were also behind the sidelining of the precautionary approach in relation to new technologies.

The GBF has also opened the door wide to corporate and market interests, inviting private, blended and 'innovative' finance to provide financial resources, without any safeguards. This helps developed countries to avoid their legal obligations under the Convention to provide new and additional financial resources.

Market-based mechanisms such as biodiversity offsets and credits, and offsetting approaches such as 'nature-based solutions' are included. In addition, the governance of the GEF Trust Fund for the GBF would be open to influence by the unaccountable private sector and philanthropic foundations. Private sector 'commitments' on action also provide another escape hatch for governments to avoid their CBD obligations.

Yet, the crux of the issue remains unaddressed. Resource extraction from developing countries that began since the colonial era and which continues today, driven by corporations, rich countries and global elites, caused the biodiversity crisis. Developed countries have become rich, and overconsumption by the rich world is causing biodiversity destruction in poor countries.

The fundamental issue of justice and equitable fair shares regarding the sustainable use of biodiversity has largely been ignored, save for vague language to 'reduce the global footprint of consumption in an equitable manner, including through halving global food waste, significantly reducing overconsumption and substantially reducing waste generation, in order for all people to live well in harmony with Mother Earth.'

This was forcefully expressed by the delegate from Namibia in the plenary session, who said that 'colonial injustice' is the 'origin of all of the problems that we have encountered in this Convention and in the relationship between humanity and biodiversity.' He stressed the need to acknowledge that the 'global economic and financial architecture that came out of the violence of colonisation, of resource extraction, of plantation agriculture' has driven markets and manufacturing for 'the countries that are today rich and control the resources of the world'. He further emphasised the need for 'a much more comprehensive and holistic solution than what we have managed to craft in this GBF'. ◆

Lim Li Lin is a senior researcher with the Third World Network.

'This framework will not deliver substantive transformational change'

In the following statement presented at the closing plenary of COP 15, the *CBD Alliance* – a network of civil society organisations working on CBD-related issues – voiced concern that the GBF does not address root causes of biodiversity loss.

Thank you Mr President,

I am speaking on behalf of the CBD Alliance.

We regret the process by which the package was adopted early this morning. It was unjust and unfair. Decisions in this COP are adopted by consensus and we did not see consensus. Much more effort could have been made to arrive at consensus.

Mr President,

We welcome Targets 22 and 23 of the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) on rights, participation and gender, and will closely monitor their implementation. We also welcome language on the clear respect for the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities.

But we remain concerned that the GBF does not address root causes of biodiversity loss, and worse, systematically incorporates injustices. This could undermine these targets.

The cause of the biodiversity crisis is a system that places corporate profit and power over people and nature and allows corporate interests to influence the outcomes.

Our governments have regrettably ceded their responsibilities to regulate the private business and finance sector, only 'encouraging and enabling' business to report and to label products, moving responsibility to consumers. These will not change the actual impact on biodiversity. There are no accountability measures or responsibility for damage done.

The interests of big agribusiness and the biotechnology industry have also permeated the GBF, with 'innovation' as a mantra for techno-fix approaches. There are no horizon scanning mechanisms to help ensure future technologies will not be damaging to biodiversity or people. Precaution has been sidelined.

Moreover, governments have invited corporate interests in, allowing developed country Parties to escape from their legally binding obligations to provide new and additional financial resources, by replacing it with private finance, blended finance and innovative financial schemes, including market-based mechanisms such as biodiversity offsets and credits.

The embrace of offsetting approaches, including Nature-Based Solutions, will not halt environmental damage and ecosystem loss. The promise to compensate for biodiversity loss by protecting similar ecosystems elsewhere justifies continued biodiversity loss and allows business-as-usual, causing human rights violations and other injustices.

Equity is subverted in this framework. The financial amounts on the table are hugely insufficient, and do not acknowledge the ecological debt that the developed world owes to the poor.

The proposed Trust Fund to be established under the Global Environment Facility (GEF) means that all of the current problems will continue and even worsen. Whatever entity is eventually designated as the Global Biodiversity Fund should not allow the private sector and philanthropic foundations to become part of the governance structure, allowing for unfettered influence of unaccountable entities.

This framework will not deliver substantive transformational change, therefore it is not ambitious. We cannot solve the biodiversity crisis using the same system that caused it.

Thank you. ◆

This statement was delivered on behalf of the CBD Alliance by Theiva Lingam from Friends of the Earth Malaysia.

The CBD must address debt as a driver of biodiversity loss

Tova Gaster, Jessica Dempsey, Audrey Irvine-Broque, Patrick Bigger and *Lim Li Ching* outline why moves to safeguard biodiversity have to take into account the question of sovereign debt.

IT is critical that the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) addresses the connections between debt, austerity and biodiversity loss. There are three key reasons why debt is relevant to the CBD:

1. Debt can incentivise ecologically damaging resource extraction for export
2. Debt can limit fiscal policy space for biodiversity protection
3. The debts of heavily indebted poor countries may violate the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR), as debt imposes fiscal and ecological costs on those nations least responsible for the biodiversity crisis, yet which stand to suffer the greatest damage.

As such, it is crucial to the implementation of the Convention that the relationship between debt and biodiversity loss be further interrogated and options for contending with an important indirect driver of biodiversity loss explored.

1) Conditions on sovereign debt for developing nations often incentivise overexploiting primary exports in order to earn foreign currency in the short term, driving biodiversity loss

- Most major external debts are foreign-denominated, resulting in a reliance on foreign currency to make payments. The high pressure to earn foreign exchange creates a reliance on export commodities, many of which are directly linked to high levels of biodiversity loss. According to one study, 927 species are projected to go extinct due to global land use change (prominently including deforestation, mining and agriculture), and 25% of these extinctions have been directly linked to the production of exports.[1]
- Compounding this, unfavourable conditions on these debts (for example, short-term debt tenors that inhibit investment in long-term sustainable development projects) often force nations to double down on commodity exports. Studies have drawn connections between structural adjustment programmes and deforestation due to export pressures,[2] but more research is needed to determine which specific conditions on debt create conditions which will limit the implementation of the CBD and the newly adopted Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF).
- Conserving biodiversity requires reducing intensive resource extraction and land use change. This will require that all Parties are able to invest in long-term sustainable development projects and diversify their economies to meet the social and environmental needs of their people without reliance on biodiversity-degrading exports. A study on the links between sovereign debt conditionalities and CBD implementation would provide vital information to support such action.

2) High levels of debt servicing also reduce fiscal space to invest in protecting biodiversity

- High levels of debt distress make addressing this matter increasingly urgent. The International Monetary Fund (IMF)'s *World Economic Outlook* from July 2022 reported that '60 percent of low-income countries [are] in or at high risk of government debt distress'[3] while 135 Global South countries are considered critically indebted by the *Global Sovereign Debt Monitor*.[4]
- Such an outlook means that a large proportion of government spending is being directed to repayment of foreign debts, rather than investment in meeting social and environmental objectives. In 2022, low-income indebted nations' debt servicing exceeded 170% of social spending on average. In nations currently in default, debt represented twice the budget allocation for social spending.[5]
- In many cases, the poorest countries are in the most precarious state in terms of both environmental change and debt distress; recent figures show that without substantial increases in non-lending finance, countries in Sub-Saharan Africa will need to take on almost $1 trillion in debt to adapt to climate change, raising debt-to-GDP ratios by nearly 50% and dramatically curtailing investment potential in other

social and environmental protection priorities.[6]

- Because debt service must be prioritised in order for borrowing countries to maintain access to further lending, biodiversity action is perpetually neglected, allowing the ecological systems which underpin public health, national economies, food and water to collapse. Without urgent, substantial investments in biodiversity protection and climate-change-resilient food system reform, costs will continue to increase as ecosystem functions reach tipping points.[7]
- It is critical that there is systematic study of the ways that debt occupies vital fiscal space needed to invest time, personnel and money into biodiversity protection and sustainable use.

3) Without action, heavily indebted poor countries will pay more than their fair share for managing the effects of global environmental degradation

- Wealthy states have failed to live up to their obligations under Article 20 of the CBD, which operationalises the CBDR principle.
- This principle was established as a result of the history of colonial resource theft in Latin America and other formerly colonised regions, during which developed nations benefited from environmental destruction and racked up their own ecological debts.[8] One recent study values the cumulative net 'drain' of resources flowing from the developing to developed countries between 1990-2015 at $242 trillion.[9]
- Meanwhile, indebted nations which are the least responsible for the ecological crises are forced to pay escalating sums in debt servicing rather than address their own urgent biodiversity needs.
- Debt cancellation is one crucial mechanism to distribute fiscal responsibility for biodiversity more equitably, an area which deserves further study. Calls to consider debt cancellation and restructuring in order to meet biodiversity objectives should be supported by Parties to the Convention.

In 2019, the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) called for 'transformative change', defined as 'fundamental, system-wide reorganisation' to preserve the ecosystems on which all life on earth depends. This necessarily means economic transformation, including reckoning with the vast wealth inequalities that accrued over centuries of exploitation in the Global South.[10] The CBD must begin to take these on, and including debt in its deliberations and actions are vital preliminary steps towards this 'transformative change'. ◆

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Developing countries defend principle of 'common but differentiated responsibilities'

The need to uphold the principle of 'common but differentiated responsibilities' between developed and developing countries in global actions to address biodiversity and climate change was a major bone of contention at CBD COP 15. *Prerna Bomzan* provides an account of the arduous negotiations that revolved around this issue at Montreal.

AT the 15th Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity in Montreal on 7-19 December, developing countries firmly defended the fundamental principle of 'common but differentiated responsibilities' (CBDR) when addressing the interlinked issue of 'biodiversity and climate change', amid stiff opposition from developed countries.

The deadlock at COP 15 on whether or not to retain the CBDR principle, which was placed in square brackets (indicating lack of consensus) throughout the evolution of the negotiating texts, stemmed from extremely divergent views between developed and developing countries.

The former refused to accept it as a principle of the CBD. The latter pointed out that it is an overarching principle enshrined in Principle 7 of the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development and therefore applies to the CBD, and furthermore is clearly invoked in Article 20 (on financial resources) of the CBD.

Principle 7 of the Rio Declaration reads: 'States shall cooperate in a spirit of global partnership to conserve, protect and restore the health and integrity of the Earth's ecosystem. In view of the different contributions to global environmental degradation, States have common but differentiated responsibilities. The developed countries acknowledge the responsibility that they bear in the international pursuit of sustainable development in view of the pressures their societies place on the global environment and of the technologies and financial resources they command.'

Photo by IISD/ENB/Mike Muzurakis

COP 15 delegates deep in discussion at Working Group II, where the principle of 'common but differentiated responsibilities' became a divisive issue between developing and developed countries.

Article 20.4 of the CBD reads: 'The extent to which developing country Parties will effectively implement their commitments under this Convention will depend on the effective implementation by developed country Parties of their commitments under this Convention related to financial resources and transfer of technology and will take fully into account the fact that economic and social development and eradication of poverty are the first and overriding priorities of the developing country Parties.'

In addition to the CBDR principle, another protracted sticky issue at COP 15 was reference to the controversial terminology of 'nature-based solutions' (NbS) in the negotiating texts, not just for the agenda item on biodiversity and climate change but also across other agenda items, including in the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF).

This concept was opposed by the majority of the developing countries, which argued that NbS has yet to be agreed under the CBD and instead preferred reference to the already agreed approach of 'ecosystem-based approaches' (EBAs).

Nonetheless, in the spirit of 'compromise' and moving forward to adopt a decision on the agenda item, developing countries eventually provided major concessions to reach a consensus on retaining 'nature-based solutions and/or ecosystem-based approaches'. This formulation has now been accepted for use in multiple documents.

CBDR fight

Despite exercising maximum flexibility on the NbS issue, developing countries however failed to receive reciprocal treatment from developed countries on retaining the CBDR principle, referenced in paragraph 8 of the conference room paper on the biodiversity and climate change agenda item (CRP.12) which read: '[Recognises that global strategies adopted to address biodiversity and climate change must take into account common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities;]'. The CRP.12 document was under consideration for approval in the form of a draft decision text.

On 16 December, when the CRP.12 text was submitted by the Working Group II Chair Helena Jeffery Brown (Antigua and Barbuda) for consideration, Norway, Canada, the European Union (EU), Switzerland, the United Kingdom (UK), Australia and Japan objected to CBDR and refused to remove the brackets around it, which would have denoted agreement.

Argentina sternly pointed out that, just to accommodate the developed countries, reference to NbS had been accepted (see below), which led to an 'imbalance' in the text, and that moreover, rejecting the CBDR principle was not 'constructive'. It reiterated that it could not accept a decision which did not contain CBDR, while further highlighting the need for reference to obligations of the developed countries on financial resources (referring to Article 20 of the CBD reflecting CBDR).

Brazil, which had consistently defended the CBDR principle from the outset, echoed Argentina's concerns, also supporting Article 20 to be reflected in the text. They were supported by Colombia, Honduras, Ethiopia, Uruguay, Mexico, Indonesia, Iran, the Philippines, Morocco, Algeria, Sri Lanka and Uganda.

South Africa, speaking for the African Group, made clear that 'Africa made the biggest compromise to accept NbS' and expressed disappointment that the 'agreed principle of CBDR as the founding principle of the Rio Convention is suddenly being contested, which is preventing progress'.

In a last-ditch effort to facilitate consensus, Chair Brown proposed a small group to move the issue forward, suspending discussion on the CRP.12 text with a view to hearing a report back at the next session of the Working Group.

Subsequently, a separate document, CRP.8 on 'specialised international access and benefit-sharing instruments', was unanimously approved, with the text containing only a procedural decision of deferral for further review, noting divergence of views on the issue.

Brazil then proposed similar treatment for CRP.12 in terms of a simple procedural decision deferring the issue for further review, given the divergences that could not be 'bridged'. It reiterated that the CBDR principle was 'non-negotiable' and that there was 'no consensus' on the issue; therefore it did not see any value in having further discussion (as earlier proposed by the Chair).

Argentina echoed Brazil, further supported by Ethiopia and Uruguay. Bolivia, while fully agreeing to defer the issue and close negotiations given 'different understandings' on essential principles, added that the issue of climate change was better addressed under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), to which Brazil agreed and highlighted that there was 'pressure' to discuss the issue under the CBD.

Brazil called on developed countries to negotiate in 'good faith' and questioned 'why the majority of Parties must be kept hostage by a few; why most who host the biodiversity must be kept hostage by the minority few' (referring to the continued rigid stance by Norway, the EU and the UK on the CBDR issue), which Brazil wanted to be 'registered' in the plenary.

It further said that it had engaged a lot throughout the negotiations with flexibility and bridging proposals, including on the NbS issue, and expressed deep regret over the lack of 'fairness and equity' of treatment on similar issues with divergent views, requesting for deferral as in the case of the CRP.8 text.

At the resumed plenary session of Working Group II, Chair Brown provided her assessment of 'no consensus', given 'divergent views on the way forward', and proceeded with the proposal to 'defer' the agenda item for consideration at the next meeting of the CBD's Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA).

The UK responded that the two Working Groups should not be working in 'silos' given 'real crosscutting issues', noting that most contention was mainly on NbS and CBDR. Hence, it preferred to keep the text in brackets and take it as a package when those very unresolved issues under Working Group I were finalised. This was supported by the EU.

Brazil reiterated its appeal to Chair Brown for a 'fair treatment of issues' and pushed for deferral of the agenda item to put an end to the protracted deadlock, stating that Parties should instead spend time on the GBF, which would be the key substantial COP 15 outcome. This was supported by Argentina, Algeria, the Philippines and Ecuador.

Ethiopia further added that 'from the very beginning, we accepted reference to NbS provided [there was] removal of brackets on the CBDR principle'.

Finally, Iceland and Canada relented to the proposal for deferral, however seeking clarification from Chair Brown on what exactly would be requested of the SBSTTA and which document would be the basis. She confirmed it would be SBSTTA recommendation 23/2 (paragraph 12 was the basis of the non-paper of 14 December which evolved into the CRP.12 text in the form of a draft decision).

The UK also agreed to the deferral, but posed an additional request to the CBD Secretariat to prepare a paper with latest scientific inputs at the SBSTTA meeting. This was supported by Norway as a possible compromise, with Switzerland joining in.

However, Brazil rejected the proposal, pointing out that the Secretariat lacked 'competence' on the issue and instead stating that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was the main scientific technical body on climate change. It also highlighted that the Secretariat's priority work would be the implementation of the newly adopted GBF.

Brazil further offered a 'compromise as a way forward' to simply request the Secretariat to invite suggestions from Parties and compile those views on how to deal with biodiversity and climate change, to be then given to the SBSTTA for review. Argentina echoed Brazil, further supported by Algeria, South Africa, Uruguay, the Philippines, Colombia and Ecuador.

Following another drawn-out dispute over whether reference to scientific information from the past workshop of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) and the IPCC should also be contained in the procedural decision text, the final decision was against any such specific references after resistance from developing countries.

The final document adopted (CBD/COP/15/L.19) contains a simple procedural decision as pressed for by developing countries. By standing their ground on the CBDR principle as non-negotiable, the developing countries successfully defended the principle and anchored it firmly in the implementation of CBD commitments, thwarting rejectionist attempts by developed countries to escape from their obligations (particularly on financial resources and transfer of technology) and to shift the burden instead to developing countries.

Developing countries would, however, need to consistently reflect the CBDR principle in their submissions of views and information in preparation for further review of the agenda item at the next SBSTTA meeting to be held prior to COP 16, as per the decision adopted.

Compromise on 'nature-based solutions'

The fights over CBDR were closely linked to the NbS discussion, with the draft decision proposed in paragraph 12 of SBSTTA recommendation 23/2 containing language on both CBDR (in brackets) and NbS (two preambular paragraphs). Due to the divergence in opinions, a Friends of the Chair group was established, which was subsequently converted to a Contact Group.

Following initial comments from Parties, mainly opposing views on the two contentious issues of CBDR and NbS, a non-paper was introduced on 14 December by the Co-Chairs Rita El Zaghloul (Costa Rica) and Sigurdur Thrainsson (Iceland) which included three additional preambular paragraphs on NbS, albeit in brackets, along with the still-bracketed CBDR principle.

The majority of developing countries saw the elevation of NbS to the increased five preambular paragraphs as inclined towards the interests of the developed country proponents. Moreover, the three new preambular paragraphs were cherry-picked from the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA) resolution 5/5 (of March 2022) on NbS and were not factually formulated.

According to delegates following the negotiations, Brazil and Argentina decried this as heightening imbalance in the text, while their demand for removal of brackets around the CBDR principle had gone unheard. South Africa is understood to have highlighted instead the need to acknowledge, up front in the preambular text, 'ecosystem-based approaches' as agreed and recognised in the CBD.

Those three Parties, in particular, resisted any reference to NbS, primarily contending that currently there was no common understanding of the terminology with divergent views, which was well reflected in the UNEA resolution as well.

On the other hand, developed countries, reportedly led by the EU, held a hardline position that the definition of NbS has been already agreed by UNEA resolution 5/5, hence justifying the three additional preambular paragraphs on NbS. They also wanted to ensure all significant pledges for NbS made at the UNFCCC's recent COP 27 in Sharm el-Sheikh went to the CBD.

Countering the argument, South Africa purportedly made clear that the UNEA resolution 5/5 had a negotiating history and that the majority of the developing countries agreed to the definition on NbS contained therein based on the understanding that 'intergovernmental consultations' – yet to start – would be convened to undertake an assessment to address 'divergences' with a view to 'achieving a common understanding' on the issue (as explicitly spelled out in paragraphs 5 and 6 of resolution 5/5). This was supported by the majority of developing countries.

India is known to have preferred reference to EBAs and pointed out that any NbS reference must also include EBAs alongside, keeping the latter option in the text. This proposal to have both references was not acceptable to some developing countries, although it was supported by other Parties.

Numerous concessions were made by developing countries to try to reach consensus. The developed countries however heavy-handedly increased the number of NbS references in the text by placing them in conjunction with the EBA references to read 'nature-based solutions [and][or] ecosystem-based approaches' in all relevant operative paragraphs in the text.

With a view to solving the conundrum, according to a delegate familiar with the negotiations, a compromise was proposed by Brazil to introduce instead the agreed NbS language from the Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan of the UNFCCC COP 27, as one operative paragraph on NbS, in exchange for the removal of all five preambular paragraphs on NbS.

The proposed paragraph 1bis read, 'Encourages Parties to consider as appropriate nature-based solutions or ecosystem-based approaches as appropriate taking into consideration UNEA resolution 5/5, for their mitigation and adaptation actions while ensuring relevant social and environmental safeguards'.

However, developed countries rejected even this very recently agreed language on NbS. Given such clear North-South divergence on the issue, developing countries urged the Co-Chairs to keep the entire non-paper in brackets, while deploring the refusal of developed countries to negotiate.

Developed countries asked to keep references to NbS and EBAs, instead of the entire non-paper, in brackets. Developing countries then requested for reciprocity by removing brackets on the CBDR principle. This was however flatly rejected. According to those familiar with the debate, the EU, the UK, Switzerland and Canada were on one end of the spectrum, while Brazil, Colombia, Eswatini, Argentina, Pakistan, Indonesia and Chile were on the other.

A last-ditch proposal was put forward in the form of an amended paragraph 1bis, replacing 'nature-based solutions or ecosystem-based approaches' with 'nature-based solutions and/or ecosystem-based approaches'. In return, developing countries were willing to keep the first two preambular paragraphs on NbS. Such a proposal was to avoid sending bracketed text to the Chair of Working Group II, which would then potentially go to Ministers, to no advantage.

To seek consensus, Co-Chair Zaghloul further proposed to replace the conjunction '[and][or]' between NbS and EBAs with 'and/or' throughout the text.

Several delegates who followed the developments said that this heavily compromised consensus was reached mainly to appease the EU that essentially led the developed countries' position. Those speaking for developing countries declared that the entire issue was being taken hostage by one delegation acting irresponsibly and not in good faith. A massive compromise had been made on their part to accept the increased number of references to NbS and therefore, developing countries asked for lifting of the brackets in the paragraph containing the CBDR principle, in order to reach a balanced consensus.

However, given the developed countries' persistent inflexibility, developing countries then took the position of considering both the CBDR and NbS issues as a package, and hence asked the Co-Chairs to place all NbS references in brackets, emphasising that any decision on climate change was not possible without the CBDR principle. The developed countries were regrettably attempting to shift the burden to developing countries and not recognising their commitments and obligations. The Co-Chairs were asked to report to the working group that there was no consensus on the non-paper and therefore to keep it entirely in brackets.

The entirely bracketed CRP.12 text eventually failed to receive consensus and was superseded by the procedural decision CBD/COP/15/L.19 finally adopted under the agenda item on biodiversity and climate change. This contained no references to NbS.

Meanwhile, as the NbS issue was bracketed in other documents under consideration by COP 15, this was brought to Ministers to resolve. Eventually, following consultations by the COP 15 President, the formulation 'nature-based solutions and/or ecosystem-based approaches' was used across the board, including in two targets of the GBF – Target 8 on climate change and Target 11 on 'nature's contribution to people'.

Earlier references to NbS and the UNEA resolution in the controversial section of the GBF known as 'B bis' were deleted. What is now a new Section C titled 'Considerations for the implementation of the framework' just contains a short section on the 'ecosystem approach', which states, 'This framework is to be implemented based on the ecosystem approach of the Convention', with a footnote referencing Decision V/6 that endorsed the approach. ◆

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What climate debt does the North owe the South?

The gaping disparities in emissions and wealth between the developed and developing countries have given rise to the concept of 'climate debt' – a debt that has to be urgently settled if the world is to rein in the disastrous effects of global warming.

John Feffer

John Englart (CC BY-SA 2.0)

The richer countries of the world need to provide the funds necessary for the poorer countries to make the transition to a post-fossil-fuel future.

TO keep the planet from overheating, there's only so much more carbon that humans can pump into the atmosphere. From the onset of the Industrial Revolution until today, humanity has used up approximately 83% of its 'carbon budget' – the amount of carbon the atmosphere can absorb without exceeding the Paris climate agreement's aspirational goal of a 1.5°C increase in global temperatures since the pre-industrial era. At the current rate of emissions, the budget will be used up within the next decade.

Equally troubling has been the distribution of those carbon emissions. 'With just below 20% of the world population, the Global North has overconsumed 70% of the historic carbon budget,' notes Meena Raman, president of Friends of the Earth Malaysia and head of programmes at the Third World Network, in a webinar convened by the Global Just Transition project on 28 September. 'Those who became rich in a world unfettered in terms of emitting greenhouse gases are responsible for much of the destruction we're facing today.'

Because of this large disparity in emissions and in wealth earned alongside those emissions, the rich countries of the North owe the poorer countries a kind of 'climate debt'. Now, when carbon emissions have to be controlled severely, the North has a historic responsibility to help the South make its own transition to a post-fossil-fuel future.

This responsibility is not simply a function of carbon emissions. The extraction and burning of fossil fuels by the Global North during and after the Industrial Revolution went hand in hand with an ongoing process of looting the Global South. The colonial era established an unequal power balance between the North and South, which has continued into the post-independence era. The Global South continues to supply the Global North with natural resources, increasingly to support a 'clean energy' transition. The countries of the Global South also remain locked into various forms of debt servitude to the financial institutions of the Global North.

'We need to talk about all of these external debts – foreign, financial – which involve colonialism, the exploitation of labour, racism and patriarchy,' observes Alberto Acosta, Ecuador's former minister of energy and mining. 'These ways of expropriating nature have been from the beginning instruments of domination over the Third World or developing countries or poor countries. These countries on the periphery have been historically bled out.'

Avoiding the worst-case scenarios of climate change will require money: a lot of it. 'Regardless of how we frame the discussion – climate debt, climate reparations, climate fair share – the challenges are immense,' points out Tom Athanasiou, co-founder of EcoEquity. 'There is no conventional politics that can properly address both the climate crisis and the inequality crisis. The science tells us that we have to phase out fossil fuels globally in only a few decades. That means that the countries of the Global South must rapidly decarbonise even while they are still poor, even if they have fossil resources they hope to extract and sell for development.'

But where will this money come from and what political structures are necessary to rectify the imbalance of power and wealth between the North and South?

The stakes

In 2021, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) concluded that 85% of the world's population had been affected by climate change. In 2022, unprecedented monsoon rains in late summer put one-third of Pakistan under water. Drought has brought high levels of malnutrition to East Africa, while the deforestation of the Amazon happened at a record pace in the first six months of 2022. Meanwhile, the smaller islands of the Indian and Pacific Oceans are getting smaller every day. Among other climate disasters in the North, forest fires have devastated Russia, Europe and the United States.

'If you look at recent IPCC reports, the window for adjusting to climate change is fast closing,' Meena Raman says. 'This is not only the window for emission reduction but also the window for adaptation. We are already in the era of loss and damage. Real suffering is happening around the world: there's been flooding in Pakistan and Nigeria, and in the rich world too.'

'The scientists are close to panic,' Tom Athanasiou reports. 'It's possible that the global temperature could very briefly hit the 1.5-degree limit in only two years. At the end of this decade, it will likely be at 1.5 degrees, or very close. By that point, with conditions getting very, very dangerous, political dynamics will have changed. It's inevitable. Of course we don't know how they will have changed.'

A shift in the political dynamics might also result from disruptions that take place beyond national borders, such as glacial melt in the Antarctic. The Thwaites glacier, nicknamed the 'doomsday glacier' for the impact its melting will cause around the world, is now shrinking at twice the rate it did over the previous decade. 'When the Thwaites glacier goes and sea level everywhere rises, will this change the political dynamics?' Athanasiou asks. 'Does radical change that previously was completely off the agenda find its way on the agenda in a new way? People know that neoliberal economics have got to go. It's not just street-fighting people. Everyone knows. So, what new channels of cooperation, resistance and transformation does this open up?'

These recent disasters are the culmination not just of climate change but of a maladaptive human philosophy towards nature. 'This climate collapse reflects the reality of anthropocentrism,' observes Alberto Acosta. 'But this disequilibrium of the planet is not the result of all humans, but of privileged humans exercising their consumerism. It's the history of capitalism, a history of voracity for accumulation that affects billions of people on earth, especially women and indigenous communities.'

In part because of the effects of this disequilibrium – the floods, droughts, intensified hurricanes – humans have finally begun to address climate change, but not with the requisite urgency or resources. So, for instance, the Paris Agreement in 2014 established targets for the reduction of carbon emissions, but national efforts towards these targets are voluntary. Similarly, the more recent pledges by countries to reach 'net zero' by 2050 are not enforced by any international authority.

'Net zero by 2050 is too little, too late,' Meena points out. 'The developed world should have gotten to real zero by now. And because of the war in Ukraine, they've even backtracked to increasing their use of fossil fuel, with Germany for instance turning back to coal.'

Alberto Acosta agrees that the Ukraine war has been a step backwards for the climate justice movement. Nuclear energy, like coal, has made a rebound. And tremendous investments have gone into armaments, he notes, at precisely the moment when they're needed for addressing climate change.

As Tom Athanasiou points out, getting to zero by mid-century 'would be hard even if we had functioning democracies and responsible leadership, and we don't have either. In fact, a lot of very powerful people stand to lose a lot of money by phasing out the fossil fuel industry.'

Although nearly everyone in the world now experiences a byproduct of climate change, these impacts vary according to geography and wealth. 'The countries with the highest climate vulnerability indexes – the countries most vulnerable to climatic destabilisation – are almost all ex-colonies,' Athanasiou adds. 'That tells you a lot right there.'

Alberto Acosta puts the blame squarely on colonialism. 'The extraction of resources is a function of colonialism,' he says. 'Consider the destruction of the Amazon to grow soybeans and export protein in the form of animal feed to the richest countries on earth. This transfer of natural resources to the Global North to feed industrial processes is done without consideration of the costs to the Global South. Meanwhile, going the other way from the Global North to the countries on the periphery is the spread of agricultural monocultures, the imposition of the most polluting industries and the dumping of toxic wastes.'

That unequal relationship has carried over to the era of 'clean energy.' The Global North's push to reduce its dependency on fossil fuel has meant, Acosta continues, 'transferring the problem to the Global South through the mining in poor countries for lithium and copper for electric cars and the destruction of tropical forests to obtain balsa wood to build more wind farms.'

Another divide, Athanasiou points out, is between different philosophies of development. In Africa, he notes, the conflict has heightened 'between governments that want to develop fossil resources and civil society that want to keep those resources in the ground and launch a crash programme of renewable development. This conflict is sharp and visible and very different from what it would have been five years ago.'

The scale

To put the brakes on global warming, the richer countries of the world need to reverse this colonial relationship and provide the funds necessary for the poorer countries to make the transition to a post-fossil-fuel future. This, Meena Raman points out, is not just an ethical or moral issue. It is a legal commitment. 'The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Kyoto Protocol, the Paris Agreement: these are legal instruments,' she explains. 'The Global North is legally committed to provide resources to the developing world.'

But what is the price tag for this transformation and what are the mechanisms to effect this change?

First, the richer countries have made commitments. In 2010, they promised to reach $100 billion per year in climate financing. 'The number was plucked from a hat,' Meena Raman reports. 'It was not based on what developing countries needed.' By 2021, the richer countries claimed to have mobilised around $80 billion, but in reality the figure was, as Oxfam estimates, about one-third that much. 'So, the $100 billion goal was shifted in 2021 to delivery by 2025,' she continues, noting as Oxfam does that the developed world counts even loans and insurance as part of that $100 billion.

Another mechanism of paying off the climate debt is the Green Climate Fund, an initiative pushed by the developing-country Group of 77 and based in Incheon, South Korea. 'Since 2014, it has delivered only $13.9 billion, which is very little in terms of the scale,' Meena reports. The Adaptation Fund, created in 2001 under the Kyoto Protocol, has committed only $850 million.

Compare these numbers – under $100 billion a year – with the scale of the challenge. According to a 2021 research report, the world needs to spend $5 trillion by 2030 in climate finance to meet the Paris goals by 2030. But as Meena points out, this figure is based on only 30% of the costs. Meanwhile, on the adaptation side, the UN Environment Programme estimated in 2016 that $140 billion to $300 billion a year was necessary to cover adaptation costs in the developing world (which it placed closer to the upper range in its 2021 report).

These numbers don't take into consideration the loss-and-damage costs. According to one study, the developing world will be paying somewhere between $290 billion and $580 billion per year by 2030 to deal with the consequences of climate change.

'We have to put the scale of the crisis in proper context,' Meena concludes. 'It's not about there being no money but about the political will. The movements for climate justice and debt justice have to go together. So, we need to talk about debt cancellation as part of reparations.'

The original loans, Acosta notes, were often taken by autocratic governments that wasted the money in corruption. Debt repayment, moreover, has forced countries not only to cut social programmes but to increase their mining and extraction. In this way, the foreign debt directly drives carbon emissions.

In addition to the compensation for loss and damage are the opportunity costs associated with keeping fossil fuels in the ground. 'What about compensation to countries like Ecuador that possess fossil fuels but refrain from extracting these resources?' Athanasiou asks. 'How do they receive it? And do the big Middle East oil producers get compensation for not continuing to pump out their oil and how much, and who pays? Is the liability for those compensations the same as for global loss and damage?'

Other costs would include those associated with climate refugees forced to resettle because their homes have become uninhabitable. 'Even if we determine what should be paid, who will pay?' Athanasiou asks.

Who pays?

The climate transition will cost trillions of dollars. The developing world, locked into a neocolonial relationship of debt and dependency, doesn't have the resources. So, where will the money come from to help the Global South leapfrog into a post-fossil-fuel era?

'There are three possibilities,' Tom Athanasiou suggests. 'Fossil fuel corporations. The rich countries of the North. Or the rich people of the world.'

Fossil fuel corporations have historically profited enormously from peddling the products that have produced climate change. Even worse, they are making windfall profits now as a result of the Ukraine war, which has put restrictions on the amount of Russian oil and gas that's available to Western markets. In the second quarter of 2022, for instance, BP 'earned' profits of $8.5 billion, its biggest take in 14 years. In total, according to the International Energy Agency, fossil fuel companies have pulled in $2 trillion in profits over the course of the war so far. 'People around the world want to push for a windfall profit tax for both tactical and strategic reasons,' he continues. 'And I wouldn't argue with them!'

The second option is the traditional climate debt approach, to make the rich countries of the North pay. 'These countries obviously have to pay the greatest part of the bill because they have the greatest historical responsibility and the greatest capacity to pay,' he adds. 'Yes, but there are lots of poor people, poor by global standards, in the countries of the North, including in the United States, the richest country the world has ever seen. And there are also some very rich people in the countries of the South.'

Because wealth is not so neatly divided between North and South, 'maybe it should be rich people and not rich countries that pay,' Athanasiou suggests. 'This is not as crazy an idea as you might think, especially if you follow Thomas Piketty and his colleagues at the World Inequality Lab. They argue that more than half of inequality on the planet is now within countries rather than between countries. So, what if we tax the emissions of just the richest 1% of the global population regardless of where they live – at a rate high enough to pay for the entire cost of the emergency climate transition?'

Assessing individuals rather than countries would still conform to a fair-share approach by geography. 'About 6% of luxury emissions come from China, so it would have significant fair share,' he explains. 'The United States, with 57% of the global luxury emissions, would have a far larger share, about 10 times the size of China's.'

He cites the work of Olúfẹ́mi O. Táíwò and his recent book on reparations: 'Táíwò says that we need a constructive approach to reparations or to climate debt, a forward-looking, world-building approach that supports mobilisation and cooperation. Such an approach cannot simply reference the climate debt that the North owes the South, huge though that is. It must also spotlight the responsibility to pay of rich people wherever they live in whatever countries.'

The bottom line, Athanasiou concludes, is that 'with so many governments going neo-fascist, it's not really very likely we'll get tens of trillions from central bankers in the next several years. You can't just print that money. It has to come from the rich. It's complicated how it will be done. But it's extremely important that the luxury consumption of the super-rich be made a big issue on this planet. And there's no way of doing that except by taxing it. Such a tax will not in and of itself solve the problem. But to create a sense that a just world is being built, there has to be a sense that the rich are being reined in.'

Other mechanisms

In 2020, the world subsidised fossil fuels to the tune of nearly $6 trillion (in both direct and implicit subsidies). Of that figure, the G7 leading industrial countries shell out around $88 billion a year in direct subsidies, which they recently pledged to phase out by 2025. 'This is a wasted resource,' Meena Raman points out, 'which could be redirected to the developing world to address both the climate crisis and the development crisis.'

A second mechanism for raising money is, as mentioned before, taxes. In addition to a tax on luxury emissions, a tax on financial transactions (also known as a Tobin tax) has been long discussed as a generator of funds to address climate change. Such a tax has been introduced in a watered-down version in the European Union, but a stronger global version could help finance a just global transition, as Alberto Acosta has suggested. He also recommends going after tax havens, which have cost governments around $500-600 billion annually in lost revenue (with poorer countries losing around $200 billion of that amount).

A third mechanism would be for the international community to pay countries to keep their fossil fuels in the ground. Acosta, who created an initiative for Ecuador to raise money internationally to keep oil beneath the Yasuni rainforest preserve, believes that 'rich countries have to pay more to preserve the equilibrium of the planet. We have to keep underground two-thirds of all fossil fuel reserves, whether oil, gas or coal. If we don't, global temperatures will increase past the 1.5-degree limit.'

Another mechanism for redirecting resources southwards would be the 'Special Drawing Rights' or SDRs that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) issues. During the pandemic, when the global economy teetered on the precipice, the IMF issued $650 billion in SDRs. 'These went to rich countries,' Meena Raman reports. 'The IMF can do this, but it's not doing it for the developing world.'

The prime minister of Barbados, Mia Mottley, is attempting to change this situation. She has called for redirecting $500 billion of these SDRs to the developing world annually for decarbonisation. 'We in civil society have to push for this as well,' Meena urges.

At the same time, any number of 'false solutions' to the climate crisis have been proposed. 'Beware of green colonialism,' Alberto Acosta warns. 'Beware of carbon markets and the mercantilisation of human rights.'

Through carbon offsets, as Meena Raman explains, 'you can continue to emit a ton of carbon if you sequester another ton through planting trees.' Ultimately, the polluting enterprises continue to operate as before. No net decarbonisation takes place, and the same economic and energy system remains in place.

'Elites in the North, in

cooperation with corporations, are now looking at geoengineering, the removal of emissions from the atmosphere through technical "solutions",' she continues. 'How do we veer away from false solutions to protect systems that are still intact? The last frontiers in indigenous communities are now under threat of land grabs. Free trade agreements allow corporations to sue governments for doing the right thing through investor-state dispute settlement mechanisms.'

On the other hand, some leaders are coming to the fore, like Gustavo Petro and Francia Marquez in Colombia. 'These new leaders are talking about new development models, post-extraction and post-fossil-fuel solutions,' she adds. 'But it's not easy having to fight to dismantle structures and proposing alternatives like cancelling the debt.'

Making connections

To address climate change effectively, countries have to work together across any number of divides: North and South, East and West, rich and poor, and those rich in fossil fuels and those rich in sustainable energy sources. That is the challenge facing the annual Conferences of the Parties to the UNFCCC or COPs, the latest of which just took place in November 2022 in Sharm el-Sheikh in Egypt.

This imperative to cooperate extends to civil society as well. 'We need to find solutions that connect all of our movements from North and South,' urges Meena Raman, 'to fight the same system that is creating the climate crisis, the inequality crisis and the development crisis.'

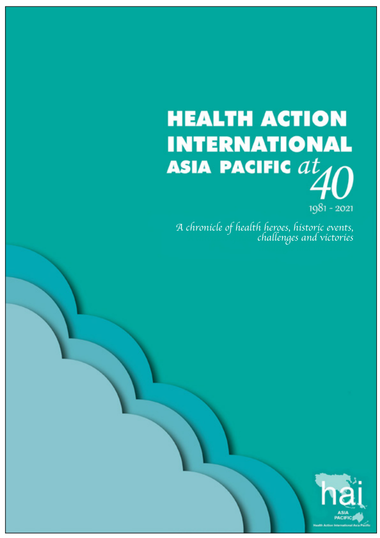
She continues, 'We need to have a longer conversation about how to connect progressive movements. In the Global South, we can do what we can, we can bring progressive governments to power. But if the Northern governments maintain the current mechanisms, we won't have real change here. So, change has to come in the North. We need massive progressive solidarity movements in the North. These movements are working in your interests in the North and in our interest too. That's the motto for Friends of the Earth International: mobilise, resist, and transform for real system change.'◆

John Feffer is the director of Foreign Policy In Focus (FPIF), from whose website (fpif.org) this article is reproduced. The article is part of FPIF's Global Just Transition project (fpif.org/global-just-transition).

Health Action International Asia Pacific at 40 (1981-2021)

A Chronicle of Health Heroes, Historic Events, Challenges and Victories

Prepared and edited by Beverley Snell



Published by Third World Network, Health Action International Asia Pacific, International Islamic University Malaysia, Gonoshasthaya Kendra, and Drug System Monitoring and Development Centre

This book commemorates the 40th anniversary of Health Action International Asia Pacific (HAIAP), an informal network of non-governmental organisations and individuals in the Asia-Pacific region committed to resistance and persistence in the struggle for Health for All Now.

HAIAP is the regional arm of Health Action International – upholding health as a fundamental human right and aspiring for a just and equitable society in which there is regular access to essential medicines for all who need them. HAIAP works with governments, academic institutions and NGOs at community, national and regional levels on issues such as promoting the essential medicines concept, equitable and affordable access to essential medicines, rational use of medicines, ethical promotion and fair prices. While promoting awareness of the impact of multilateral agreements, particularly TRIPS and GATT, on access to affordable healthcare and essential medicines, HAIAP advocates for poverty eradication and action on other priority themes relevant to countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

Available at https://twn.my/title2/books/HAIAP%20at%2040.htm

'Nature-based solutions' to climate change: Behind the hype

Current climate and biodiversity discourse is rife with references to ecosystem conservation and management measures that are said to keep carbon concentrations in check. Do these 'nature-based solutions' live up to the claims, or are they more an excuse for inaction on cutting fossil fuel emissions?

Doreen Stabinsky

A reforestation project in Victoria, Australia. The contribution of 'nature-based solutions' like reforestation to mitigating climate change should not be overstated.

THE International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) introduced the term 'nature-based solutions' (NbS) into the global policy space in 2016. The term has attracted a great deal of attention and use, with a large emphasis put on the potential of nature to 'solve' climate change. In 2017, a group of scientists associated with The Nature Conservancy published an academic article titled 'Natural Climate Solutions', again proposing that 'nature' might be a climate change 'solution'. That article proposed that implementing a set of 20 practices ['natural climate solutions' (NCS)] might provide '37% of cost-effective CO_2 mitigation needed through 2030 for a >66% chance of holding warming to below 2°C.'[1]

Current climate and biodiversity discourse is filled with claims that 'nature', NbS or NCS can meet an important fraction of the global climate change mitigation goal under the Paris Agreement. The exact fraction cited varies with the source. One can find references to '30%',[2] 'around one-third'[3] or 'approximately one-third',[4,5] and 'more than one-third',[6] in addition to the number published in the original paper: '37%'.[7] The sources vary as to whether or not they include more qualifying language beyond the base figure, such as the time frame covered or the temperature target (1.5°C or 2°C). They also vary with respect to the types of actions that might deliver the mitigation effort.[8] Sometimes the numbers are said to refer to the potential of NbS, other times of NCS.

These sorts of inaccurate reflections of the underlying science are quite common, and there is a proliferation of related false and misleading claims about the role that 'nature' can play in climate change mitigation. Experts have raised a range of concerns about the assumptions and methodology in the original NCS paper, and a consequent overestimation of actual mitigation potential. In this article, we examine misleading uses, inaccuracies, the assumptions used to generate the claims about the mitigation potential of nature, and the validity of those claims.[9]

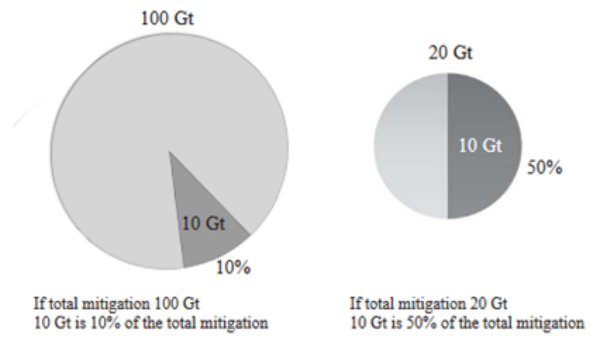
Are NbS and NCS different?

NbS and NCS sound very similar and the terms are often used interchangeably in erroneous ways. Scientists at the Oxford-based Nature-based Solutions Initiative note that NCS refers to a subset of NbS: 'conservation and management actions that reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from ecosystems and harness their potential to store carbon'.[10]

NCS are often sorted into three different types of climate change mitigation actions: protecting ecosystems (particularly forests), better managing ecosystems under human control (forests, croplands, grazing lands), and restoring ecosystems (forests, mangroves, peatlands).[11] These 'nature-based' or 'natural' practices could either reduce or avoid emissions, for example by not cutting down trees or avoiding the use of synthetic nitrogen fertilisers, or enhance sinks, for example by planting trees in agroforestry systems.

In the original 2017 NCS article, Griscom and his co-authors described 20 specific types of NCS. These 20 NCS include: reforestation, avoided forest conversion, natural forest management, improved plantations, avoided woodfuel use, fire management, biochar, trees in croplands, nutrient management, grazing (feed, animal management, optimal stocking intensity, legumes), conservation agriculture, improved rice management, avoided grassland conversion, coastal restoration, peat restoration, avoided peat impacts, and avoided coastal impacts. The largest mitigation contributions described in the article potentially come from reforestation and avoided forest conversion.

Percentage contribution of 10Gt of NCS under different mitigation scenarios (example, not to scale)



The resulting fractional contribution to the mitigation effort depends on the overall mitigation effort

Unpacking the 37% figure

The Griscom et al. article concludes that ‘Natural climate solutions [the 20 listed above] can provide 37% of cost-effective CO_2 mitigation needed through 2030 for a >66% chance of holding warming to below 2°C.’ Several elements of this conclusion should be highlighted and unpacked here, starting with the question: 37% in relation to what? Important variables and assumptions made in the paper include how much mitigation might be needed yearly and what quantity of removals could be possible within natural systems.

The article relies on a series of contestable framings and assumptions:

- The article looks only at mitigation needed until 2030.
- Somewhat surprisingly, the model assumes that fossil fuel emissions continue unchanged throughout the decade of analysis.
- Determining what is ‘cost-effective’ relies on assumptions and judgments about costs of current and future mitigation actions.
- The mitigation objective defined in the analysis is to hold warming to below 2°C, and only with a 66% chance of reaching that objective. In contrast, the Paris Agreement’s aims include: ‘holding the increase in the global average temperature to *well below 2°C* above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to *limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C* above pre-industrial levels’ [Article 2.1(a)] [emphases added].

37% in relation to what? Whether the total amount of overall mitigation effort required is small or large makes a difference. If the overall mitigation effort assumed in Griscom et al. (30 Gt) is rather underestimated in relation to what is actually necessary to meet the Paris Agreement goals (45 Gt), the potential contribution of NCS to that effort would look large (see graphic). Conversely, if the mitigation effort needed between now and 2030 were much greater than that assumed in the article, then the fractional contribution of NCS to that mitigation effort would be a good deal smaller than 37%.

Indeed, the amount of mitigation effort needed for just a 66% chance of staying below 2°C is far smaller than the amount of mitigation effort needed, for example, for a 90% chance of staying below 1.5°C. And actually relying on reductions in fossil emissions to deliver most of the mitigation effort in the next decade (in line with what the science requires) will necessarily reduce the relative contribution of NCS. The devil is thus in the details: 37% of what?

Examining assumptions and assessing the validity of the NCS claims

In this section we examine three aspects of the NCS article and its conclusions in more detail:

- **There are rather contestable assumptions upon which the conclusions are based.** These are usually hidden in dense scientific writing and supplementary information published alongside the article. These assumptions should see the light of day, not only in the scientific article, but also in the pronouncements of policymakers.
- **There are important differences between two different categories of nature-based mitigation** – avoiding emissions (e.g., avoided deforestation) and enhancing removals by sinks (e.g., forest restoration) – which means they cannot be simply added together in a single number (37%).
- **Aggressive climate action requires dramatic cuts in fossil emissions this decade.**

How useful, and to whose benefit, is a number that is based on an assumption that there is no reduction at all over the next decade in fossil fuel contribution to atmospheric CO_2 concentrations?

1. Any claims of climate impact are misleading if the assumptions behind the modelling are not made clear and/or if they are not credible.

The article's modelling relies on making many, many assumptions about actors and systems included in the analysis, as all models do. What assumptions are made will affect the model's output. Here are two examples of assumptions made in the article, related to deforestation and reforestation:

- To assess the potential contribution of avoided deforestation, the authors have made assumptions about how much deforestation might take place if forests were not protected, and how much people are willing to accept in payment to not cut down trees. They make baseline assumptions about rates of deforestation into the future to estimate that a certain amount of emissions will be avoided. The greater the baseline assumptions about the extent of deforestation in 2030, the greater the mitigation potential (as avoided emissions) that can be claimed from halting deforestation.
- To estimate the potential for reforestation, the article assumes that 'all grazing lands in forested ecoregions can be reforested.' This is linked to an assumption about significant reductions in global consumption of beef.

Aggressive climate action requires dramatic cuts in fossil emissions this decade.

The consequences of such assumptions are that they lead to a possibly large overestimation of the mitigation potential of reforestation.

2. Avoided emissions and enhanced removals are not interchangeable and should not be added together.

The authors measure the mitigation potential of actions that either reduce or avoid GHG emissions in the first place or remove carbon dioxide that is already in the atmosphere by increasing carbon sequestration in natural and managed ecosystems – as sinks.

Approximately half of the mitigation potential identified in the original NCS article is from avoided emissions (5.7 Gt CO_2-eq) and half due to additional CO_2 sequestration (5.6 Gt CO_2-eq) (i.e., removals). The 37% figure is based on just adding these figures together.

Yet, the climate change impacts of these two types of actions – avoidance and removals – are quite different. In the first case, the emissions have not yet happened, and as pointed out above, estimating what may happen 10 years from now in the absence of climate action is a speculative exercise, and easily manipulated.

In the second case, removals take carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere that has already been emitted. However, removals by terrestrial ecosystems – forests, grasslands, soils – are by their very nature impermanent. Soils may store carbon until the field is ploughed or drought or flooding causes the soils to become degraded. Forests may store carbon until insect-damage, drought, fire or any combination of those impacts causes degradation or loss.

Simply put, for scientific and policy-relevant purposes, the quantities of CO_2 associated with avoided emissions and enhanced sinks (see table) cannot be added together; any figure that aggregates emissions and removals will lack accuracy and credibility.

3. Setting low overall mitigation objectives makes the mitigation potential of NCS seem large.

It is a relatively straightforward exercise to make NCS contributions to mitigation goals seem large, if in fact the rest of the assumed mitigation actions are not particularly ambitious to begin with.

Examples of reduced or avoided emissions	Examples of enhanced sinks or removals
Avoided deforestation Avoiding the use of synthetic nitrogen fertilisers	Forest and other ecosystem restoration Planting trees, for example in agroforestry systems

To estimate the mitigation contribution of NCS, the authors must make assumptions about what mitigation actions will or will not be undertaken in other sectors, and on which time frame. In the article, '*it is assumed that fossil fuel emissions are held level over the next decade* then decline linearly to reach 7% of current levels by 2050' [emphasis added].

The scenario described is extremely unambitious, leading to warming well beyond what the Paris Agreement sets as its goal. By setting a low-ambition target, including one that assumes fossil fuel consumption remains steady throughout the decade, the mitigation potential from the 20 NCS actions seems large.

The land sector, or more specifically NCS, no doubt has an important role to play in climate change mitigation. It is critical to reduce and avoid emissions from natural sources. Enhancing sinks is also critical. However, what these numbers actually show is not the great potential of NCS, but rather the relatively limited, but still important, contribution over the next couple of decades that natural systems can make to the mitigation effort ahead.[12]

It is imperative to dramatically and urgently reduce fossil emissions.

Conclusion

It is certainly critical to conserve biodiversity and natural ecosystems for many reasons, including because of the role they can play in both climate change mitigation and adaptation, but this contribution should not be overstated or misused at the expense of doing nothing much about reducing emissions. Additionally, it appears that there may be vested interest in claiming such large mitigation potential of NbS, because through using NbS to offset carbon emissions, increased funding for biodiversity conservation can be generated. However, this is often without due attention to the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

What this analysis actually shows is that nature can only do so much. It also demonstrates how certain scientists and environmental organisations have taken on a piece of the public relations work of the fossil fuel industry and countries unwilling to make drastic emissions reductions.

The figures are being used and misused in attempts to convey that there is an easy path out of the mess that we are in, that is, that nature can provide an ample amount of mitigation in the short term, so there is no need right now to do the difficult task of drastically reducing emissions. There is also simply a cynical use of the figures, to pretend there is a scientific basis for complacency and lack of real action. Perhaps to also restate the obvious, as with NbS, NCS are not 'solutions' in any real sense of that term. In sum, a large number of misinterpretations, uncertainties, assumptions and obfuscations combine to make the 30%/37% figure inaccurate and misleading, and its use should be avoided. ◆

Doreen Stabinsky is professor of global environmental politics at the College of the Atlantic in Bar Harbor, Maine, USA. The above was originally published as a briefing paper by the Third World Network in October 2021 (https://twn.my/title2/briefing_papers/twn/NbS%20mitigation%20TWNBP%20Oct%202021%20Stabinsky.pdf). The paper was produced with partial financial contribution from SwedBio/Stockholm Resilience Centre and Brot für die Welt.

Notes

1. Griscom, B.W. et al. 2017. Natural climate solutions. https://www.pnas.org/content/114/44/11645. A 66% chance of staying below 2°C is rather far from what parties have agreed to in the Paris Agreement. The Paris Agreement language is 'holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and ... pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels ...'
2. In reference to voluntary REDD offset credits, the website https://opensea.io/collection/creol-verified-carbon-units claims that 'This [the credits] in turn can address 30% of worldwide emissions today.'
3. 'It is estimated that NCS projects can help deliver around one-third of net emission reductions needed by 2030.' Bill Winters, foreword, Consultation: Nature and net zero. World Economic Forum, January 2021.
4. The documentation for the 2020 UN Summit on Biodiversity claims that 'nature-based solutions can provide approximately one-third of the solutions needed to achieve the climate mitigation targets of the Paris Agreement.' https://www.un.org/pga/75/united-nations-summit-on-biodiversity/
5. 'NBS could provide approximately one-third of the cost-effective climate mitigation needed to deliver on the 1.5°C target.' Seymour, F. and P. Langer. 2021. Consideration of nature-based solutions as offsets in corporate climate change mitigation strategies. WRI Working Paper.
6. 'Actions to avoid, reduce and reverse land degradation can provide more than one-third of the most cost-effective climate mitigation needed to keep global warming under 2°C by 2030 (established but incomplete).' https://ipbes.net/assessment-reports/ldr
7. Griscom et al. 2017.
8. With respect to the sources cited above, these actions include voluntary offsetting based on REDD projects, NbS, and 'actions to avoid, reduce and reverse land degradation.'
9. This article builds on analysis in a longer paper, '"Nature-based solutions" and the biodiversity and climate crises', available at https://twn.my/title/end/pdf/end21.pdf
10. Seddon, N. et al. 2020. Understanding the value and limits of nature-based solutions to climate change and other global challenges. https://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/10.1098/rstb.2019.0120
11. Girardin, C.A.J. et al. 2021. Nature-based solutions can help cool the planet – if we act now.
12. House, J. et al. 2002. Maximum impacts of future reforestation or deforestation on atmospheric CO2. *Global Change Biology* 8(11): 1047-1052; Mackey, B. et al. 2013. Untangling the confusion around land carbon science and climate change mitigation policy. *Nature Climate Change* 3: 552-557.

We are ‘greening’ ourselves to extinction

False solutions to climate change and biodiversity loss only exacerbate the problems they purport to resolve, while generating massive profits for their corporate peddlers.

Vijay Kolinjivadi

MORE than a decade ago, investment experts James Altucher and Douglas Sease wrote a book for the *Wall Street Journal* called *Investing in the Apocalypse*. They argued that the end of the world is a profitable opportunity for those who know how to ‘fade the fear’ as everyone else panics. They maintained that when disaster strikes, investors should approach it with the rationale that ‘no matter how bad things seem, they really aren’t that bad’.

Well before the COVID-19 pandemic, they advised investing in big pharmaceutical companies as a strategy to reap dividends from global pandemics. They also encouraged putting money into renewable energy systems while ramping up oil production.

Today, it seems many have followed Altucher and Sease’s advice. Under the guise of taking action on the pandemic, billions of dollars have been poured into Big Pharma, instead of public health and policies aimed at preventing another global outbreak. The supposed energy transition that has been undertaken has seen renewable energy production expanded, but there has been no indication that oil and gas are being substituted and ultimately phased out.

What is worse, governments and corporations have teamed up to turn the apocalypse into a money-making opportunity. They have rushed to put forward false solutions to the climate crisis: from the push to replace fuel-engine vehicles with electric ones, to so-called climate-smart agriculture, to protected areas for nature conservation and massive tree-planting projects for carbon offsets.

The growing electric vehicle industry will increase the demand for lithium and other minerals and, with it, the adverse environmental impacts of mining.

All this trickery is called ‘greening’ and it is designed to profit off of climate fears, not stop climate change. While guaranteeing high returns, this deception is tantamount to the genocide of the hundreds of millions of people who will perish from the effects of climate change within the next century because things *are* that bad.

‘Firefighters with flamethrowers’

That is how climate writer Keton Joshi describes the world’s biggest polluters proposing climate solutions. Indeed, what governments and corporations have pushed for in terms of climate action in the past few years are policies that only make the situation worse.

Take carbon offsets – the epitome of ‘greening’. Acting as real-life ‘Pass GO and Collect $200’ tickets, they allow some of the biggest climate criminals to go on polluting by engaging in a charade of tree-planting schemes. The logic behind them is that we cannot stop our greenhouse gas emissions immediately because that would ‘hurt the economy’, so we can instead plant trees that will absorb them and grow the economy through carbon markets – a supposed win-win situation.

But this fallacy has been repeatedly exposed. For one, the organisations that are supposed to certify that indeed enough tree-planting has taken place do not have the tools to verify that the declared emissions will definitely be absorbed. Another problem is that many offsetting activities do not actually offset anything.

A recent investigation into the world's largest carbon standard found that 94% of its rainforest offset credits did not actually contribute to carbon reduction. Worse still, it exaggerated the threat to forests included in its projects, while its conservation activities – which yielded some of these credits – involved serious human rights violations, including forced evictions and home demolitions of local people.

Even if some of these carbon offset schemes do make a difference in the short term through forest conservation or reforestation, given our current climate reality characterised by ever-worsening forest fires, they can easily just burn to dust and contribute to the greenhouse gas problem. One recent study, for example, found that since 2015, close to 7 million tonnes of carbon was released from wildfires in six forest projects that are part of California's carbon trading system.

Then there is the fatal confusion between efficiency and ecology. We are being duped to believe that buying more 'energy-efficient' or 'green' products can save the planet. Whether it is a new electric car, an 'eco-friendly' condo, a paper straw instead of a plastic straw, or a solar-powered turtle-shaped mega yacht – all are branded as ecological solutions because they are supposedly more energy or materially efficient than the standard alternative.

What often hides behind these 'green' labels is the large carbon footprint their production generates. Furthermore, 'greened' technological solutions often just shift the environmental damage they do to another sector or a distant location.

For example, the growing electric vehicle industry may help reduce carbon emissions but it will also cause a massive jump in the demand for lithium and other minerals. Scientists are already warning about the grave environmental impact the rush for mining lithium may have, including water pollution and loss, toxic waste spills, biodiversity loss and soil contamination.

Apart from making climate change worse, these 'solutions' also disproportionately harm marginalised groups and Indigenous peoples, as UN special rapporteur Tendayi Achiume has recently warned. Not only are the impacts of ecological collapse felt more severely by those who encounter racism on a daily basis, but the extraction of minerals needed for 'smart' technologies and renewable energy exposes these same people to pollution, violence and displacement.

The argument that 'green' solutions provide jobs also rests on weak foundations, especially if the quality of work is considered. As the International Labour Organisation (ILO) has pointed out, a large share of employment for the so-called 'nature-based solutions' is informal, low-wage, temporary and exposed to risks, such as unsafe working conditions, child labour and lack of social security.

'The biggest land grab in history'

Nature conservation has also fallen prey to the 'greening' deception. For years now, large conservation organisations and their corporate sponsors have been pushing the idea that large swaths of land and forests need to be fenced off so we can protect biodiversity and help mitigate the effects of climate change.

Like the carbon offset schemes, this policy is just another way to enable big polluters to continue to pollute by saying: 'We are doing something for the planet.' It also enables some – particularly in the tourism and construction sectors – to benefit from the so-called 'nature' tourism in which the wealthy pay big money to access fenced-off parks and 'experience' pristine nature while staying at luxury real estate projects.

And just like other 'greening' strategies, this type of nature conservation results in major human injustices. Indigenous peoples from around the world have suffered evictions, dispossession and even killings as they have been forced from their lands to make way for nature conservation projects.

In the Republic of the Congo, the Indigenous Baka people have been brutally oppressed by the guards of a conservation project supported by the UNDP, WWF, the EU, the US and logging and palm oil companies. A UNDP investigation found that members of the community were routinely beaten, some imprisoned, tortured or raped.

In the neighbouring Democratic Republic of the Congo, the guards of a national park funded by the US and German governments have also engaged in violent attacks on the Indigenous Batwa people living in its territory. A 2022 report by Minority Rights has produced evidence that at least 20 members of the community have been killed and at least 15 women raped during forced eviction campaigns.

There are countless horror stories like these ones; according to estimates, some 14 million people have been evicted in this manner in Africa alone. That is why the news that a new conservation scheme was approved at the UN conference on biodiversity (COP 15) held in Montreal in December was met with much dismay by Indigenous people across the world.

The new Global Biodiversity Framework – also called the 30×30 target – aims to turn 30% of the planet into protected areas by 2030. In a letter to COP 15 participants, Indigenous peoples stated that the policy 'may be the biggest land grab in history and further threaten the physical and cultural survival of

Indigenous people worldwide'.

Given that Indigenous peoples reside on territories that hold 80% of the world's biodiversity, it is certain that Indigenous-held land will fall within the 30×30 plan. Evicting them from land they have lived in since time immemorial is hardly an ecological solution.[1]

A much better solution would be addressing the biggest cause of biodiversity loss: industrial-scale farming. It destroys the soil, increases desertification, releases huge amounts of greenhouse gases and is linked to deforestation.

30×30 would not curb the damage industrial-scale farming does. If the economic model that enables it does not change, it may even worsen its impact. Restricting land use may raise food prices, artificially inflate the value of land, and encourage further overuse of chemicals and harmful crop and livestock breeding practices to increase production. This would have devastating consequences for smallholder farmers who produce more than 30% of the world's food and tend to use more sustainable practices than industrial farms.

Reparative justice, not 'greening'

Perhaps the biggest problem with apocalypse investing and its 'greening' deception is that they dominate the global conversation on climate change and biodiversity at official forums (such as COP 15) and are presented to the public as 'making progress' on environmental issues.

We also have people like billionaire Bill Gates who say they are 'very optimistic' about the future. Of course they are! Since 2020, the top 1% has collected nearly two-thirds of all new wealth, as the world has faced a deadly pandemic and massive climate-change-related disasters.

The optimism of the wealthy and the fake climate solutions pushed on us are quite effective in convincing people that climate change will be tackled. That is because they provide reassurance that we will not have to give up the comforts we enjoy and because they also give us, the consumers, 'a choice' – to go 'green' or not. Indeed, we can now choose between a renewable or an oil-powered turtle-shaped mega yacht.

Making the 'green' choice then leaves us satisfied that we are 'doing something' about climate change. But driving an electric car, putting your organic produce in a tote bag and turning down your heating or air-conditioner by one degree is not going to save the planet. Let's have the courage to face this fact.

What would make a difference is developing mass transport and substantially reducing car ownership; closing coal mines and ending oil and gas exploration; promoting decentralised and community-managed renewable energy systems; doing away with industrial-scale monoculture farming; and supporting smallholder and Indigenous-led agroecological systems that have been shown to enhance nutrition, biodiversity and quality of life.

Of course, the system we have in place now favours apocalypse investors, who would do everything in their power to resist real climate action. That is why, as Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg has eloquently pointed out, 'we can't save the world by playing by the rules because the rules have to be changed'.

We need to confront the manipulation of false solutions, discredit them, and move on to changing rules premised on profiting from apocalypse.

Reparative justice is one approach to changing the current system. Embracing reparative justice means giving power back to the people to invest in the needs of their communities by supporting autonomous organisation and mutual aid efforts for affordable housing, food production, energy and transport systems.

Reparative justice for reducing carbon emissions means demanding that those companies and governments historically responsible for climate change pay for the damage they have caused. Present and future victims of climate change should get to collectively decide how these reparations are to be spent.

Reparative justice also means supporting agroecological practice and restoring diverse food-growing cultures that have been erased or lost due to industrial monoculture farming.

Reparative justice also means that biodiversity loss would be tackled by guaranteeing the status of Indigenous people as stewards of their land and empowering them to protect it based on their knowledge, spiritual wisdom and traditions.

Achieving all this will not be easy and we will have to face the power of governments and corporations – the apocalypse investors. But through human solidarity and collective action, we can fight back and invest in our survival. ◆

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Notes

1. The 30x30 target is one of 23 targets in the Global Biodiversity Framework. The proposal for this target met with a huge pushback by Indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs) and civil society organisations arguing that colonial 'fortress conservation' has resulted in massive human rights violations of IPLCs. The final language adopted in the Framework now recognises Indigenous and traditional territories, where applicable, and contains safeguard language with regard to recognising and respecting the rights of IPLCs. – *Third World Resurgence*

Manifesto for an Ecosocial Energy Transition from the Peoples of the South

Organisations and individuals from across the Global South have issued the following call to reject the new colonialism enshrined in the rich world's 'clean energy transition' in favour of a radical, systemic shift grounded in both social and environmental justice.

Paolo Dala (CC BY-SA 2.0)

A wind farm in the Philippines. The transition to clean energy should be part of a comprehensive vision that addresses radical inequality in the distribution of energy resources and advances energy democracy.

An appeal to leaders, institutions, and our brothers and sisters

MORE than two years after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic – and now alongside the catastrophic consequences of Russia's invasion of Ukraine – a 'new normal' has emerged. This new global status quo reflects a worsening of various crises: social, economic, political, ecological, bio-medical, and geopolitical.

Environmental collapse approaches. Everyday life has become ever more militarised. Access to good food, clean water, and affordable health care has become even more restricted. More governments have turned autocratic. The wealthy have become wealthier, the powerful more powerful, and unregulated technology has only accelerated these trends.

The engines of this unjust status quo – capitalism, patriarchy, colonialism, and various fundamentalisms – are making a bad situation worse. Therefore, we must urgently debate and implement new visions of ecosocial transition and transformation that are gender-just, regenerative, and popular, that are at once local and international.

In this Manifesto for an Ecosocial Energy Transition from the Peoples of the South, we hold that the problems of the Global – geopolitical – South are different from those of the Global North and rising powers such as China. An imbalance of power between these two realms not only persists because of a colonial legacy but has deepened because of a neocolonial energy model. In the context of climate change, ever rising energy needs, and biodiversity loss, the capitalist centres have stepped up the pressure to extract natural wealth and rely on cheap labour from the countries on the periphery. Not only is the well-known extractive paradigm still in place but the North's ecological debt to the South is rising.

What's new about this current moment are the 'clean energy transitions' of the North that have put even more pressure on the Global South to yield up cobalt and lithium for the production of high-tech batteries, balsa wood for wind turbines, land for large solar arrays, and new infrastructure for hydrogen megaprojects. This decarbonisation of the rich, which is market-based and export-oriented, depends on a new phase of environmental despoliation of the Global South, which affects the lives of millions of women, men, and children, not to mention non-human life. Women, especially from agrarian societies, are amongst the most impacted. In this way, the Global South has once again become a zone of sacrifice, a basket of purportedly inexhaustible resources for the countries of the North.

A priority for the Global North has been to secure global supply chains, especially of critical raw materials, and prevent certain countries, like China, from monopolising access. The G7 trade ministers, for instance, recently championed a responsible, sustainable, and transparent supply chain for critical minerals via international cooperation, policy, and finance, including the facilitation of trade in environmental goods and services through the WTO. The Global North has pushed for more trade and investment agreements with the Global South to satisfy its need for resources, particularly those integral to 'clean energy transitions'. These agreements, designed to reduce barriers to trade and investment, protect and enhance corporate power and rights by subjecting states to potential legal suits according to investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) mechanisms. The Global North is using these agreements to control the 'clean energy transition' and create a new colonialism.

Governments of the South, meanwhile, have fallen into a debt trap, borrowing money to build up industries and large-scale agriculture to supply the North. To repay these debts, governments have felt compelled to extract more resources from the ground, creating a vicious circle of inequality. Today, the imperative to move beyond fossil fuels without any significant reduction in consumption in the North has only increased the pressure to exploit these natural resources. Moreover, as it moves ahead with its own energy transitions, the North has paid only lip service to its responsibility to address its historical and rising ecological debt to the South.

Minor changes in the energy matrix are not enough. The entire energy system must be transformed, from production and distribution to consumption and waste. Substituting electric vehicles for internal-combustion cars is insufficient, for the entire transportation model needs changing, with a reduction of energy consumption and the promotion of sustainable options.

A lithium mine in Chile. The 'clean energy transitions' of the North have put pressure on the Global South to yield up lithium for the production of high-tech batteries.

In this way, relations must become more equitable not only between the centre and periphery countries but also within countries between the elite and the public. Corrupt elites in the Global South have also collaborated in this unjust system by profiting from extraction, repressing human rights and environmental defenders, and perpetuating economic inequality.

Rather than solely technological, the solutions to these interlocked crises are above all political.

As activists, intellectuals, and organisations from different countries of the South, we call on change agents from different parts of the world to commit to a radical, democratic, gender-just, regenerative, and popular ecosocial transition that transforms both the energy sector and the industrial and agricultural spheres that depend on large-scale energy inputs. According to the different movements for climate justice, 'transition is inevitable, but justice is not'.

We still have time to start a just and democratic transition. We can transition away from the neoliberal economic system in a direction that sustains life, combines social justice with environmental justice, brings together egalitarian and democratic values with a resilient, holistic social policy, and restores an ecological balance necessary for a healthy planet. But for that we need more political imagination and more utopian visions of another society that is socially just and respects our planetary common house.

Energy is an elemental and inalienable human right, and energy democracy should be our goal.

The energy transition should be part of a comprehensive vision that addresses radical inequality in the distribution of energy resources and advances energy democracy. It should de-emphasise large-scale institutions – corporate agriculture, huge energy companies – as well as market-based solutions. Instead, it must strengthen the resilience of civil society and social organisations.

Therefore, we make the following 8 demands:

1. We warn that an energy transition led by corporate megaprojects, coming from the Global North and accepted by numerous governments in the

'The elimination of energy poverty in the countries of the South should be among our fundamental objectives....'

South, entails the enlargement of the zones of sacrifice throughout the Global South, the persistence of the colonial legacy, patriarchy, and the debt trap. Energy is an elemental and inalienable human right, and energy democracy should be our goal.

2. We call on the peoples of the South to reject false solutions that come with new forms of energy colonialism, now in the name of a Green transition. We make an explicit call to continue political coordination among the peoples of the South while also pursuing strategic alliances with critical sectors in the North.

3. To mitigate the havoc of the climate crisis and advance a just and popular ecosocial transition, we demand the payment of the ecological debt. This means, in the face of the disproportionate Global North responsibility for the climate crisis and ecological collapse, the real implementation of a system of compensation to the Global South. This system should include a considerable transfer of funds and appropriate technology, and should consider sovereign debt cancellation for the countries of the South. We support reparations for loss and damage experienced by Indigenous peoples, vulnerable groups and local communities due to mining, big dams, and dirty energy projects.

4. We reject the expansion of the hydrocarbon border in our countries – through fracking and offshore projects – and repudiate the hypocritical discourse of the European Union, which recently declared natural gas and nuclear energy to be 'clean energies'. As already proposed in the Yasuni Initiative in Ecuador in 2007 and today supported by many social sectors and organisations, we endorse leaving fossil fuels underground and generating the social and labour conditions necessary to abandon extractivism and move toward a post-fossil-fuel future.

5. We similarly reject 'green colonialism' in the form of land grabs for solar and wind farms, the indiscriminate mining of critical minerals, and the promotion of technological 'fixes' such as blue or grey hydrogen. Enclosure, exclusion, violence, encroachment, and entrenchment have characterised past and current North-South energy relations and are not acceptable in an era of ecosocial transitions.

6. We demand the genuine protection of environment and human rights defenders, particularly indigenous peoples and women at the forefront of resisting extractivism.

7. The elimination of energy poverty in the countries of the South should be among our fundamental objectives – as well as the energy poverty of parts of the Global North – through alternative, decentralised, equitably distributed projects of renewable energy that are owned and operated by communities themselves.

8. We denounce international trade agreements that penalise countries that want to curb fossil fuel extraction. We must stop the use of trade and investment agreements controlled by multinational corporations that ultimately promote more extraction and reinforce a new colonialism.

Our ecosocial alternative is based on countless struggles, strategies, proposals, and community-based initiatives. Our Manifesto connects with the lived experience and critical perspectives of Indigenous peoples and other local communities, women, and youth throughout the Global South. It is inspired by the work done on the rights of nature, buen vivir, vivir sabroso, sumac kawsay, ubuntu, swaraj, the commons, the care economy, agroecology, food sovereignty, post-extractivism, the pluriverse, autonomy, and energy sovereignty. Above all, we call for a radical, democratic, popular, gender-just, regenerative, and comprehensive ecosocial transition.

Following the steps of the Ecosocial and Intercultural Pact of the South (https://pactoecosocialdelsur.com/), this Manifesto proposes a dynamic platform that invites you to join our shared struggle for transformation by helping to create collective visions and collective solutions. ◆

To endorse the Manifesto and to view a list of the existing signatories, go to https://progressive.international/wire/2023-02-21-manifesto-for-an-ecosocial-energy-transition-from-the-peoples-of-the-south/en

The French are going, but the war in the Sahel continues

French troops are leaving the Sahel, having failed to quell – and even, many believe, having inflamed – the long-running conflicts wracking the region.

Vijay Prashad

ON 9 February, around 100 armed men drove to Dembo, Burkina Faso, on motorcycles and in pickup trucks. They opened fire on a militia group called Volunteers for the Defence of the Homeland (VDP), which works with the Burkinabé military to protect the areas of northwest Burkina Faso near its border with Mali. These men killed seven members of the VDP.

Three days later, on 12 February, at the other end of Burkina Faso near the border with Ghana and Togo, armed men entered Yargatenga and killed 12 people, including two VDP fighters. Meanwhile, in another incident that took place from 9 February night until the next day – further north of Burkina Faso near the border with Mali – men on motorcycles arrived at the Sanakadougou village and killed 12 people, burning homes and looting 'the few goods and livestock of the villagers', reported a survivor to Agence France-Presse.

These are not isolated incidents. They have become commonplace in Burkina Faso, where about 40% of the country is now largely controlled by a wide range of armed groups who began to target the Sahel region after 2012.

Captain Ibrahim Traoré, who leads the Burkinabé government, came to power through a coup d'état in September 2022. He ousted Lieutenant Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba, who had himself come to power through a coup in January 2022. Neither of these coups was a surprise. Both followed after the two coups in neighbouring Mali (in 2020 and 2021), where the military took over out of frustration with the civilian government's inability to quell the armed violence. Much of the same dynamics that propelled Mali's interim President Colonel Assimi Goïta to power pushed Damiba and Traoré to their successive coups.

French soldiers in Mali in 2016. France intervened militarily in the Sahel in 2013 but since then, its inability to end the violence plaguing the region has sparked anti-French sentiment.

Pressure has been mounting on the military establishment in Mali and Burkina Faso, which are controlled by men in their late 30s and early 40s, to defeat the armed violence that has wracked their region for the past 10 years. Part of the motivation for these coups was the desire to remove the presence of the French military, which intervened in the Sahel region in 2013 to end the violence but instead – it is widely believed – actively participated in inflaming the violence further. In May 2022, Mali's Goïta told the French to leave the country, a move repeated by Traoré in January 2023.

Armed men

When the Algerian civil war (1991-2002) ended, members of the Armed Islamic Group of Algeria (GIA) fled southward and set up bases in Mali, Niger and southern Libya. Attempts to restart a war by the GIA failed, since the Algerian population was exhausted after the decade-long civil war. In 2007, some hardened former elements of the GIA formed Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), which – as I experienced firsthand in the northern Sahel – became an integral part of the trans-Sahara smuggling networks. AQIM members began to work with a group called Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MOJWA), led by Hamada Ould Mohamed El Khairy.

Everything changed for these groups with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) war on Libya in 2011, which destroyed the Libyan state and provided Al Qaeda-aligned groups free rein in the region (many of them are now being armed by NATO's Arab allies in the Gulf). By 2012, AQIM joined hands with many of the Arabs who had been brought to Libya during the war as well as with Tuareg groups from the northern Sahel who had been pursuing their own territorial aims against the government in Mali.

France, which had driven the NATO war against Libya, intervened militarily in Mali to block the rapid movement of these jihadist forces south towards Bamako, Mali's capital. Operation Serval, the name of the first French mission, pushed these forces out of the major cities of central Mali. Then-French President François Hollande went to Bamako to celebrate these gains in 2013 but said 'the fight is not over'.

France established Operation Barkhane thereafter, which expanded through the Sahel and operated alongside the massive US military presence in the region (which includes one of the world's largest military bases in Agadez, Niger, not far from France's garrison at the uranium mine in Arlit, Niger). The inability of France to halt the onrush of these armed groups into the heart of the Sahel has led – largely – to the anti-French sentiment in the region.

VOA

Islamist fighters in Mali in 2012. By rooting themselves in the region's local struggles, such groups have made themselves a difficult target.

Rooted in the countryside

In March 2017, many of these armed Islamic groups affiliated to Al Qaeda formed the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM), whose leader Iyad Ag Ghali participated in the Tuareg fight against the Malian state (in 1988, he founded the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Azawad). The JNIM rooted itself in the local struggles in the region, capitalising on the separatist sensibility of the Tuareg people and the Fulani clashes with the Bambara people of the centre of the country. A year after the founding of the JNIM, one of its emirs, Yahya Abu al-Hammam, released a video message that France's retreat into the cities left the countryside in the hands of the JNIM and its allied forces, who would win 'with patience'.

By rooting themselves in the smuggling networks and in the local conflicts over land and resources, the various armed groups affiliated to Al Qaeda made themselves a difficult target. The new governments in Mali and Burkina Faso accuse the French of both bringing these wars into their territory from Libya and exacerbating these conflicts by making deals with the armed groups to prevent attacks on French military bases. Rather than break the insurgency, the French war in the region has resulted in the creation of the Islamic State Sahel Province in March 2022, with the group extending its operations in Burkina Faso's Oudalan and Seno provinces, Mali's Gao and Ménaka regions, and Niger's Tahoua and Tillaberi regions. Now, France departs, leaving behind military governments ill-equipped to deal with what appears to be an unending war.

In December 2022, Burkina Faso's Prime Minister Apollinaire Kyélem de Tambèla visited Moscow to apparently seek assistance from Russia in the war against the Al Qaeda insurgency. During his visit, he told RT that he visited the Soviet Union in 1988 and regretted that Russian-Burkinabé relations have weakened. It is likely that more Russian aid will enter these countries, provoking a reaction from the West, but this aid by the Kremlin is unlikely to help the Sahel in breaking away from the entrenched set of conflicts that trouble the region, set in motion under France's colonial supervision. ◆

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Hands off Africa

Like many other African countries, the Democratic Republic of the Congo has long been a battleground for foreign forces seeking control over its political future and resource wealth.

Elizabeth Schmidt

UNMAS/Gwenn Dubourthoumieu

A deminer conducting a technical survey using a mine detection dog in Kisangani, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Mines are a deadly legacy of the many conflicts which have roiled Congo over the years and which have been provoked and intensified by foreign parties.

POPE Francis's recent visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo has focused world attention on a 'forgotten genocide' in a region long exploited by outsiders and devastated by the consequences of endless wars. For more than a century, Congolese rubber, ivory and minerals have enriched the coffers of colonial and Cold War powers, and, after the Cold War, China, neighbouring countries and the West. The people and their labour have been ruthlessly exploited, their bodies brutalised, their villages plundered, their women raped, and civilians murdered.

'Hands off the Democratic Republic of the Congo! Hands off Africa!' Francis told the cheering crowd. 'We cannot grow accustomed to the bloodshed that has marked this country for decades, causing millions of deaths that remain mostly unknown elsewhere. What is happening here needs to be known.'

What needs to be known is the role that outsiders have played in instigating and exacerbating Congo's endless wars. Dominating the public relations campaign, perpetrators have successfully blamed victims for their own plight. While local actors certainly deserve a share of the blame, their impact has been intensified by external support.

Congo's exploitation by outsiders began in the 16th century, when the territory became a major source of slaves for Brazil. Following the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade in the 19th century, Congo was pillaged for rubber and ivory. King Leopold II of Belgium claimed Congo as his personal fiefdom and imposed a harsh labour regime that consumed five to eight million lives between 1890 and 1910 and left countless others maimed and disabled. When the atrocities were exposed, international outcry, both by humanitarians and by fellow imperialists who hoped to gain Congo for themselves, forced Leopold to relinquish the territory to Belgium in 1908. Exploitation continued, although severed hands and mass murder were no longer a prominent feature.

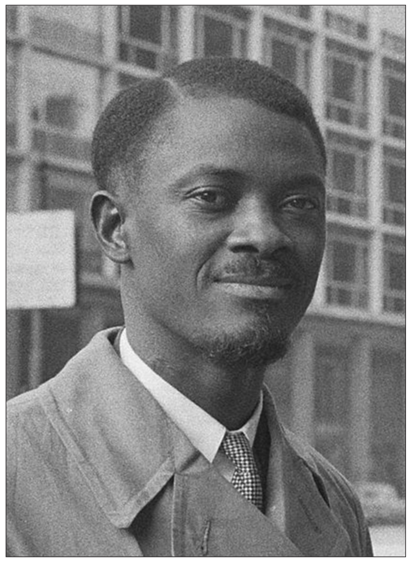
As the 'wind of change' blew over the African continent in the 1950s and '60s and anticolonial activists forced imperial powers to grant political independence, the Cold War superpowers vied with one another for influence. Congo, rich in strategic minerals and bordered by nine other territories in Central, Southern and East Africa, was a coveted prize.

Following Congo's independence in June 1960, it became a key Cold War battleground in Africa. The West, including Belgium and the US, along with white settler states and foreign mineral companies, targeted then prime minister Patrice Lumumba, whose economic nationalism and political nonalignment threatened their interests. Deeming Lumumba a Soviet stooge, Washington helped orchestrate a coup d'état and joined forces with Brussels and local opposition forces to assassinate the elected leader. Belgium, together with other colonial powers and the white settler regimes, supported separatist movements that would ensure that Congolese mineral wealth would remain in Western hands.

In the decade that followed, the CIA helped install compliant political leaders and trained a mercenary army that quelled a Lumumbist insurgency in the east. Mercenary pilots bombed railroads, bridges and populated areas, while mercenary and Congolese soldiers raped, robbed and killed civilian populations. In 1965, following a coup d'état by CIA protégé General Joseph-Désiré Mobutu, the US threw its support to the military strongman, helping him establish a sophisticated, well-equipped army that transformed Congo into a regional powerhouse. For the next three decades, his corrupt and brutal dictatorship wreaked havoc on Congo while enriching Mobutu, his family and associates. Valuing Mobutu as its regional policeman, the US turned a blind eye to his atrocities until the Cold War ended and Washington severed its ties.

The withdrawal of US military support rendered Mobutu vulnerable to a pro-democracy movement and to rebel forces that had challenged his rule since the 1960s. After the 1994 genocide in neighbouring Rwanda, genocide perpetrators, aided by France, fled to Congo from where they launched attacks and plotted a return to power. Rwanda and Uganda, in turn, backed rebel forces that drove Mobutu from power in 1997 and seized control of the embattled state.

The most recent spate of Congo wars, launched in 1996, continue to plague the country. The conflicts have attracted foreign armies and their local proxies, who have fought over the nation's political future and mineral wealth. Civilian populations, whose death toll has surpassed 5.5 million, have been the biggest losers. Displacement and economic collapse have led to hunger, disease and malnutrition. Women and children have been especially affected. More than 200,000 women and girls have been raped and brutalised, while tens of thousands of children have been abducted and forced to work as fighters, miners, cooks, porters and sex slaves.



Washington Area Spark (CC BY-NC 2.0)

The West, along with white settler states and foreign mineral companies, targeted Congolese independence leader Patrice Lumumba *(pic)*, whose economic nationalism and political nonalignment threatened their interests.

Externally imposed peace accords, designed by political and economic elites, have led to new regimes that have perpetuated many of these abusive practices and failed to address deep structural inequalities. Unresolved are the distribution of land and resources, the impunity of armed groups and their external backers, and the absence of responsive government, rule of law and a security sector that can protect the civilian population. Pro-democracy activists, members of the internal political opposition, and civil society more generally, were not party to the discussions or included in the new governments, which were often installed after elections plagued by corruption and violence.

Outsiders have initiated or worsened the situation. Most of the Great Lakes countries and others from East, Central and Southern Africa have been involved, supporting various factions and pillaging the country's mineral wealth. Rwanda, especially, has backed numerous rebel forces and used Congo's resources to rebuild its post-genocide economy. UN peacekeepers have failed to protect civilian populations and have often participated in the abuses and plunder.

There is no doubt that instability in Congo is the product of both internal and external factors. Longstanding political, economic and social inequalities, the legacies of colonial and Cold War practices, and the determination of political and economic elites to protect their power and wealth have led to numerous domestic conflicts that foreign interests have exploited. Although the presence of Rwandan genocide perpetrators served as the immediate justification for intervention in the 1990s, this rationale masked many others. Congo's mineral riches attracted the attention of outsiders, who looted the country's wealth to build their own. Although the UN, the African Union and African sub-regional bodies sponsored several plans to establish stability and a framework for a new political order, their efforts were hindered by the competing interests of their members and the failure to address the underlying causes of local conflicts.

It should not require a celebrity visit to focus world attention on African conflicts that have taken millions of lives, especially when outsiders have provoked and intensified these endless wars. It is high time that the devastating impact of foreign intervention in Africa be taken as seriously as those in Europe. ◆

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Palestinian lives behind Israeli bars

Palestinians in Israeli prisons can be subjected to arbitrary incarceration, detention without trial, and 'cruel' and 'sadistic' treatment.

Hamza Ali Shah

A Palestinian boy looks at pictures of Palestinian political prisoners held by Israel.

NINETEEN-YEAR-OLD Amal Nakhleh suffers from a rare, long-term condition called myasthenia gravis that causes severe muscle weakness. In November 2020, when he was 16, Amal was arrested at an Israeli checkpoint between the Palestinian towns of Atara and Birzeit and presented with a list of charges based around throwing stones.

Amal was released in December but in January 2021 re-arrested and subjected to an administrative detention order that was extended several times.

'I had surgery just before my arrest,' recalls Amal. 'This illness requires a CT scan every six months and continuous medical treatment. During my entire 15-month imprisonment, they only allowed me to do it once and there was no medical follow-up or specialised attention.'

Reports state that at least 600 Palestinian prisoners are suffering from ill health, a significant proportion with chronic diseases. Amal also contracted COVID-19 in prison, and recounts the period he spent in quarantine: 'They just gave me a bowl of rice for lunch and chocolate pudding for dinner. I weighed 69 kilogrammes when I went in, and I was 61 kilogrammes when I left 10 days later.' International campaigns called for Amal's release, which eventually took place in May 2022.

Israel's prison system forms an oft-overlooked dimension of its apartheid rule. The treatment of Palestinian prisoners can involve arbitrary detainment, administrative detention without trial, and conditions that the international human rights community has said constitute 'cruel and blatant' and even 'sadistic' violations of international law. In 2022, Israeli authorities arrested 7,000 Palestinians, according to the Palestine Centre for Prisoners Studies (PCPS). At least 164 of those were women and 865 were children, 142 of whom were under the age of 12. 2,340 were subject to administrative detention.

With Israel's previous, supposedly centrist government being replaced with a far-right coalition hellbent on ensuring Palestinians prisoners' conditions remain unimproved, Palestinians are anticipating the exacerbation of this state of affairs.

Leena Khattab is one of the more than 17,000 Palestinian women arrested by Israel since the occupation of the West Bank commenced in 1967. Speaking exclusively to Tribune, she recalled her traumatic experience in prison in 2014, serving a six-month sentence at only 18 years old.

'I was arrested for supposed stone-throwing; something I didn't even do,' she says. 'From the moment I was arrested in the street, it was a humiliating and disgusting experience. I remember being beaten on several occasions, starting from as soon as I got inside the military jeep.

'And they exploited the fact I was a woman. It was so dehumanising and painful, but I refused to cry or give them the reaction they wanted. In one instance, they ripped my clothes and tied me to a chair outside, leaving me in the freezing weather for several hours.'

Human rights organisations have previously drawn attention to the abuse of women in Israeli prisons, while former prisoners have recounted experiences of sexual assault. Others have spoken up about being photographed and strip-searched. Torture methods used during interrogation have also been documented by Addameer, the Palestinian Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association.

At one point in our conversation, Leena recounts her experience of *al-bosta*. The word literally translates to 'public bus', but in this case refers to the method of transportation that carries Palestinian prisoners to courts or clinics in vehicles with blacked-out windows and tightly divided cells. The rides can be as long as 12 hours. There are no rest stops or toilet breaks, and there is no food. Prisoners refer to it as a moving grave.

'It was the death ride for me,' she continues. 'The temperature inside was below zero and we are sitting on hard metal seats while handcuffed in uncomfortable positions and with suffocating crowding. I remember seeing them bring in a child and searching for handcuffs that fit him because his hands were too small. To this day, I wince when someone mentions *al-bosta*.'

Still, Leena maintains that her experience could have been worse and, as evidence, points to those trapped indefinitely in administrative detention in Israeli prisons – at least 820 Palestinians as of December 2022.

Administrative detention is an unlawful process that allows Israel to hold detainees without charge or trial, on the grounds that they plan to break the law in the future – grounds based on evidence that is not revealed to them. This leaves the detainees helpless, facing unknown allegations with no way to disprove them and not knowing when they will be released. UN experts are among those who have repeatedly raised concerns and called for an end to the practice.

Nidal Abu Aker is a 54-year-old Palestinian journalist who has been arrested multiple times and spent around 15 years in prison, most of it in administrative detention. The main accusation that Israeli authorities level at Abu Aker is that he is active in and participates in events affiliated with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), which is outlawed under Israeli law.

The evidence for accusations like these is often kept secret, the accusations themselves thereby forming instruments of repression. In October 2022, six prominent Palestinian human rights groups were raided and forcibly shut down after being accused of undercover connections to the organisation.

For Nidal and his family, administrative detention has robbed them of a normal life. His daughter Dalia opened up on the devastating effect that his imprisonment has had on his loved ones: 'My father missed out on so many memorable and momentous occasions. I got engaged recently – it was a huge celebration and felt like a national event, with so many members of the community present. Except the one person I really wanted there.

'My father has never been able to build a life outside prison. All he wants is to live a normal life and play his role as a father. But that is impossible.'

Research has shown parental detention can have a profound impact on the social and psychological wellbeing of children. Now 25, Dalia has witnessed her father go in and out of detention for much of her life.

'It's so tough. Sometimes my father would serve several months, and we'd be eagerly anticipating his release, and then his sentence would be renewed on that day. If he had a fixed sentence, at least then we could plan for his release, but instead we never know when he's coming out and he's wrongly spending all that time in there.'

Nidal's son Mohammad Abu Aker confirmed that in mid-January, his father's detention was extended again for another six months.

Mohammad himself spent five-and-a-half years in an Israeli prison, with all but a year in administrative detention. He spoke about unpleasant memories of room inspections and headcounts as the most daunting part of his incarceration. 'Very minor acts are seen as rebellious, and all rebellions are crushed. There are special forces, the Masada, for this exact purpose.' Mohammad is referring to Israel's Control and Restraint Unit, members of which have been said to engage in collective punishment during raids on prisons.

'I witnessed these forces invade once,' Mohammad recalls. 'They appear to have a licence to kill if necessary and seeing it unfold in real time is akin to seeing a massacre. One person had his leg slashed wide open with the bones visible while another had his nose sliced in half.'

Despite the fear these events instil, Palestinian prisoners try to make the best of it. Leena took up embroidery while in prison, and often sent pieces as gifts to her family. 'It was a nice way of me keeping busy, building up a routine, remaining defiant and showing my family I was not letting the prison affair get to me,' she recalls.

As Amal was in 11th grade during his arrest, he applied to sit his Tawjihi exam – a GCSE equivalent – passing with 79%. 'It was by no means easy. There were many prison incursions and collective punishment measures, but I tried to make use of my limited free time by studying.'

Imprisonment is only one part of a system that sees Palestinians daily subjected to violence and killings, kept under siege, living in homes at constant risk of demolition and forcibly dispossessed. In such circumstances, the ordeals of Palestinian prisoners are also a microcosm of the Palestinian experience generally – and Itamar Ben-Gvir, Israel's new national security minister, has reiterated his pledge to introduce harsher measures for Palestinian prisoners, including adopting the death penalty.

But as long as the international community continues to look the other way and shield Israel from accountability for its human rights violations, Palestinians like Amal and Leena will continue to speak out. 'Freedom and dignity are red lines; that's all we want in our land,' says Leena. 'I hope the world will hear us, but I have no idea if they will.' ◆

Hamza Ali Shah is a political researcher and writer based in London. This article first appeared on the Tribune website (https://tribunemag.co.uk/2023/02/palestinians-prisoners-israel-prison-system-administrative-detention).

Honduran women leaders in the crosshairs

Amid a widespread culture of impunity, women public figures are killed in Honduras at an alarming rate.

Laura Blume, Diana Meza and Piper Heath

ON 25 July 2021, five assassins disguised as a COVID-19 medical team arrived at the Tegucigalpa home of Carolina Echeverría Haylock, a lawyer, former congresswoman, and congressional candidate for the Liberal Party of Honduras from the predominantly Indigenous Miskitu department of Gracias a Dios. Since her husband was home recovering from COVID-19, Echeverría opened the door. Once inside, the hitmen shot her 14 times.

Perhaps more chilling than the details surrounding Echeverría's murder is the fact that it is far from an isolated incident. Her case is reflective of an alarming trend throughout Central America: public figures are frequently murdered. Those who dare to challenge the status quo and stand up to private interests – in particular human rights defenders, environmental activists and members of left-wing political parties – are among the most commonly targeted. This violence, combined with high levels of impunity, has created a disastrous and dangerous atmosphere for high-profile women who are fighting for equality and representation within Honduran society.

Honduras currently holds the highest rate of femicide in Latin America, 6.2 per 100,000 women, with 278 femicides reported in 2020. Carolina spoke out about violence against women in Honduras a year before she herself became a victim. Targeted attacks against female leaders like Carolina are exceptionally problematic: beyond the general deplorable loss of life, these assassinations have broader ripple effects in society and make women's ability to gain equality in representation difficult.

Currently, Honduran women hold 27.3% of legislative seats in the country and only a third of supreme court justices are women. Disparities are not just evident at the highest levels: 30.7% of city council members and 7.4% of mayors elected in 2021 were women, meaning a mere 17 of 298 mayoral posts are held by women. Although Hondurans recently elected their first female president, Xiomara Castro, she has received criticism for failing to fulfil campaign promises to advance women's rights in the country, including for appointing a mostly male cabinet.

The Violence Against Public Figures project

Given these alarming trends, the Violence Against Public Figures (VAPF) project is working to compile the first comprehensive, cross-national dataset of these incidents across Central America. The project tracks cases of lethal violence occurring between 2008 and 2022 for male and female public figures, a term that includes politicians, activists, judges, lawyers/prosecutors and journalists. The preliminary data from Honduras paints a very concerning picture: approximately 590 public figures have been killed in Honduras alone in the last 15 years. For comparison, 13 public figures were killed in Costa Rica during the same period. While data collection is ongoing, preliminary results suggest Honduras has by far the highest rate in the region.

By category, this translates to 92 politicians, 88 media workers, 149 judicial workers and 285 activists (individuals with more than one relevant profession are counted twice here; Echeverría is coded as both a politician and a lawyer). The most acute period of violence in Honduras occurred following the 2009 coup d'état, with targeted attacks against public figures peaking in 2011 when 78 individuals – 12 of whom were women – were murdered. While violence has decreased since then, the issue is far from abating; in just the last four years, 110 public figures were killed in Honduras, 18 of them women, according to VAPF data. Within the first week of 2023, two activists from Guapinol were assassinated.

The work of gathering and publishing information on public figures killed in Central American countries like Honduras is hindered by the threats faced by journalists themselves. In addition to the daily dangers that investigative journalists face in Honduras, political turmoil often leads to higher risks and targeted killings of media workers. In the years following the 2009 coup, various journalists who opposed the ouster of President Mel Zelaya faced frequent threats of violence, with six media workers killed in under two months. Luz Marian Paz Villalobos was another such journalist. Villalobos worked as a news director for Cadena Hondureña de Noticias (CHN), a popular radio news station, and in 2011 this criticism cost her life when she was assassinated by armed men on motorcycles. No arrests were ever made for her murder.

A culture of impunity

Far from an anomaly, the lack of arrests for Villalobos's murder is reflective of weak judicial frameworks and widespread impunity in Honduras, where perpetrators often walk away from their crimes without punishment. This is exacerbated by the fact that judges, lawyers and prosecutors are frequently targeted for assassination, with 19% of murdered judicial workers being women. Honduras ranks towards the bottom on global measures of rule of law, and reports suggest a mere 24% of homicides are investigated in the country, of which only 13% reach any kind of judicial resolution. Moreover, even when arrests do occur, the wrong parties are sometimes identified as responsible for the crimes committed.

For instance, in 2014 two women prosecutors, Marlene Banegas and Patricia Eufragio, were assassinated by *sicarios* (hitmen) in the Honduran city of San Pedro Sula while on their way home from work. Banegas was shot over 50 times. The chief of police stated that members of the Barrio 18 gang were responsible for the murders. But three years later, in 2017, two former police affiliated with Barrio 18's rival, Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13), were sentenced to 13 years for their connection to Banegas's killing. At the time of her assassination, Banegas was reviewing the details of a large corruption case, and, according to subsequent testimony from the Geovanny Fuentes Ramírez trial, she was one of two individuals given a copy of a video linking then President Juan Orlando Hernández to the now convicted narco-trafficker.

In Echeverría's case, only three of the five hitmen hired for her assassination have been arrested. These hitmen, also allegedly members of the Maras gang, are not believed to have been the sole perpetrators; the intellectual author and party that paid (allegedly a million lempiras) to have Echeverría murdered has yet to be held accountable. Relatives have stated her murder was politically motivated, and Carolina had reportedly turned down a $400,000 bribe to abandon her candidacy. Other theories behind the former congresswoman's murder relate to her work as a lawyer and the extensive reach of narco-politics in Echeverría's native Gracias a Dios department. Nonetheless, these examples highlight the risks faced by those working in the legal system, leading to reluctance to investigate or convict perpetrators of corruption and violence, thus further eroding the rule of law.

A lack of justice for human rights and land defenders

Justice for murdered Honduran activists may prove especially elusive, with impunity rates reportedly as high as 90% for crimes against human rights activists and 96% for the killing of land defenders. One notable exception is the case of Berta Cáceres, an internationally acclaimed and award-winning environmental defender and Indigenous Lenca activist. Cáceres was violently murdered in her home in 2016 in retaliation for her activism. Her story is remarkable, both for her renowned advocacy and because it is a rare case in which a top executive was formally charged and convicted for her death. This conviction can likely be attributed to international and national pressure to bring justice to her case.

Three of Cáceres's colleagues had been killed prior to her death, and many other Indigenous and land rights activists have been targeted without receiving equal attention. Tolupán Indigenous human rights activist Maria Enriqueta Matute was one such defender who was attending a peaceful protest in 2013 when she was chased down by armed men and assassinated along with two male colleagues. No one was convicted for their murders. In 2020, Laura Carolina Valentín Dolomo, a Garifuna activist and member of the Honduran Black Fraternal Organisation (OFRANEH), was found dead in La Ceiba. Despite calls for an investigation, no autopsy was conducted and no one has been arrested.

LGBTQI+ activists in Honduras have also faced extreme persecution. Gloria Carolina Hernández Vásquez, a well-known LGBTQI+ rights and HIV/AIDS advocate, was kidnapped and murdered in 2015. Last year two prominent trans activists, Melissa Núñez and Thalía Rodríguez, were also assassinated. Cases like these highlight the dangers that women-identifying activists face for their work in Honduras, where a culture of impunity threatens their ability to create positive change for themselves and their communities.

La lucha sigue (the fight continues)

Despite these attacks, the women of Honduras continue to fight for their rights, with some even using the fear intended to silence them as common ground for others to rally behind. After her mother's murder, the daughter of Berta Cáceres followed her legacy and carried on her activism, arguing that her mother hadn't died, 'she multiplied'. Erika Urtecho Echeverría, Echeverría's daughter, is another example of this incredible resilience. After her mother's death, Urtecho ran in her place and is now the congresswoman for the department of Gracias a Dios.

On the one-year anniversary of her mother's assassination, Congresswoman Urtecho tweeted that those who took her mother may have 'killed the dreamer but not the dream', and reaffirmed her commitment to keep fighting for their beloved Miskito region. She included hashtags calling for an end to impunity (#NoMasImpunidad) and femicide (#NoMasFemicidios). Honduras is in the process of installing an International Commission Against Impunity (CICIH), and although it remains to be seen how that process will unfold, the commission holds the promise of beginning to address the country's systemic corruption and perpetuation of violence. The motivation for the VAPF project is to reduce these murders by bringing attention to this form of violence and increasing the ability of social scientists and policymakers to study its causes and effects. ◆

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Constructing Indonesian girlhood on film

Released almost two decades apart, the films *Yuni* and *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta* reflect both similarities and shifts in the conception of girlhood, youthfulness and hope in post-Reformasi Indonesia.

Annisa R Beta

'I ALWAYS thought I could be anything. Now, I don't know,' says Yuni, the protagonist of the eponymous film. She gazes away from Yoga, one of her love interests, who is sitting next to her. He asks her to run away with him. Nothing good is left in the town; the mountain has been dredged out, Yoga convinces Yuni. But she doesn't seem to see the point of anything anymore. Towards the end of the film, Yuni is seen running away from her wedding. She walks barefoot alone on the soil of the dredged mountain. Seconds later, in a frame that reminds the audience of the painting *Ophelia*, Yuni floats on the river, seemingly lifeless.

In a different scene produced almost 20 years before in *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta*, Cinta is surrounded by her best friends at the school gym. Crying, Cinta admits her love for Rangga. She has been keeping it a secret out of fear that her best friends would abandon her. 'You should quickly tell Rangga how you feel about him, before you regret it,' Alya, one of Cinta's best friends, suggests. Minutes later, Cinta runs to Rangga at the airport, right before his departure to New York. They share a kiss. Rangga still flies away, leaving her crying. But after she reads his poem for her, Cinta looks up to the sky, believing their love will continue to flourish despite the distance.

Yuni (2021) directed by Kamila Andini and *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta* or *AADC* (2002) directed by Rudy

Soedjarwo and produced by Mira Lesmana and Riri Riza, bookend 20 years of Indonesian filmmakers constructing post-Reformasi girlhood in Indonesia. More than that, I want to suggest that while girls and young women are often ignored in public debates, their representations in popular culture continue to inform and intervene in not only the Indonesian cinematic universe but also its affective landscape.

On the face of it, *Yuni* and *AADC* are two very different films. *AADC* cast former models like Dian Sastrowardoyo in lead roles, and commissioned Melly Goeslaw to produce pop songs with earworm beats. A hugely commercially successful film, it marked the zeitgeist and rebirth of Indonesian cinema, welcoming young Indonesians back to fun and happy popular culture after politically intense years. *Yuni* is a festival darling and one of Kamila Andini's feminist directorial feats. *AADC* is Jakarta-centric: 'shamelessly Americanised melodramatic love story between middle-class Jakartan youths', according to cultural theorist Ariel Heryanto. By contrast, all the characters in *Yuni* appear to be lower-middle class and speak mostly in Serang-Javanese dialect. Jakarta is a faraway land where Yuni's parents work, one of the many reasons she appears intensely lonely even when she is with her friends and being cared for by her grandmother.

While they seem to speak to and about different kinds of girls, *Yuni* and *AADC* share many of the elements that are central to how girlhood is socially constructed. Both Cinta and Yuni are surrounded by their closest friends. Romantic interests and the idea of love are central to their daily interactions. In both films the high school is the key site for many plot lines. The main female protagonists are depicted as strong and ambitious: Cinta with her *mading* (wall magazine) editorial work and Yuni with her extracurricular activities and studies towards entering university on scholarship. The work of Indonesian modern poets enters the narratives (Chairil Anwar in *AADC*; Sapardi Djoko Damono in *Yuni*), dramatising their youthful insights on life. Although there are many differences in the form, timing and positionality of these films, through them we can plot a trajectory in the shifts within the public imaginations not only about girls, but also about youthfulness and normativity and, more specifically, the idea of hope in post-1998 Indonesia.

Hope springs

In *AADC* hope glitters in almost all elements of the story about Cinta and her friends. Music is central to *AADC*'s plot, typical of producer Lesmana's work, such as *Petualangan Sherina* (2000) and *Gie* (2005), and also other popular films in the 2000s: *Eiffel I'm in Love* (2003) or *Realita, Cinta dan Rock 'n Roll* (2006). The rhythms of the scores work in tandem with the narrative plot, letting the audience know that while low moments happen, the beats will eventually go up again; hopefulness is worth it. When Alya attempts suicide because her mother would not leave her abusive father, Cinta's visit results in her and us, the audience, knowing that the pain is worth it. Alya's mother is finally leaving him. This, I contend, could be an allegory about Suharto's (the father of the nation) violent New Order regime and young people's dangerous attempts to end it.

Another example is Cinta's visit to Rangga's home. Their cheerful lunch with Rangga's 'naughty' (meaning: critical) intellectual/scholar father is interrupted by a molotov cocktail thrown at the house, a reference to authoritarian tactics to scare off critics. Rangga's and his father's eventual migration to New York resolves the fear evoked in the lunch scene. Despite their fights, Cinta and Rangga finally admit their love to each other, and although Rangga leaves, Cinta's young love story is hopeful. Everything, it seems, is going to be alright at the end.

AADC's optimistic outlook, according to Thomas Barker, is typical of the early post-Reformasi euphoria. In films released since 2008, the emphasis on religious values – most strongly represented by the success of *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* (2008) – marked another cultural shift. Public performances of piety dominate popular culture. A response to Reformasi's media liberalisation was moral panic which, Intan Paramaditha suggests, paved the way for an Islamic consumer culture fixated on the idea of 'authentic Muslimness'. As Lyn Parker and Pam Nilan also note, the prevailing economic insecurity facing Indonesian youth has made conventional and normative choices appear to make more sense. In short, the coupling of political freedom and hope symbolised in many early 2000s films is now transformed into a focus on modesty, conventionality and a virtuous vision of life (and, perhaps, the afterlife).

Yuni plays with and disrupts these changing notions of hopefulness. She represents the conflicts caused by the contemporary mishmash of references to religiosity dominating the Indonesian public, recent emphasis on female empowerment, and the gradual erosion of optimism on Indonesian economic prosperity. Cinta's issues revolve around simplistic problems of friendship and love: she ignores her best friends while secretly falling for Rangga. In contrast, Yuni and her friends talk about virginity tests in schools, teen pregnancy, rape, early marriage, domestic abuse and divorce. Her older friend Suci's remark 'freedom *abis*' (which can be translated to 'totally free' but can also mean 'freedom is gone'), made after she has put heavy makeup on Yuni, could be understood as a sarcastic reference to the hopes for freedom and empowerment many young women are attached to and yet often have to fight most of their life to gain. (In the film, after marrying young and experiencing miscarriages and domestic abuse, Suci is eventually 'free' when her divorce is finalised.)

Yuni's desire for self-actualisation, which she initially believes will help her create a better future, is facilitated by characters with good intentions. The same characters, however, cannot alter the fact that she is from the lower-middle class, living in a community where teen marriages are the common response to many social ailments. Her teacher, Bu Lies, urges her to work harder to receive a scholarship to university. Yuni is obviously in distress after the proposal of a much older man, seeing her friend Sarah having to get married young out of shame, and witnessing Pak Damar, her teacher and crush, trying on women's dresses. Despite seeing Yuni in despair, Bu Lies insists that Yuni should focus on her goal. Whilst her mother's return home comforts her, Yuni lets go of her dream of further education and accepts Pak Damar's marriage proposal.

Running away from the wedding and appearing lifeless floating in the river are not the result of the lack of support from the people around her. Neither is this about the consequence of the often presumed loss of Indonesian collective culture, transformed into destructive neoliberal individualism. Rather, I suggest that it symbolises a disassociation from the demands of self-improvement and the hope of a better future that pressure many young women like Yuni. To float away is a technique of the disaffected.

Cinta and Yuni are two characters separated by 20 years but connected by an optimism about the future of girls and young women in Indonesia, a result of the political and cultural ruptures of Reformasi. Although both are not obviously political films, the centrality of the girl helps the filmmakers reflect and comment on the shifts Reformasi engenders in society by showing her experiencing multitudes of emotions in her mundane, everyday life. *AADC* and *Yuni* are only two of many popular culture artefacts Indonesian creatives offer, but their capacity to elicit audience reactions and reflections on hope could help us to critically assess what has changed in almost 25 years since Reformasi. ◆

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VIEWPOINT

Amid rubble and tears, a glimmer of hope

The earthquake in Syria and Türkiye left a trail of devastation and sorrow, but it also produced stories of genuine heroism and humanity.

Ramzy Baroud


VOA

The wreckage of a collapsed building in Diyarbakir, Türkiye, following the February earthquake.

ON 7 February, a funeral was held in the northern Syrian town of Jinderis. It was one of numerous such funerals to be held on that day across Syria and Türkiye following a devastating earthquake that killed and injured thousands.

Each of these funerals represented two seemingly opposite notions: collective grief and collective hope. The Jinderis funeral was a stark representation of this dichotomy.

Earlier, rescue workers found a baby in the rubble of a destroyed home. Her umbilical cord was still connected to her mother. Quickly, they cut the cord and rushed the baby to the hospital. Unfortunately, the entire family, save the newborn, perished.

Chants of 'Allah Akbar' – God is Great – echoed across Syria and Türkiye throughout the days of desperate search. Every time a person is found alive, or hanging on to his life, the rescue workers, the medics and the volunteers would chant the same words with voices gone hoarse. For them – in fact, for all of us – it is a constant reminder that there is something bigger in this life than all of us.

The heart-wrenching, sorrowful, yet inspiring stories that emerged from the rubble of the 7.8-magnitude quake were as many as the dead and the wounded. Long after the dead are buried, and the injured are healed, these stories will serve as a reminder of how vulnerable our human race is and how stubborn and inspiring it can be.

The little Turkish boy, Yigit Cakmark, who emerged alive from underneath the rubble of his collapsed home in the city of Hatay, was reunited with his mother atop the wreckage of their destroyed home. The image of them clinging onto one another after 52 hours of search cannot be described in words. Their unbreakable bond is the essence of life itself.

Another little Syrian girl actually smiled as she was being pulled out through the crushed concrete. Many rescued children smiled, happy to be alive or in gratitude to their rescuers, but this girl smiled because she saw her father, also alive.

Heroism is one of the most subjective terms in any language. For these little children and for the thousands of rescued victims of the earthquake, true heroes are those who save their lives and the lives of their loved ones.

It is sad that, quite often, we ascribe heroism to war, and rarely for the right reasons. I have spent much of my life living, writing about or reporting on war, only to discover that there is little heroism in war from the moment weapons are manufactured, shipped, deployed or used. The only heroism I found in war is when people collectively fight back to protect one another; when the bodies are pulled from the wreckage; when the wounded are rushed to hospitals; when blood is donated; when solidarity is offered to the families of the victims, and when people share their meagre supplies to survive together.

This same heroism is on full display in Türkiye and Syria. The typical rescue site is a tapestry of human tenacity, love, family, friendship and more: the victims underneath the rubble, praying and pleading for rescue; the men and women above, fighting against time, the elements and the lack of means.

Whenever a hand or a foot emerges from beneath the dust and debris, the rescue workers and medics rush to see if there is a pulse, however faint. Then, no gender matters; no religion; no sect; no language; no colour; no status; no age, nothing but the shared desire to save a single life.

Such tragic events could take place in Türkiye, Syria, Italy, Algeria, Japan or anywhere else. The rescuers and the rescued can be of any race, religion or nationality. Yet, somehow, all our differences, real or imagined, all of our conflicting ideologies and political orientations do not – and should not – matter in the least during these harrowing moments.

Sadly, soon after the wounded are rescued, the dead are buried and the debris is removed, we tend to forget all of this, the same way we are slowly forgetting our rescuers and saviours during the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead of investing more in the structures, technologies and resources that save lives, we often do the exact opposite.

Though the pandemic continues to kill people in large numbers, many governments have decided to move on to seemingly more urgent matters: war, geopolitical conflicts and, expectedly, more investments in new, deadlier weapons. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), world military expenditure passed $2 trillion for the first time in 2022. Just imagine if the increase in military spending alone was used to help, heal and rescue those fighting poverty, disease or natural disasters.

Our lack of a true sense of priorities is quite astonishing. While munitions are delivered to wartorn countries at incredible speed, it takes days, weeks and months for help to arrive to victims of hurricanes and earthquakes. Sometimes, help never arrives.

Chances are our confused priorities will not change, at least not fundamentally, following the Kahramanmaras earthquake. But it is important to reiterate this time-honoured truth: heroes are those who save lives and offer their love and support to those in need, regardless of race, colour, religion or politics.

To our true champions of humanity, we thank you. ◆

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