

# **International Development Committee inquiry: Climate change, development and COP 26**

## **Evidence submission from the Institute of Development Studies**

### **About the Institute of Development Studies**

The [Institute of Development Studies \(IDS\)](#) is a global research and learning organisation for equitable and sustainable change. IDS is ranked best international development policy think tank (2020 Global Go To Think Tank Index) and first in the world for development studies with the University of Sussex for the fifth year running by the QS University Rankings.

This submission draws on the expertise of the [Resource Politics and Environmental Change Cluster](#) at the Institute of Development Studies.

### **The UK context**

There have been many welcome announcements made by the UK Government this year ahead of COP26, such as putting into law the target to reduce emissions by 78 percent by 2035 and to achieve net zero by 2050. It also launched the Adaptation Action Coalition, forming a group of leading nations that will be working with the Race2Resilience initiative and the UN Climate Action team towards COP26 later this year. In partnership with Egypt, Bangladesh, Malawi, the Netherlands, Saint Lucia and the UNDP, the goal of this initiative is to accelerate efforts to 'turn political commitment into tangible action on the ground to support those most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.' However, despite the Adaptation Action Coalition, to date, there has been a disproportionate emphasis placed on mitigation rather than adaptation, and even less regarding loss and damage support for communities who are past the threshold limit of tolerable impacts.

The Prime Minister announced in September 2019 that the UK would double its contribution to international climate finance from £5.8 billion to £11.6 billion over 2021-2026 to help reduce and mitigate the impacts of climate change in developing countries.

As host of COP26 there is a lot more the UK could also be doing domestically, to lead by example and demonstrate by action that climate change is a universal issue. This is highlighted in cases of continued investment into carbon generating activities, such as the £127bn committed to the HS2 rail link and new roads - which will both increase emissions - while offering just £1bn to home insulation, which would reduce emissions.

### **How work on climate change and development can best take the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the needs of low-and-middle income countries and vulnerable groups into account.**

IDS research across Asia and Africa has shown that climate change, particularly in the context of development, needs to be viewed not only in technical terms of achieving zero carbon emissions, but fundamentally as an issue of justice. The roots of the problem of climate change lie in economic and social injustices that are often racial, gendered, and class-based in origin, and are interconnected with a host of other issues relating to poverty and inequity. In most cases, climate change acts as stress multiplier, and hence it is important to target the root causes of vulnerability that drive these impacts. Therefore, climate justice, and the approach to climate change and development is linked synergistically to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Taking into consideration the needs of low- and middle-income countries and vulnerable groups into account, work by IDS for the Canadian International Development Research Centre (IDRC), led by Peter Newell, Professor at the University of Sussex, [on transformative climate justice](#) identified that southern led visions of climate justice are key. Incorporating findings from that research and from other ongoing IDS research with vulnerable communities facing multiple uncertainties related to climate change (including the [TAPESTRY project](#) working in vulnerable coastal areas of India and Bangladesh, [PASTRES](#) learning lessons from pastoralists and [Seeing Conflicts from the Margins](#) on experiences of communities living next to resource developments), in summary the following areas need to be addressed:

- **Facilitate bottom-up transformation** – Climate action needs to be locally led and should not merely focus on climate change impacts, but also wider changes, taking a holistic view and approach. Climate change initiatives will not be sustainable unless wider interconnected issues, relating for example to water, food, healthcare, education, are also addressed concurrently.
- **Avoid maladaptation** – Climate initiatives to support adaptation must not lead to or further exacerbate precarity, making sure either that efforts to cope with climate risks in the short term do not undermine resilience in the long term, or that support to one place or social group does not increase the vulnerability of others. For example, research on climate smart agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa demonstrates that poorer and marginalised groups may be excluded from benefitting from the programmes or the policies set up to address climate change. Many of the policies affecting the smallholder farmers, fisher communities as well as pastoral and agro-pastoral communities are decided without their participation.
- **Challenging ‘green’ development** – ‘Green’ initiatives, such as the [Sustainable Markets Initiative](#) and those of the sustainable mining and renewable energy sectors can hide flawed and dangerous underlying assumptions. They can in fact intensify real-world [environmental harm](#), exacerbate inequalities, exclude less powerful people from debates, and have devastating consequences for the welfare and livelihoods of politically and economically marginalised people. This includes the dispossession of land due to ‘green grabbing’ (the expropriation of land or marine territory from existing land users - often rural farmers, foragers, artisans, fisherfolk and other residents). In Madagascar, for example, backed by the Malagasy government and environmental NGOs, the Rio Tinto QMM ilmenite mine has caused nearly a decade of local conflicts, displacing hundreds of farmers, fishers and pastoralists near mine and port sites. The consequences have included damage to household income levels and children going hungry.
- **Nature based solutions is not a silver bullet** – This regards avoiding expansion of tree-planting at the cost of biodiversity and resource and land rights of local populations. (Further details below).

Although well-designed Nature based solutions (NbS) can deliver multiple benefits for people and nature, recently the approach has focused on tree planting for carbon sequestration (removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere). There are serious concerns that this is distracting from the need for deep decarbonisation and to protect existing intact ecosystems. There are also concerns that the expansion of forestry framed as a climate change mitigation solution is coming at the cost of carbon rich and biodiverse native ecosystems and local resource rights.

The recent journal article [Getting the message right on nature-based solutions to climate change](#) (Seddon, N.; Smith, A.; Smith, P.; Key, I.; Chausson, A.; Girardin, C.; House, J.;

Srivastava, S. and Turner, B. 2021) on this issue recommends that policymakers, practitioners and researchers consider the synergies and trade-offs associated with NbS and four guiding principles to enable NbS to provide sustainable benefits to society: (1) NbS are not a substitute for the rapid phase out of fossil fuels; (2) NbS involve a wide range of ecosystems on land and in the sea, not just forests; (3) NbS are implemented with the full engagement and consent of Indigenous Peoples and local communities in a way that respects their cultural and ecological rights; and (4) NbS should be explicitly designed to provide measurable benefits for biodiversity.

## **The potential of COP26 to address challenges around climate change and development effectively and the steps the UK Government needs to take if COP26 is to succeed in tackling them.**

There are five main areas the UK Government and other world leaders need to address if COP26 is to be successful, these are:

### **1) Prioritising adaptation in climate finance and acknowledging the links between adaptation and mitigation programmes**

To tackle the scale of the problem, climate finance should prioritise adaptation and it must be ensured that adaptation programmes are locally led and equity focused. Too many adaptation initiatives to date have been ‘top-down’; designed without participation of poor and marginalised populations, and which may risk creating ‘maladaptations’ that cause further harm to the vulnerable communities who are suffering the worst effects of climate change, and have done the least to cause it. This harm can occur when their needs and livelihoods are not fully understood, and for this reason adaptation programmes must be locally focused, with solutions and action generated from the ‘bottom-up’. There needs to be an increasing focus on how to integrate goals of mitigation, adaptation and development. Mitigation focused programmes, for example renewable energy parks, can often create further marginalisation for communities as resource commons are reallocated for these interventions - harming the vulnerable communities that often depend on these resources for their [local livelihoods](#).

### **2) Just transitions**

There is a need for more research that follows low-carbon pathways along the supply chain, paying attention to social and labour conditions and environmental impacts, and how best to manage them to address the need for a just transition. Though the energy sector is understandably getting a lot of the attention, and to a lesser degree the transport sector (because of biofuels and increasing focus on aviation), there is important work to do across all sectors. This includes sectors which most directly impact upon the livelihoods of the poorest, such as water, food and agriculture. For example, our work with pastoralists in the PASTRES project analyses how northern environmentalist discourses on dietary change and the push towards plant-based diets, based on (valid) concerns about the impacts of industrial meat production on emissions can potentially negatively affect low emission producing and [marginalised livestock producers/pastoralists](#).

### **3) Loss and damage**

For those people whose livelihoods and homes are past the point of adaptation, more attention and funding must be allocated to loss and damage. Although mitigation and adaptation are meant to address issues of loss and damage that are likely to occur in future, in several cases the damage has already occurred or remains inevitable in the

face of extreme weather events. As part of this important area of work, the UK government needs to go beyond working in siloes.

#### **4) Targeting root causes of vulnerability for climate justice**

Currently, the UK government appears to be treating climate change as a separate, standalone issue to be tackled via the COP26 summit. However, we know from research at IDS that climate change, and more specifically climate justice, and the impacts of climate change on people around the world cannot be separated from issues of poverty, from sanitation, education, gender violence or food security. They are all connected and despite pledging funding for specific climate change initiatives, the overall funding cuts to UK ODA, including to programmes providing WASH facilities or girls education, for example, will have a devastating impact on the lives of poor and marginalised populations worldwide, directly increasing their vulnerability to climate impacts. Importantly, it will also affect the credibility of UK in discussions leading up to COP26, and ultimately the ability of the COP to address challenges around climate change and development effectively. There can be no discussion of rights, risks and responsibility for climate change that does not employ, consciously or not, ideas about justice.

Where these issues are not attended to, there is a very real danger of locking-in or deepening existing inequalities as the preferred ‘technical’ solutions of powerful institutions (such as carbon trading, nature-based solutions, or geo-engineering) are pushed through at the expense of poorer groups.

#### **5) Moving beyond technical solutions**

There needs to be much more focus on climate justice as part of the COP26, as part of the agenda to reduce carbon emissions. To focus disproportionately on technical solutions, usually delivered from large-scale top-down initiatives, creates a danger of causing further harms to marginalised communities.

For example, industrial scale wind, solar and nuclear energy all generate ‘[green sacrifice zones](#)’ – places and peoples harmed by the sourcing, transportation, installation, operation and disposal of waste products of ‘solutions’ for powering low-carbon transitions, green new deals and sustainable investment platforms. Baotou, in Inner Mongolia, is described as a ‘[hell on Earth](#)’ due to the environmental consequences of extracting and processing the rare earth minerals required to make wind turbines, solar photovoltaics and electric cars. The global supply chain for sheet mica, used in high voltage cables used to transport wind and solar power, also profits from the exploitation of whole [families of miners in southern Madagascar](#), including children [as young as four](#).

#### **Important questions to pose**

Climate justice is understood in a multitude of ways and reflects the fact that the causes and effects of climate change, as well as efforts to tackle it, raise ethical, equity, and rights issues. These differences in the understanding of climate justice matter because they have serious implications for those countries, regions, and communities on the front line of the impacts of climate change. They are also increasingly apparent in efforts to accelerate decarbonisation.

As the Committee continues its inquiry on this vital issue of climate change and development, there are important questions to keep posing to thoroughly investigate and ensure that policies and actions to address climate change are integrated and aligned to

issues of inequities, power imbalances and structural injustices, and are just and inclusive. In short, they should focus squarely on issues of climate justice at home and overseas.

To ensure transformative climate justice, structural barriers need to be addressed and questions for international climate change programmes need to centre around who is driving these initiatives? Are Northern-led solutions salient for Southern contexts? What is their impact on poor and marginalised communities and societies across the globe? Are adaptation initiatives leading to maladaptation and inequity? Are transitions to reduce carbon emissions such as net zero, just and inclusive?

This includes ensuring that the UK government reflects the universal nature of the issue through its own domestic policymaking. Therefore, it is important to investigate climate justice issues in the UK, and to push for the creation of cross-government integrated responses for low-carbon transitions and adaptation in this country, that address inequities, and issues of structural injustice regarding climate change. Climate justice needs to be taken seriously and be placed at the heart of climate action. This involves tackling the root causes of vulnerability, which requires challenging the status quo in our social and institutional relations between countries as well as within our societies. Technical fixes will not take us very far, and in most cases will perpetuate the systems of inequity and injustice in the form of displacement and resource grabs, something we are already witnessing with green energy solutions. Any climate action needs to bring meaningful and positive change to the lives of marginalised people who are experiencing the worst harms of climate change impacts and have done the least to create it.