

Unequal burdens and shared fates: Rethinking climate justice through reparative action and global solidarity

Abstract

In this perspective paper, I discuss the troubling inequalities driving our climate crisis, where wealthier nations profit most while poorer communities face the harshest consequences. My observations of the media coverage surrounding the 2024 Climate Conference in Baku reinforced my sense that even well-intentioned initiatives such as the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement often become entangled in politics and corporate interests. Drawing on multiple insights from environmental sociology - including Beck's (World) Risk Society, Moore's concept of the Capitalocene, and Fraser's analysis of expropriation - I argue that minor reforms are not enough; we need fundamental changes to the economic structures fuelling these inequalities. I advocate for reparative justice, a shift away from relentless economic growth, and genuine global solidarity. In my view, climate justice is not optional - it is essential. It requires urgent, transformative action to safeguard people, ecosystems, and our planet's future.

Keywords: Climate Justice, Sustainable Development Goals, Global Inequalities, Reparative Actions, Global Solidarity

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1. Introduction: The unequal burdens of climate change

I wrote this piece as a personal reflection on what I see as one of the most pressing and unjust issues of our time: the climate crisis. The more I learn about its complexities, the clearer it becomes that its effects are unfairly distributed. Wealthy Western nations, long reliant on fossil fuels for their prosperity, have contributed the bulk of greenhouse gas emissions. Yet, it is poorer nations - those with minimal historical responsibility - who now bear the brunt of rising seas, destructive storms, droughts, and food insecurity. This disparity raises urgent questions about global responsibility and climate justice. Despite the ambition of frameworks like the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), their implementation remains constrained by systemic barriers. The 2024 Climate Conference in Baku (COP29, the 29th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) exemplified this challenge, where fossil fuel lobbyists overshadowed critical voices, showing how powerful interests continue to shape global climate policy.

In the pages that follow, I reflect on how global aspirations like the SDGs often clash with local realities. I discuss examples from Bangladesh, Kenya, India, and the UK, showing how projects intended to achieve sustainability and economic growth frequently come at immense social and environmental costs. Through theoretical insights from Beck (1986, 1999, 2016), Moore (2015), Fraser (2017), and Daly (1996), I highlight that the contradictions between economic expansion and ecological balance are not accidental but significantly embedded in our global economic system. I argue that overcoming entrenched inequalities demands more than incremental reforms - it requires systemic change rooted in reparative justice, accountability, and meaningful solidarity. Finally, I contend that climate justice means radically transforming our economic structures, shifting away from GDP-driven growth towards ecological well-being, and placing communities rather than corporate interests at the heart of global climate governance.

I acknowledge that the contradictions I highlight between sustainable development ideals - particularly as encapsulated by the SDGs - and the actual actions of wealthier states and international organisations are not new. Scholars have critically examined these inconsistencies since the formulation of sustainable development itself, notably in the

Brundtland Report (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987), which attempted but ultimately struggled to reconcile economic growth with environmental protection. My reflections emerge from the position of someone relatively new to the climate justice field, struck by the persistent and, at times, bewildering gap between ideals and realities. Indeed, while seasoned researchers have debated these contradictions for decades, revisiting them through fresh eyes reveals how strongly embedded economic growth imperatives remain within frameworks like the SDGs - especially SDG 8 on "Decent Work and Economic Growth" - rendering them naïve when confronted with powerful political and corporate interests.

From this perspective, my critique aims not to restate familiar observations but rather to emphasise the absurdity of continually proposing incremental reforms when faced with systemic contradictions. The SDGs embody an optimism about aligning growth with sustainability, yet their practical implementation frequently exposes fundamental incompatibilities. By openly confronting these limitations, my goal in this short perspective piece is not simply to critique but to argue for a more radical reconsideration of the economic structures underpinning global climate governance.

2. The disconnect between global goals and local realities

I have always appreciated the elegance of the sustainable development ideal: *"enough, for all, forever"* (Hopkins, 2009). On paper, it presents a compelling vision - a blueprint for a world where resources are shared equitably, and the environment is safeguarded for future generations. The SDGs, formally adopted in 2015, attempt to translate this vision into a set of concrete targets spanning poverty reduction, food security, clean energy, economic growth, and climate action. However, the more I try to understand their implementation, particularly in poorer nations, the clearer the cracks become. While the SDGs outline an inclusive vision, their translation into tangible progress is often undermined by political and economic realities. The SDGs promise an equitable and sustainable future, yet in practice, they often seem disconnected from on-the-ground realities. I cannot help but wonder whether these global goals - however well-intentioned - are capable of overcoming political inertia, corruption, and corporate influence.

In many countries of the Global South, political and economic challenges remain severe. Instability, corruption, weak infrastructure, and chronic underinvestment mean that even well-intentioned interventions often fall short. Small-scale renewable energy projects, designed to promote clean energy access (SDG 7), have sometimes unintentionally disrupted local livelihoods because of inadequate community consultation. For instance, in northern Kenya, the Lake Turkana Wind Power Project, despite its intentions to improve energy security, resulted in conflicts over land use, disrupted traditional grazing routes, and led to tensions between local communities and developers (Cormack & Kurewa, 2018). Similarly, in Gujarat, India, solar power developments have occasionally displaced pastoral communities, restricting their access to vital grazing lands and leading to significant livelihood losses (Yenneti, Day, & Golubchikov, 2016). Such examples highlight how noble intentions can inadvertently harm communities when local contexts and stakeholders' perspectives are overlooked.

A particularly troubling case is Sirajganj, Bangladesh, where unregulated textile dyeing factories have contributed to economic growth (SDG 8), but at a severe human cost. Sirajganj has the highest proportion of disabled people in the country, with one in every fifteen children affected - many of whom acquire their disabilities after birth (Hasan, 2018). This issue gained attention in 2015 when local concerns prompted investigations into drinking water quality. Tests by the Bangladesh Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (BCSIR) revealed dangerously high levels of mercury, zinc, iron, lead, arsenic, and other toxins from textile effluents, strongly linked to the area's elevated disability rates and mental health issues. The factories, initially established under British colonial rule, increasingly discharged untreated pollutants into local water sources (Hasan, 2018). Here, economic "growth" has clearly come at the expense of clean water, health, and community well-being (SDGs 3 and 6). Similarly, in Chittagong, Bangladesh's shipbreaking industry provides employment but imposes severe environmental and human costs. Hazardous waste from dismantled ships pollutes the soil, water, and air, devastating marine life (SDG 14) and terrestrial ecosystems (SDG 15). Workers, trapped in poverty with few alternatives, endure unsafe conditions that contradict any meaningful definition of "decent work" (SDG 8).

These tensions are not confined to developing nations; even in countries with stronger regulatory frameworks, environmental protection is frequently sacrificed for economic priorities. In the UK, severe degradation of rivers due to pollution from agricultural runoff and untreated sewage highlights significant failures of environmental governance (SDG 6). The River Wye, once celebrated for its biodiversity (SDG 15), now suffers from pollution linked to intensive poultry farming. Excess phosphorus from manure runoff has triggered algal blooms, depleting oxygen levels and threatening aquatic ecosystems (SDG 14) (Environment Agency, 2023). This mirrors challenges faced in the Global South, where unregulated industrial activities compromise environmental health (SDGs 3 and 6). Despite the UK's wealth and strong regulatory frameworks, corporate and governmental failures persist, illustrating how economic priorities (SDG 8) frequently overshadow ecological responsibilities. These cases underscore the urgent need for accountability and stronger enforcement of environmental laws to ensure development genuinely aligns with sustainability, rather than exploiting the environment for short-term economic gains.

I am struck by how these sharp contrasts - economic growth versus health, sustainability versus exploitation - reveal a fundamental disconnect between global aspirations and local realities. The SDGs were never meant to be a checklist of isolated targets; rather, they were envisioned as an integrated system of goals that reinforce one another. Yet, in practice, power imbalances, political trade-offs, and socio-cultural complexities fracture this vision. As some researchers have pointed out, "SDG politics" (Siegel & Lima, 2020) often unfold behind closed doors, where powerful interests shape agendas and marginalise the very communities these goals were meant to uplift.

The tension between economic growth and sustainability, evident in the implementation challenges of the SDGs, is not new; it was explicitly addressed by the World Commission on Environment and Development's seminal Brundtland Report (1987), which first popularised the concept of sustainable development. Scholars such as Daly (1996) have long argued that the pursuit of endless economic growth inherently conflicts with ecological sustainability, highlighting the problematic nature of attempting to reconcile these objectives within the same framework. Daly contends that continuous economic expansion inevitably exceeds planetary ecological limits, suggesting instead the necessity of adopting a steady-state

economy - one focused on quality of life and ecological balance rather than quantitative economic expansion (Daly, 1996).

Beck's (1999) concept of the World Risk Society further clarifies limitations in current climate governance. Beck (1999) highlights how global risks - such as climate change - transcend national borders, demanding governance approaches that extend beyond state-based solutions. This perspective aligns with my concerns about the failures of the SDGs and international climate summits, which remain constrained by a nation-state paradigm ill-equipped to tackle transnational ecological crises. Furthermore, Beck's *The Metamorphosis of the World* (2016) reframes climate change not as a risk to be managed but as an agent of transformation - one that is actively reshaping social institutions, economic structures, and long-held assumptions about growth and development. If climate change represents a metamorphosis rather than just a crisis, then incremental policy adjustments, such as those embedded in the SDGs, are inadequate. What is needed is not just reform but a fundamental rethinking of global economic and political systems.

One of the greatest barriers to meaningful climate action, in my view, is the firm hold of vested interests that weaken environmental policies at both national and international levels. While climate finance mechanisms such as the Green Climate Fund were designed to support mitigation and adaptation in developing nations, funds are often misallocated, lost in bureaucratic inefficiencies, or redirected toward unrelated projects (Roberts & Weikmans, 2017). These systemic failures, shaped by both economic and political forces, protect existing power structures and prevent meaningful change. Addressing these challenges requires more than regulatory fixes or political goodwill; it demands a fundamental restructuring of global governance to prevent short-term economic interests from consistently taking priority over long-term planetary and social well-being. To confront these failures, we need a comprehensive approach - one that strengthens institutional transparency, promotes citizen-led accountability, and enforces legal consequences for mismanagement.

Governments and international advocacy organisations must commit to independent auditing mechanisms for climate finance distribution. One model worth considering is the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), which has improved accountability in oil

and mining sectors (Öge, 2016). A similar Climate Finance Transparency Initiative could require real-time public reporting on how climate funds are allocated, enabling both domestic watchdog groups and international regulators to scrutinise spending. I also see potential in participatory budgeting for climate finance, where local communities directly engage in deciding how climate adaptation funds are spent. Brazil has already demonstrated how participatory budgeting reduces corruption and increases transparency, ensuring that public funds address real community needs (Cabannes, 2015). If adapted to climate finance, this model could prevent resources from being captured by political elites and instead prioritise projects that serve the most affected communities.

Another essential element, in my view, is strengthening legal protections for whistleblowers who expose corruption in climate finance. Expanding laws similar to the EU Whistleblower Directive (2019/1937) to explicitly cover climate-related disclosures would be a crucial step (De Maria, 2019). Additionally, I believe that investigative journalism in environmental affairs plays a key role in ensuring transparency. Media outlets such as Climate Home News have already exposed financial mismanagement in international climate agreements (Herrick & Vogel, 2022). Increased funding for environmental journalism initiatives could further improve scrutiny, enabling journalists to investigate how climate finance is being used, who benefits, and who is left behind.

For climate action to be truly effective, we must ensure that funding mechanisms are transparent, corruption is addressed, and affected communities are empowered in decision-making processes. I argue that climate governance must move beyond top-down financial commitments and instead prioritise grassroots participation, legally enforceable accountability frameworks, and structural reforms that challenge corporate and political inertia. Without these systemic changes, the SDGs risk remaining a symbolic set of ideals rather than a tangible framework for transformative action.

3. COP29: A missed opportunity

My frustrations became particularly evident after following the media coverage of COP29. What should have been a moment for bold action and fairness instead became a platform for powerful fossil fuel lobbyists. The voices of climate scientists, grassroots activists, and

affected communities were drowned out by corporate interests focused on protecting their profits. For me, this was not just disappointing - it underscored a fundamental problem: our global response to climate change remains dominated by the very forces that created the crisis in the first place.

The COP29 was supposed to be a catalyst for action, a moment when nations came together to advance the goals of the Paris Agreement and accelerate the transition to a low-carbon economy. Instead, it served as a cruel reminder of the persistent power imbalances that hinder progress. Corporate lobbyists, especially from the fossil fuel sector, pervaded the event. They sponsored exhibitions, hosted lavish side events, and engaged in backroom negotiations, all while climate scientists and civil society activists struggled to make their voices heard (Noor, 2024).

This reflects a broader issue: global climate summits, which should serve as platforms for urgent action, often become arenas where those responsible for the crisis retain the most influence. Institutions that should lead on climate action remain entangled with the actors who have benefited from the exploitation of fossil fuels. Instead of holding big polluters accountable, the international process often grants them a seat at the table, normalising their influence and reducing urgent matters of survival and justice into topics for polite, inconclusive debate. I found it impossible not to recall past leaders who have derided climate science, from Ronald Reagan's absurd comment that "trees cause more pollution than automobiles" to Donald Trump's notorious dismissal of global warming as a hoax. While these statements may seem outdated, the attitudes they represent persist. Some European leaders, who publicly acknowledge the climate crisis, still fail to prioritise the voices of frontline communities or to frame the crisis as a profound injustice demanding reparative measures.

The failures of COP29 in Baku highlight something more problematic: the continued dominance of powerful nations and corporations over the climate agenda. For all the talk of "climate cooperation", the underlying message from wealthy, high-emitting countries remains defensive and profit-oriented. Unless climate governance actively prioritises justice and accountability over economic interests, these summits risk becoming symbolic exercises rather than catalysts for change.

Moore's (2015) *Capitalocene* framework helps explain why these governance failures persist. By shifting the focus away from a generic "humanity" and toward capitalism as the driving force behind ecological destruction, Moore highlights how climate policy remains constrained by an economic system that prioritises endless accumulation over planetary sustainability. This analysis directly challenges the SDGs, which, despite their environmental rhetoric, remain embedded in a neoliberal paradigm that assumes economic growth (SDG 8) can be decoupled from environmental harm. Similarly, Fraser's (2017) work on *expropriation and exploitation* underscores how capitalism externalises ecological costs onto the most vulnerable populations. Wealthier nations continue to accumulate capital while poorer nations bear the brunt of environmental degradation. From this perspective, climate reparations are not just about financial compensation but about fundamentally restructuring global economic relations to redress the historical and ongoing expropriation of land, labour, and resources.

4. The climate crisis: Inequities and consequences

The injustice of climate change is painfully clear. Wealthy, industrialised countries have emitted the bulk of greenhouse gases for decades, effectively using the atmosphere as a free dumping ground. This "carbon debt" is immense, yet the very nations that contributed least now face disproportionately severe consequences. Small island states like Tuvalu and Kiribati confront existential threats as rising seas swallow their lands, while nations in sub-Saharan Africa grapple with intensifying droughts, collapsing agricultural systems, and mounting instability (Paul, 2020).

The principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities" (Stone, 2004), which underpins international climate treaties, acknowledges these inequalities. Yet acknowledgement does not translate into sufficient action. Again and again, rich nations fail to meet their finance commitments, leaving poorer nations to struggle with adaptation and mitigation on their own. The most vulnerable communities rarely have the resources to build flood defences or restructure their economies to withstand climate shocks. They are forced to adapt, with limited means, to a crisis not of their making.

This reality is morally jarring. How can we accept that communities in Bangladesh must elevate their homes to escape rising floodwaters, or that farmers in parts of Africa must abandon ancestral lands due to persistent droughts, when their societies contributed so little to the problem? To me, this disparity is not just a statistical oddity - it is a moral failing. It underscores why climate justice is not a peripheral issue but a central, inescapable dimension of any meaningful conversation about climate action.

This dynamic persists today, as resource extraction and industrial pollution in developing nations continue to fuel the economies of wealthier states. Colonial powers drained colonies of raw materials - coal, minerals, timber - to feed burgeoning industries. This extraction came with ecological devastation and extreme poverty. After the colonial era ended formally, these exploitative patterns persisted through unequal trade relationships and a global economic system that still favours wealthier nations. Brand and Wissen (2021) argue that affluent societies sustain their lifestyles through an "imperial mode of living", whereby consumption in the Global North relies on continuous extraction and ecological degradation elsewhere, externalising environmental and social costs onto poorer nations. The comforts enjoyed in wealthy nations cannot, therefore, be detached from the hardships endured elsewhere. When I think about overconsumption, I recall reading *A Vision from the South: How Wealth Degrades the Environment* (Kirana et al., 1992) during my early PhD days. That book profoundly influenced my thinking. It dissected Dutch society as an example of how wealth fuels ecological harm, highlighting how an affluent nation produces disproportionate waste and emissions while benefiting from the very inequalities that sustain its lifestyle. Although Dutch society and others have made strides in environmental consciousness, the underlying point remains: high levels of consumption in wealthy societies still rest on extractive processes that harm poorer nations and the planet at large.

For me, this is a key lesson: no form of Western prosperity is isolated from global consequences. Every car journey, every round of consumer purchases in an affluent society, is linked - however indirectly - to global supply chains, resource extraction, and emissions. As Brand and Wissen (2021) highlight, understanding climate change through this lens reveals it as not merely an environmental crisis, but a symptom of longstanding and ongoing global inequalities. As the authors of *A Vision from the South* insisted, Dutch prosperity

could not be disentangled from the hardships endured in the Global South. This dynamic holds true for other wealthy nations. Recognising this connection means understanding that climate change is not a sudden calamity, but the long-anticipated outcome of economic and social systems that valorise growth and profit over justice and planetary boundaries.

I once harboured the illusion that wealth and technology might help rich nations sidestep the worst of climate change. But the past decade has torn apart that comforting notion. Massive wildfires have ravaged California, Canada, and Australia. Heatwaves have caused thousands of deaths in Europe. Floods have battered Germany, the UK, and Spain, and the infrastructures of these nations, built for a different climate era, are straining under new environmental extremes. Beck (1986) wrote about the “risk society” and how the toxins and hazards created by industrialisation eventually “boomerang” back to those who produce them. Climate change validates his warning. No matter how wealthy or technologically advanced a society might be, it cannot fully shield itself from droughts that disrupt food supplies, storms that cripple energy grids, or heatwaves that collapse public health systems. Over \$165 billion in climate-related disasters hit the United States in 2022 alone (Smith, 2023), and Europe is likewise paying a steep price. If we fail to address injustice at its source, instability will eventually engulf us all - manifesting not only in economic and social turmoil but also in widespread displacement and the erosion of legal protections for those most affected.

One particularly urgent and often overlooked consequence of these inequalities is climate-induced displacement. Across many regions, people are being forced to flee their homes due to rising seas, droughts, floods, and other environmental devastations. Yet, these individuals currently lack legal recognition under the 1951 Refugee Convention, which does not account for environmental causes of displacement. This omission reflects a troubling failure to adapt international law to contemporary climate realities (McAdam, 2020). I believe this legal gap urgently needs addressing. The creation of a dedicated UN Climate Displacement Treaty could offer a binding international framework to ensure that those displaced by climate impacts are not treated as stateless populations without rights. Proactive legal recognition, rather than ad hoc humanitarian responses, is necessary to uphold their dignity and protect their futures.

Climate change is the ultimate leveller. It respects no national boundaries and no bank accounts. While poorer nations remain the most vulnerable, no fortress of affluence can remain unbreached indefinitely. This interconnectedness suggests that wealthy countries should view reparative and adaptive measures not only as moral imperatives but also as acts of enlightened self-interest. If we fail to address injustice at its root, the cascading effects will eventually impact all societies, including the most privileged.

5. Towards justice: Reparative and transformative action

5.1 Reconceptualising reparations: From compensation to transformation

Academic discussions on ecological reparations and climate debt highlight that reparative actions go beyond financial compensation; they are fundamental steps toward global ecological justice. Salleh (2009) introduces ecological debt as a historical obligation resulting from the industrialised world's excessive consumption and environmental damage inflicted upon poorer nations. She argues that addressing this debt is a moral and political necessity, not merely a matter of financial payments. Instead, it requires recognising how capitalist development depends on unequal ecological exchanges that disproportionately harm marginalised communities, particularly women, who often bear the most severe consequences.

Expanding on this, Táíwò (2022) frames reparations as an opportunity for systemic transformation, advocating for empowering affected communities with genuine autonomy to define their own sustainable futures. Reparations, therefore, should not be reduced to financial transfers but should serve as mechanisms for reshaping global economic and political structures. Watson (2024) further argues from a political economy perspective, stating that meaningful reparations must disrupt the existing power structures of transnational capitalism rather than perpetuate economic dependency. He calls for structural changes in international economic relations to ensure that reparations strengthen sovereignty and self-determination for climate-vulnerable nations, rather than perpetuating existing inequalities.

Building on these perspectives, I contend that reparative action must extend beyond conventional climate finance, which often provides insufficient funding attached to restrictive conditions that reinforce dependency. This legacy of uneven development underscores why climate reparations must be framed as obligations rather than voluntary aid. Thus, climate reparations should not be framed as acts of charity but as obligations to rectify historical injustices. However, financial commitments remain inadequate. Estimates suggest that poorer nations require at least \$1 trillion annually for effective adaptation and mitigation, yet much of the pledged funding has either failed to materialise or remains tied to restrictive conditions (Abnett, Volcovici & Strohecker, 2024).

5.2 Structural barriers and pathways: Finance, technology, and law

To meaningfully address climate injustice, international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank must abandon austerity-driven policies that constrain environmental investment and climate resilience in developing countries. Instead, they should prioritise debt relief, grant-based financing, and unconditional technology transfers to ensure that frontline communities receive the necessary resources for adaptation and sustainable development. Yet financial measures alone are insufficient. Climate justice also requires equitable access to technology and knowledge, but corporate patents and restrictive trade agreements frequently obstruct access to essential innovations such as drought-resistant crops, renewable energy technologies, and early warning systems. The monopolisation of climate solutions through intellectual property laws exacerbates global inequalities. To address this, wealthier nations must implement open technology-sharing policies, reform restrictive patent laws, and limit corporate control over essential technologies. Without these structural interventions, reparations risk reinforcing rather than resolving global inequalities.

A more sustainable path requires rethinking economic prosperity beyond GDP metrics and toward models that centre ecological balance and well-being. Achieving climate justice necessitates redefining prosperity beyond economic expansion, prioritising well-being, ecological balance, and fair resource distribution. Alternative frameworks such as doughnut economics (Raworth, 2017) and Buen Vivir (Lantigua, 2023) offer pathways to a more sustainable and equitable world. However, adopting these frameworks requires significant

shifts in global trade policies, investment strategies, and governance structures. Rather than sustaining consumption-driven economies, I advocate for resilience-focused, culturally grounded development strategies such as circular economies and locally empowering initiatives.

Despite recognising the necessity of reparations, I remain concerned about enforcement mechanisms. Without legally binding commitments, reparative actions risk becoming symbolic rather than substantive. Debt-for-climate swaps, such as Seychelles' 2016 initiative (Chamon et al., 2022), provide a viable model by redirecting debt payments toward climate resilience projects. This approach could alleviate financial burdens while addressing structural inequalities in global finance. Additionally, climate litigation has emerged as a powerful accountability tool. For example, the Urgenda case in the Netherlands (Peel & Osofsky, 2020) set a precedent by legally mandating accelerated emissions reductions. Similar legal strategies could effectively hold governments and corporations accountable, akin to past lawsuits against the tobacco industry.

The establishment of the Loss and Damage Fund at the 2022 UN Climate Change Conference marks progress in recognising the climate debt of high-emitting nations. However, its voluntary nature raises concerns about its effectiveness (Roberts & Pelling, 2022). To ensure meaningful accountability, climate debt obligations must be embedded within legally enforceable international agreements. Integrating reparative commitments into compliance mechanisms such as the Paris Agreement is crucial for ensuring genuine accountability.

Beck's (1986) concept of reflexive modernisation has further shaped my understanding of societal responses to climate risk. He argues that as awareness of self-generated dangers grows, societies begin to question traditional institutions and governance models. However, awareness alone is not enough - structural change must follow to prevent institutional stagnation. The increasing frequency of climate-induced disasters, such as heatwaves, cyclones, and wildfires, exposes the limitations of incremental policy approaches, underscoring the need for decisive, transformative action.

5.3 Building collective will: Education, participation, and solidarity

I argue that systemic change requires sustained grassroots movements and public pressure. As Tarrow (2011) notes, significant political change is typically driven by collective action rather than elite-led initiatives. Movements such as Extinction Rebellion, Indigenous-led environmental resistance, and campaigns for Loss and Damage funding are actively reshaping political possibilities, advocating for participatory decision-making, Indigenous sovereignty, and systemic economic transformation. Addressing climate justice necessitates moving beyond GDP-centric economies to models that prioritise universal access to essential services, ecological sustainability, and human well-being. Examples such as Costa Rica's emphasis on social investment over GDP growth (Klein, 2014) and Finland's national circular economy roadmap (European Environment Agency, 2024) illustrate practical alternatives. By embedding reparative actions within broader structural transformations, we can cultivate global solidarity, ecological sustainability, and genuine equity.

As I reflect on what might actually make these reparative visions possible, I keep coming back to the question of collective will. While the strategies I have explored - climate finance reform, legal accountability, and alternatives to GDP - are essential, they still depend on something deeper: the social and political conditions that make bold action possible. Without a shift in how we think, engage, and organise, even the best ideas risk staying on paper.

One approach I find hopeful is the growing use of citizens' assemblies on climate issues. In places like Ireland and France, randomly selected citizens have come together - supported by independent facilitators and expert input - to discuss climate policy and produce recommendations that are both ambitious and publicly legitimate (Devaney et al., 2020; Smith, 2021). Embedding such participatory forums more systematically into how decisions are made could help disrupt political inertia and build broader support for change. Education also matters here. UNESCO (2022) has been calling for climate justice to be embedded in both formal and informal education - not just as a set of facts, but as a way of thinking and relating to others. I believe that without this cultural shift - one that normalises care, equity, and ecological responsibility - our efforts will continue to feel fragmented.

I have also been inspired by the cross-border solidarity I have seen between grassroots climate movements, particularly across the Global South. Civil society networks like the Global Campaign to Demand Climate Justice, or regional alliances such as the Pan African Climate Justice Alliance, are creating platforms for resistance and knowledge exchange that feel far more grounded and reciprocal than the top-down initiatives I criticised earlier. Supporting these efforts - financially, institutionally, and diplomatically - seems to me not just strategic but ethically necessary (Martinez-Alier et al., 2016).

Lastly, I think we need to be honest about the limits of goodwill alone. Change also requires binding rules, protected spaces for dissent, and formal mechanisms that guarantee inclusion. Legal mandates for independent climate monitoring, guaranteed representation for frontline communities, and participatory governance in climate funding bodies - these are not just procedural tweaks; they are safeguards against business-as-usual politics. In short, the question of *how* we build collective will has no single answer. But I believe the seeds are already there - in classrooms, in assemblies, in transnational alliances, and in the growing insistence from communities around the world that climate justice is not a gift to be granted but a right to be reclaimed.

6. Conclusion: Global solidarity and the path forward

The complexity of the climate crisis might tempt us to despair, but I hold onto a hopeful vision that we can forge a path forward through genuine global solidarity. This solidarity must go beyond diplomatic niceties and performative commitments. It must reflect a shared understanding that climate change ties our fates together, binding Parisian bankers, Toronto IT professionals, Bangladeshi farmers, and Pacific islanders into one interconnected human community. Though the worst impacts are concentrated in the Global South, climate change has become an undeniable force shaping lives across the world.

However, as I discussed earlier, global solidarity cannot be reduced to abstract moral appeals - it must be embedded in legal, financial, and institutional mechanisms that ensure sustained and equitable cooperation. This means ensuring that international frameworks are aligned with justice-based principles, and that affected communities are meaningfully included in shaping policy decisions that impact their futures. Climate-induced

displacement, for example, which I discussed in Section 4, remains an under-addressed issue that underscores the urgency of rethinking our international legal and humanitarian frameworks.

Addressing climate justice means going beyond balancing emissions ledgers - it requires acknowledging historical responsibility and confronting the uncomfortable realities of exploitation and environmental harm. As I previously discussed, the comforts enjoyed in affluent societies are intertwined with resource extraction and ecological degradation elsewhere, externalising environmental and social costs onto poorer nations. Climate change, therefore, is not just an environmental crisis but a symptom of persistent global inequalities. I often think of Beck's (1986) analogy: two men have two apples; one eats both, yet it appears on average that they each ate one. This statistical illusion obscures inequalities. Climate change operates in the same way. We talk of global average temperatures and per capita emissions, but these metrics fail to capture the fact that some communities suffer devastating consequences while others observe the crisis from a position of relative security.

Too often, climate action is framed within Global North-led initiatives, imposing conditional funding structures on developing nations. These approaches reinforce existing power imbalances, leaving poorer nations dependent on Western financial institutions that dictate the terms of their transition. I believe that South-South cooperation offers a powerful alternative, enabling climate-vulnerable nations to shape their own responses without reliance on extractive financial systems. The African Renewable Energy Initiative (AREI), which promotes decentralised renewable energy projects across the continent, is a promising example of how climate transitions can be led from within the Global South (Newell & Taylor, 2020). Strengthening regional climate alliances and fostering horizontal cooperation between developing nations could help shift climate governance away from top-down interventions and towards models based on mutual empowerment and shared knowledge.

This commitment to solidarity must also be reflected in everyday actions. It includes making ethical consumer choices, supporting fair trade, and resisting corporate lobbying in politics. It means donating to community-led climate projects, pushing for stronger environmental

regulations, and holding governments accountable for their promises. However, solidarity must be reciprocal. Too often, wealthier nations assume the role of benefactors rather than recognising the knowledge, cultural wisdom, and innovative adaptation strategies that climate-vulnerable communities have developed. A just response requires mutual respect and the open sharing of solutions, not the imposition of externally devised policies that ignore local realities.

The path forward requires political courage and moral clarity. The climate crisis is not simply an environmental emergency; it is a political reckoning that exposes systemic inequalities and forces us to rethink the structures that govern our world. We cannot afford to treat climate justice as an abstract principle to be debated in policy circles. It must become the foundation of our legal systems, financial institutions, and global governance frameworks. For this to happen, the climate movement must not only demand policy changes but also challenge the underlying economic and political assumptions that have led us to this point.

I see climate justice as both an urgent responsibility and an unprecedented opportunity. The choices we make today will determine whether future generations inherit a world of scarcity, displacement, and conflict, or one rooted in equity, resilience, and sustainability. The solutions exist - the question is whether we have the collective will to implement them. Whether we seize this moment or allow the status quo to persist will determine not only the fate of the planet but also the future of global justice.

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