

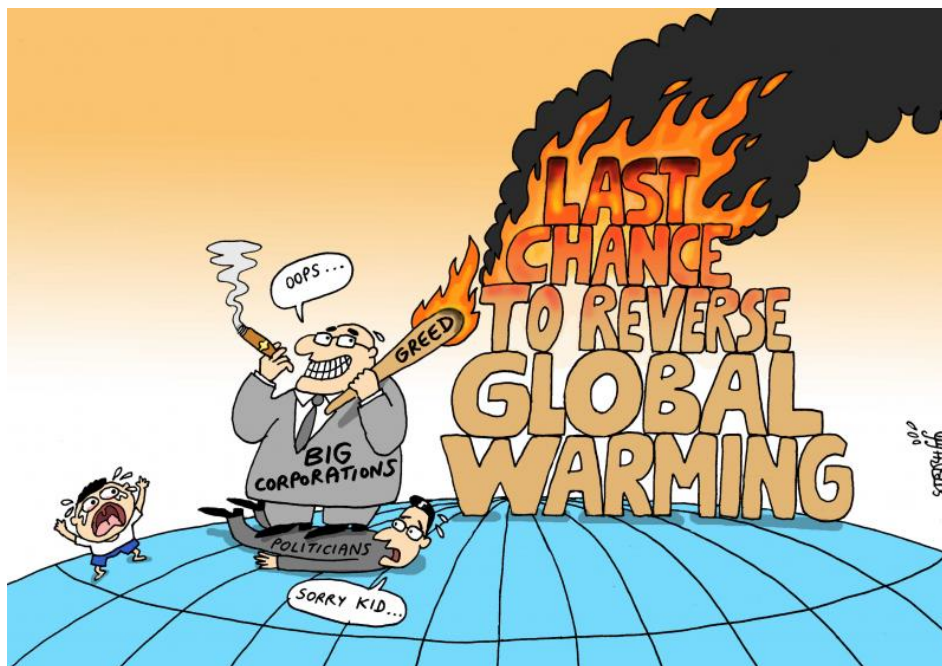
Climate Injustice at Glasgow Cop-Out¹

By Jomo Kwame Sundaram² and Anis Chowdhury³

The planet is already 1.1°C warmer than in pre-industrial times. July 2021 was the **hottest month** ever recorded in 142 years. Despite the pandemic slowdown, 2020 was the **hottest year** so far, ending the **warmest decade** (2011-2020) ever.

Betrayal in Glasgow

Summing up widespread views of the recently concluded Glasgow climate summit, former Irish President **Mary Robinson** observed, “People will see this as a historically shameful dereliction of duty, ... nowhere near enough to avoid climate disaster”.



<https://cartoonmovement.com/>

A hundred civil society groups **lambasted** the Glasgow outcome: “Instead of a multilateral agreement that puts forward a clear path to address the climate crisis, we are left with a document that takes us further down the path of climate injustice.”

¹ First published on Interpress Service, on November 23, 2021 at <http://www.ipsnews.net/2021/11/climate-injustice-glasgow-cop/>.

² Jomo Kwame Sundaram, a former economics professor, was United Nations Assistant Secretary-General for [Economic Development](#), Assistant Director-General of the [UN Food and Agriculture Organization](#) (FAO) and received the [Wassily Leontief Prize for Advancing the Frontiers of Economic Thought](#) in 2007.

³ Anis Chowdhury, a former professor of economics at the [University of Western Sydney](#), held senior United Nations positions during 2008–2015 in New York and Bangkok.

Even if countries fulfil their Paris Agreement pledges, global warming is now expected to rise by 2.7°C from pre-industrial levels by century's end. [Authoritative projections](#) suggest that if all COP26 long-term pledges and targets are met, the planet will still warm by 2.1°C by 2100.

The United Nations Environment Programme suggests a strong chance of [global warming disastrously rising over 1.5°C](#) in the next two decades. Earlier policy targets – to halve global carbon emissions by 2030, and reach 'net-zero' emissions by 2050 – are now recognized as inadequate.

The Glasgow UN Framework Convention on Climate Change 26th Conference of Parties (COP26) was touted as the world's 'last best hope' to save the planet. Many speeches cited disturbing trends, but national leaders most responsible for greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions offered little.

Thus, developing countries were betrayed yet again. Despite contributing less to accelerating global warming, they are suffering its worst consequences. They have been left to pay most bills for 'losses and damages', adaptation and mitigation.

Glasgow setbacks

Glasgow's two biggest hopes were not realized: renewing targets for 2030 aligned with limiting warming to 1.5°C, and a clear strategy to mobilize the grossly inadequate US\$100bn yearly – promised by rich country leaders before the Copenhagen COP in 2009 – to help finance developing countries' efforts.

An exasperated African legislator dismissed the [Glasgow Leaders' Declaration on Forests and Land Use](#) as an "empty pledge", as "yet another example of Western disingenuousness ... taking on the role of 'white saviour'" while exploiting the African rain forest.

Meanwhile, far too many loopholes open to abuse remain, undermining efforts to reduce emissions. Further, no commitment to end fossil fuel subsidies globally – at [US\\$11 million every minute](#), i.e., around US\$6 trillion annually – was forthcoming. No new oil and gas fields should be developed for the world to have a chance of getting to net-zero by 2050. Nevertheless, governments are still approving such projects, typically involving transnational corporate giants.

Various measures – e.g., 'carbon capture and storage' and 'offsetting' – have been touted as solutions. But carbon capture and storage technologies remain controversial, unproven at scale, expensive and rarely cost-competitive.

The Glasgow outcome did not include any commitment to fully phase out oil and gas. Meanwhile, the language on coal has been diluted to become virtually toothless: coal-powered plants will now be 'phased down', instead of 'phased out'.

Offsets off track

Offset market advocates claim to reduce emissions or remove GHGs from the atmosphere by some to 'off-set' emissions by others. Thus, offsetting often means paying someone

poor to cut GHG emissions or forcing them to pay someone else to do so. With more means, big business can more easily afford to 'greenwash'.

Carbon offset markets have long overpromised, but underdelivered. As they typically exaggerate GHG emission reduction claims, offsetting is a poor substitute for actually cutting fossil fuel use. Meanwhile, disagreements over offset rules have long stalled international climate change negotiations.

Buying offsets allows GHG emitters "to keep polluting", albeit for a fee. Highly GHG emitting activities by wealthier individuals, companies and nations can thus continue, after "transferring the burden of action and sacrifice to others" – typically to those in poorer nations – via the market.

For Tariq Fancy – who managed 'sustainable investing' at BlackRock, the world's largest fund manager – the market for offsets is a "deadly distraction", "leading the world into a dangerous mirage , ... burning valuable time".

Meanwhile, most established offset programmes – e.g., the United Nations' REDD+ programme or the Kyoto Protocol's Clean Development Mechanism – have clearly failed to meaningfully reduce GHG emissions.

More than 130 countries have committed to achieve net-zero by 2050. But net-zero targeting has actually allowed the world to continue kicking the can down the road, instead of acting decisively and urgently to verifiably cut GHG emissions.

Hence, it is seen as a cynical "scam", "nothing more than an expensive cover-up for continued toxic emissions". Trading non-verifiable offsets – supposedly to achieve net-zero – allows continuing GHG emissions with business almost as usual.

Loss and damage?

Vulnerable and poor nations have argued for decades that rich countries owe them compensation for irreversible damage from global warming. In fact, no UN climate conference has delivered any funding for losses and damages to countries affected.

Rich countries agreed to begin a 'dialogue' to discuss "arrangements for the funding of activities to avert, minimize and address loss and damage". Representing developing nations, Guinea expressed "extreme disappointment" at this ruse to delay progress on financing recovery from and rebuilding after climate disasters.

Developed nations account for two-thirds of cumulative emissions compared to only 3% from Africa. Carbon emissions by the wealthiest 1% of the world's population were more than twice those of the bottom half between 1990 and 2015!

Low-lying small island nations – from the Marshall Islands to Fiji and Antigua – fear losing much of their land to rising sea levels. But their longstanding call to create a 'loss and damage' fund was rejected yet again.

South Pacific island representatives have expressed disappointment at lack of funding for losses and damages, and the watered down language on coal. For them, COP26 was a 'monumental failure', leaving them in existential peril.

Although historical responsibility for GHG emissions lies primarily with the wealthy countries, especially the US and the European Union, once again, they have successfully evaded serious commitments to address such longstanding problems due to global warming.

Climate injustice

For the UN Secretary-General, “[o]ver the past 25 years, the richest 10% of the global population has been responsible for more than half of all carbon emissions, and the poorest 50% were responsible for just 7% of emissions”.

The World Bank [estimates](#) that, if left unchecked, climate change will condemn 132 million more people into poverty over the next decade, while displacing more than 216 million from their homes and land by 2050.

Meanwhile, poorer countries – who have contributed least to cumulative GHG emissions – continue to suffer most. To address climate injustice, rich countries – most responsible for GHG emissions and global warming – must do much more.

Their finance for developing countries ought to be much more ambitious than US\$100bn yearly. Financing terms should be far more generous than currently. Also, funding should prioritize adaptation, especially for the poorest countries most at risk.

Further readings:

- Global Campaign to Demand Climate Justice, [Statement on COP26](#), 2021.
- World Meteorological Organization, [2020 was one of three warmest years on record](#), 2021.
- Climate Action Tracker, [Glasgow’s 2030 credibility gap: net zero’s lip service to climate action](#), 2021.
- UN Environment Programme, [Emissions Gap Report 2021](#), 2021.
- UNCTAD, [Trade and Development Report 2021 - From Recovery to Resilience: The Development Dimension](#), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2021.
- Irfan U., [Can you really negate your carbon emissions? Carbon offsets, explained](#), Vox, 2020.
- UNCC, [The Clean Development Mechanism](#), online.

Selection of earlier articles on hungerexplained.org related to the topic:

- Opinions: [Will Glasgow Fix Broken Climate Finance Promises?](#) by Jomo Kwame Sundaram and Anis Chowdhury, 2021.
- [Income inequality impacts on the level of greenhouse gas emissions and on vulnerability to the consequences of climate change](#), 2020.