

Historic legacies affect climate change survival in Caribbean

September 12 2017

The legacies of empire have increased the vulnerability of Caribbean states to climate change, according to University of Warwick expert Dr Leon Sealey-Huggins.

In a new paper published this week, Dr Sealey-Huggins finds that discussion of [climate change](#) has failed to pay enough attention to the social, political and historic factors which increase the vulnerability of Caribbean societies, and calls for a new approach focused on understanding and addressing these historic inequalities.

Caribbean island states are already experiencing more intense tropical storms, longer and harsher droughts, and more frequent floods, as a result of [climate](#) change.

According to Dr Sealey-Huggins, the geographical factors which make Caribbean states more vulnerable to the effects of climate change are exacerbated by "the legacies of empire."

These legacies include:

- economic dependence on tourism, agriculture and fishing - sectors which are particularly threatened by climate change;
- unequal power in diplomatic negotiations - resulting in climate change discussions prioritising the needs of the developed North over those of the global South.
- global indebtedness - leaving states more reliant on external

[financial aid](#) and limiting their ability to fund development and adaptation;

Caribbean countries have campaigned for strong climate targets, captured in the campaign slogan '1.5C to stay alive.' This refers to the limit of warming beyond which the island states will become unviable in the face of threats including rising sea levels, flooding, ocean acidification and drought.

Drawing on evidence from diplomatic correspondence published in 2010, Dr Sealey-Huggins argues that the failure of the international community to adopt this target shows how the interests and preferred approach of powerful industrialised nations "are prioritised in the climate regime at the expense of Caribbean societies."

The paper also describes how diplomatic correspondence depicted financial aid being made conditional upon political support, and identifies "bullying tactics" and the use of intelligence resources to strengthen the negotiating position of more developed nations. Dr Sealey-Huggins suggests that the lack of capital resources in the Caribbean results in the region being particularly vulnerable to manipulation through the use of financial aid in this way.

Commenting on his research, Dr Leon Sealey-Huggins said: "Climate change is more than a technical problem to be addressed by engineering or scientific actions. It should make us fundamentally question the way society is currently organised, and the globally uneven distribution of resources and power that has precipitated the crisis.

"Global inequality, with its roots in the histories of imperialism and colonialism, has affected the ability of Caribbean societies to deal with the challenges of climate change.

"We need to address these historical inequalities in order to move forward. An ethical approach to climate change including consideration of wealth redistribution to repay 'climate debt' is one model for doing this."

The paper, '1.5C to stay alive': climate change, imperialism and justice for the Caribbean is published in *Third World Quarterly*.

More information: Leon Sealey-Huggins, '1.5°C to stay alive': climate change, imperialism and justice for the Caribbean, *Third World Quarterly* (2017). [DOI: 10.1080/01436597.2017.1368013](https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2017.1368013)

Provided by University of Warwick

Citation: Historic legacies affect climate change survival in Caribbean (2017, September 12) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2017-09-historic-legacies-affect-climate-survival.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.