

Study shows 'dark side of ambition' in climate policy

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With the eyes of the world on COP26, researchers from The Australian National University (ANU) say the broader environmental and social implications of extreme emission reduction schemes need to be taken into account.

The researchers argue that [emission reductions](#) are essential, but must be

done in a considered way.

Lead author and Ph.D. researcher Hong Xu said: "China's [climate](#) actions can offer lessons in managing this potential 'trade-off', especially for those countries looking to take action post COP26."

First co-author and Ph.D. researcher Mr Aaron Tang added: "Policy driven by a single overriding metric, in this case, emissions reductions, can generate adverse side-effects."

In a new research paper published in *Environmental Research Letters*, Mr Xu and Mr Tang argue that these trade-offs represent "the dark side" of China's climate ambition.

"For example, hydropower is the largest renewable energy in China. But its unrestricted expansion has put pressure on fragile ecosystems, and increased the vulnerability of local communities, especially those forced to resettle," Mr Xu said.

"While reducing emissions is a crucial step, policymakers and analysts must also identify solutions that generate multiple benefits.

"These solutions should be consistent with local circumstances, meet local development objectives and needs and adapt to local priorities."

The authors suggest five things that should help guide future decision-making, particularly for countries taking big and rapid steps toward climate change mitigation.

Their recommendations include employing "bottom-up" initiatives like community micro-grids that are reviving [rural areas](#) in China, as well as ensuring more accountability in climate governance to help limit malpractice.

"More countries need to invest in robust and transparent evaluation of the environmental and [social impacts](#) of proposed emissions reductions policies," Mr Xu said.

Co-author Professor Jamie Pittock said: "Providing adequate retraining or compensation packages for those impacted is also crucial, as is involving more international organizations in climate governance and respecting host communities' rights and views.

"In order to ensure the success of the Paris Agreement, which aims to limit global temperature rises to 1.5 degrees Celsius, processes should be adopted to maximize benefits, minimize costs, identify potential conflicts, and understand the trade-offs of climate policies."

More information: Hongzhang Xu et al, The dark side of ambition: side-effects of China's climate policy, *Environmental Research Letters* (2021). [DOI: 10.1088/1748-9326/ac30bf](https://doi.org/10.1088/1748-9326/ac30bf)

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