

Too many words, too little action: Climate justice is essential to limit climate change

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The world is already at 1.1C and, consequently, along with steep reductions in greenhouse gas emissions that cause global warming, we must figure out how to adjust to the changes caused by the warming. This includes more frequent and intense weather events, changes in season dynamics, and impacts on ecosystems that have consequences for

human life (so-called adaptation). This latter action is the focus of the IPCC's Working Group II report on "Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability."

Today's IPCC report contains chapters on food and fiber, water, coastal ecosystems/oceans, ecosystems. There are regional chapters as well. But the chapter for which I am the co-ordinating lead author, draws on these and looks at the prospects of achieving Climate Resilient Development. Right now, it's not a good outlook.

Climate change is not going to be solved with technical solutions. Instead, it needs integrated efforts across all of society and around the whole world.

The IPCC's report last August (Working Group I: The Physical Science Basis) gave an unequivocal warning: we are going to reach 1.5 degrees warming soon.

We have a brief window of opportunity to act in the face of advancing [climate change](#). There is very little wriggle room. This key problem of equity is a major stumbling block we have identified. Concerted action is needed now.

Countries that need to develop, but cannot afford the cost of sustainable development, are being left to pick up the tab for a meal they did not eat and cannot afford.

These countries have been promised \$100 billion—to help them adapt to [climate](#) change—by those who did eat and can afford it.

But the funds, which would allow them to develop sustainably and reduce the risks posed to them by climate change, have not been forthcoming.

Despite global efforts to reduce poverty, there is still so much inequity and many of the world's poorest people live in places which are already being hit by the impact of climate change. If nothing is done, then there will be no way to limit temperature rise.

Climate resilient development emerges from explicitly bringing together actions to adapt to climate change with actions to reduce [greenhouse gas emissions](#), in order to advance sustainable development. Climate resilient development policies and plans need to aim to keep [global warming](#) below 1.5—as well as how to adapt to current and future impacts of climate change—while also considering how countries can continue to improve wellbeing and ensure equity around the world. Not just a few should be able to live in a climate resilient world, but all.

We need to think of taking climate action not just as [climate policy](#), but how every social choice made at this stage is going to affect whether we are moving towards lower or higher climate resilience.

Every decision taken by governments, companies—and individuals—has an impact. People do not always have a choice, often because of cost. But these social choices are critical. It is really difficult to make these policy decisions. And there is pushback from people saying reducing greenhouse gas emissions is going to cost too much money.

But inertia in the decision-making process is incredibly critical because the longer we wait, the more difficult it becomes, and we lose one window of opportunity after another. Once we have hit 1.5C, some impacts of climate change will become irreversible, particularly in some sensitive ecosystems. This considerably limits the options for adaptation and human development. It not only becomes really, really costly, but it permanently closes off many pathways toward climate resilient development.

There is some amazing research underway, including at Oxford that will help to reduce carbon in the atmosphere, both through technological and behavioral change. But climate change is already happening and there are limits to what adaptation can do—very real limits to how much we can nudge the ecosystems to deal with the increase in temperature and other climate-related issues.

We can see these limits in human systems. For example, when the temperature rises too high, there is a point at which working out-of-doors becomes a daily health hazard. Yet for many people, such work is the only option at the moment. And there is other evidence now that we are up against limits.

But technology does not have all the answers. For instance, you cannot find a technical solution to gender inequality, which is one of the drivers of vulnerability to climate change. This is why it is important to have diverse voices and different perspectives contributing constructively to identifying appropriate solutions.

At the same time, there is a real danger of the 'net zero' drive being used by governments and companies effectively to 'greenwash' continuing emissions—not really stopping emissions, but planting a few trees and using recyclable cups and saying you're net zero.

International climate governance, despite its slow pace, is a large part of the picture. This is currently mainly embodied through the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. It is under this umbrella that countries around the world have come together to agree that they want to keep global warming levels to 1.5 degrees C above pre-industrial levels.

One issue is that much of the work to adapt comprises development planning, which is not always done with climate change in mind. The biggest challenge, for a global response to climate change, is that

countries around the world have very different starting points for acting on climate change. Countries in the Global South especially are struggling.

The Working Group II contribution to the 6th Assessment Report focussed on "Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability" is available to the public on 28 February. The Summary for Policymakers will be available.

More information: Sixth Assessment Report:
[www.ipcc.ch/report/sixth-asses ... rt-working-group-ii/](http://www.ipcc.ch/report/sixth-assessment-report-working-group-ii/)

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