Foreword: Global Climate Justice

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This is an excerpt from *Global Climate Justice: Theory and Practice*. You can download the book free of charge from E-International Relations.

The scientific data is clear. Over the last decade, we have witnessed the hottest years on record, with 2020 being one of the five hottest years since records began. The World Meteorological Organisation has warned that the world is not on track to keep global warming to within 1.5°C above pre- industrial levels. The current rate of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions trends suggests the world is heading towards a global warming between 3°C and 5°C by 2100. The authors of the landmark Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Special Report on the Impacts of Global Warming of 1.5°C (2018) say urgent and unprecedented changes are needed to hold the increase in global average temperature between 1.5°C and 2°C. The Paris Agreement (2015) has set out bold ambitions to limit GHG emissions so as to prevent the worst impacts of climate change. Through their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), many countries have committed to reduce their carbon emissions by 2050; notably the United Kingdom has committed to get carbon neutral by 2050, and Scotland even adopted a 5-year lower target, 2045. This global ambition was vital in the run up to the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) and was even more pertinent as we approached COP27.

However, climate ambition comes with pressing questions. Who bears the burden of climate action as societies around the world transit to a low-carbon regime and to sustainable ways of life? Relatedly, who bears the burden of climate adaptation as societies adjust to with new climate scenarios? Moreover, with reference to climate justice, we understand that the impacts of climate change will affect some communities more severely than others. Low-income, marginalised and other disadvantaged groups will be hit the most. The inherent climate injustice is so profound that these communities will bear the economic, social and environmental burdens of climate change and will also be denied the right to a decent quality of life, despite not being significantly at fault for climate change.

The title of this book, *Global Climate Justice: Theory and Practice*, is pertinent as we head from COP26 and COP27 (which was also coined as the Africa COP) to COP28, and as the world grapples with identifying workable solutions to the climate crisis whilst protecting the most vulnerable. Understanding the theory of climate justice is fundamental for arriving at practical ways forward that meet the needs, wants and aspirations of communities on the front line of the climate crisis. Thus, the chapters in this book provide rich and deep insights on the nexus between theory and practice of climate justice. In saying that, I would like to turn my attention here to two critical issues that lie at the heart of finding participatory and practical ways to advance climate justice by putting theory into practice.

The first is *gender and just climate financing*. Finance is rapidly becoming the defining issue in the fight against climate change. Many countries are developing Long Term Strategies and NDCs for which finance is needed to implement, whilst at the same time, donor countries are under extreme pressure to meet the pledge of delivering $100 billion per annum by 2023 (3 years later than promised at COP15 in Copenhagen in 2009) and to agree on the New Collective Quantified Goal on Climate Finance from 2025 onwards. Fair and equitable access to finance will be vitally important for ensuring that financial resources reach all sectors of society and address both mitigation and adaptation needs. Currently, access to climate finance comes through large multilateral institutions, such as Global Climate Facility and Global Environment Facility, as well as smaller scale bilateral funds. Most of this climate finance goes to mitigation projects (often for renewable energy development) and to supporting infrastructure.

Often the main recipients of funds are governments and private sector actors that manage to seize large grants, loans and guarantees from development organisations such as the World Bank and United States Agency for International Development to the tune of between $10–$50 million. Comparatively little funding flows to adaptation projects, especially when they do not provide significant financial return on investment. Consequently, access to climate finance is neither fair nor equitable, resulting in women, youth and vulnerable people missing out despite often bearing a disproportionate share of the impacts of climate change. What is required is a call for a significant overhaul of the global, bilateral and national climate finance flow architecture and of climate change financing policies, so as to integrate climate justice considerations in the design and implementation of climate adaptation programmes. Raising awareness and building in processes for fair and equitable access to finance are vital for ensuring that climate funds are allocated to those who have benefited least from them so far, which can help them develop skills and build resilience in the fight against climate change. This would be a significant step towards climate justice.

The second point is *Non-Economic Loss and Damage (NEL&D)*. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report, "The human cost of disasters: an overview of the last 20 years (2000–2019)", since 1980 the world has seen an 80% increase in climate related disasters. These disasters disproportionately impact the poorest countries, i.e., the people who have contributed the least to climate change. Although it is often hard to pin down any specific disaster to climate change, there is evidence of an increase in the frequency of extreme weather events. Predictions that heatwaves, heat stress and heavy rainfall will become more intense and frequent in Sub-Saharan Africa have implications for the safety and survival of the poorest people in the world. Due to the loss of shelter, livestock, food, income and basic provisions, including access to water, many people, especially women, have been left distraught and broken. At the same time, recent evidence shows that extreme poverty is expected to rise for the first time since 1998 in Sub-Saharan Africa. In part due to the economic decline of the Covid-19 pandemic, over 500 million people are living in extreme poverty, in an intertwined climate and health crisis.

There is also growing evidence that women are the largest group of people to be affected by Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) caused by extreme weather, and this is also linked to sexual and gender-based violence. Women tend to face a higher risk of depression, anxiety, distress, suicide and grief following extreme weather. This correlates with research being conducted at the Mary Robinson Centre for Climate Justice at Glasgow Caledonian University and has led to the development and rollout of a programme of work to provide vital safety nets and support to women in Malawi.

NEL&D cannot be reckoned easily, in either monetary or other ways; hence the issue is often neglected, hidden and difficult to deal with. However, this does not mean that we should shy away from addressing NEL&D. In the interest of achieving climate justice, it is imperative that we 'understand better' NEL&D, and this will pose a novel challenge. Looking at this through a gendered lens, very often women and girls face increasing pressures due to climate change and the onslaught of extreme weather events, due to their roles and responsibilities: they are left vulnerable, they have to walk longer and farther to collect water and fuel wood, with the risk trafficking, sexual exploitation and resultant child pregnancy. Climate change exacerbates gender-based violence, and we know that in many developing countries women are on the brink of a mental health crisis. Accordingly, NEL&D is about going beyond repairing infrastructure, bridges and roads that have been destroyed to start 'repairing' people whose lives have been left damaged and broken. NEL&D is about the 'safety' not just the survival of the poorest and the most vulnerable. Although none of this is easy to quantify and qualify, NEL&D is an area of climate justice research which warrants much attention.

Looking ahead, I do not know what will be achieved at COP28 and beyond. But we must look towards ensuring a healthy and sustainable environment for all of humanity and delivering on our commitments to achieve climate justice. The protection of human rights and especially of the most vulnerable – socially, legally, financially and environmentally – is vital. This is not simply a moral duty of care or an act of compassion, but rather an obligation for the world's richest economic actors to put humanity in the conditions to live healthy lives with dignity.

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Tahseen Jafry is Professor of Climate Justice and Director of the Mary Robinson Centre for Climate Justice at Glasgow Caledonian University. She has extensive research and development experience on the social justice and equity aspects of climate change: climate migration and conflict, gender and poverty targeting, the management of natural resources, the geo-political nature of climate justice discourse and the psycho-social impacts of climate change. She has published widely in multidisciplinary journals, is Editor of the *Routledge Climate Justice Handbook* (Routledge 2018) and Chair of the World Forum on Climate Justice.