

The Solution to the Climate Crisis Is to Put Power in the Hands of Those Hit Hardest

The greatest injustice of the climate crisis is that those least responsible for it are hit first and hardest. But within this injustice lies the key to a just and sustainable future. ASAD REHMAN, executive director of War on Want, explains

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The greatest injustice of the climate crisis is that those least responsible for it are hit first and hardest. But within this injustice lies the key to a just and sustainable future – a movement for people and planet that centers the rights and struggles of the poor in the global South.

The climate crisis is often compared to the Titanic – we are headed for a fatal collision and must change course. But that’s not where the metaphor ends. Yes, we’re all on the boat. Yes, all our lives will be affected. But like the Titanic, the privileged have rescue boats and [the rest do not](#).

Citizens of wealthy – and overwhelmingly white – countries in the global North are on the deck sipping cocktails, listening to the orchestra and feeling sure of rescue.

Borderless world

But below deck, the poor, most marginalised, black and brown people will be the first to drown. Those locked inside the global South are drowning already and when they try to escape, they find the doors locked shut.

This is why the dream of a borderless world is resurfacing in progressive circles, especially amongst those focused on [the climate question](#).

Of course, most of the people on deck already experience a borderless world. With a UK passport, you can fly to 186 countries without even applying for a visa.

Likewise, multinational corporations are free to move their goods, their money and even their workers across borders with ease.

Those moving from former colonies are always ‘the immigrant’ but when white people with Northern citizenship settle abroad, they enjoy the status of ‘expat’. Ironic, then, that it is these relatively privileged voices telling us that a borderless world is impossible.

First and hardest

Borders in the modern sense didn’t even exist in the 19th century – when millions of white

Europeans migrated to North America, Australia and South Africa.

Most were drawn by European colonialists as a mechanism of control. Today they continue to imprison people, preventing them from escaping from the crisis our empires created.

During colonialism, Britain looted \$600 trillion from India alone. Today, just [10 percent of the world's population is responsible for 50 percent of all global emissions](#), which powered the global North's rise to dominance amidst the Industrial Revolution.

Meanwhile, the poorest 50 percent are responsible for just 10 percent. This is the great injustice of the climate crisis: that those least responsible for creating it are being hit first and hardest.

[Last year saw the hottest global temperatures since records began](#). In my home country of Pakistan, temperatures hit 53.5 degrees centigrade: the upper end of what human beings can tolerate outdoors.

Staggeringly frightening

In 2014, another heat wave killed 1,200 people in one city. In 2010, a fifth of the country flooded, affecting 20 million people. This – in a country where 40 percent of the population already lives in poverty – is a deadly threat.

It's a pattern we see repeated across the global South, from the 23 million people devastated by drought in Sub-Saharan Africa to the 7,000 killed and two million left homeless in the Philippines after Typhoon Haiyan. These are just direct 'disaster impacts'.

Global warming also devastates food security and water access while driving air pollution and preventable disease. Include these indirect deaths and estimates suggest that as many [as five million of our brothers and sisters are already losing their lives to climate-driven threats each year](#).

Some say that to win the argument on global warming we should avoid these staggeringly frightening numbers because people will stop listening.

But we must find a way to tell the truth without paralysing people with fear. We must do this for all those [millions of fellow human beings](#) for whom 'not listening' is a luxury reserved for those on deck.

Dirty energy

In the global North, it is our passports that protect us: powerful citizenships built on the backs of slaves whose descendants are still exploited by the global economy; a system whose arrogance built the ship and now locks its borders.

We must never speak of global warming exclusively or even primarily as an environmental issue. To do so is an act of theoretical genocide when it is, in fact, the defining social justice issue of our times.

Not much has changed since the colonial era except the language. In this neo-colonial system, exploitation of people and planet has been sanitised and [rebranded as](#)

[‘international development’](#).

The UK and United States governments have led the world putting corporate profit over human rights. They have enforced unjust trade rules and the privatisation of basic services and utilities, defending the right of corporations to the unbridled extraction of finite resources.

What calls itself ‘green capitalism’ is still subsidising dirty energy companies to the tune of [\\$10 million per minute](#).

Social justice

Neo-colonial free-market capitalism keeps the power to change course above deck, with a corporate captain whose career depends on staying the course.

Forced migration, global warming, poverty and hunger – these are the symptoms of a system in crisis.

It is a system as incompatible with present environmental reality as it has always been with the principles of human rights and democracy; a system set up to protect the rich and powerful, to the point where the world’s [eight richest individuals can claim the same wealth as the poorest 3.5 billion](#).

That is why environmentalism, social justice and migrant and refugee rights are so intimately linked. We will win on all these fronts – or none of them. Our only hope lies with a movement rooted in social justice and allied with those fighting and dying on the frontlines in the global South.

These are the communities we can trust with our shared future. They are the ones resisting fossil fuel corporations and pioneering beautiful solutions, from food sovereignty and agro-ecology to land rights and community-owned energy alternatives.

It is they who hold the keys to solving the climate crisis, tackling global inequality and ensuring us all the right to a dignified life, wherever we call home.

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