OUR CLIMATE; OUR COMMONS

ON THE RELATION BETWEEN CLIMATE CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT

THE "BIG SIX" ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR **60%** OF **GLOBAL CARBON EMISSIONS.** MEANWHILE, ALL **196 COUNTRIES** SUFFER THE SHARED **CONSEQUENCES OF CLIMATE CHANGE.**

DEVELOPING COUNTRIES ARE DISPROPORTIONALLY AFFECTED BY CLIMATE CHANGE, AND HAVE FEWER MEANS TO ADAPT. AS LONG AS THE BIG EMITTERS ENJOY ALL THE BENEFITS BUT ONLY PART OF THE BURDEN, THEY HAVE VERY LITTLE INCENTIVE TO CUT THEIR EMISSIONS.

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OPINION PAPER

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On the Relation between Climate Change and Development

We can only hope that the year 2015 will be marked in the history books as a pivotal year for both global development cooperation and for the battle against climate change. Both these larger-than-life topics will have known key summits by the end of the year (COP21[1] in Paris for Climate Change and the post2015 UN Summit in New York[2] for Development). By the end of the year, the World should have a new ambitious agenda for global development - the Sustainable Development Goals[3] (SDGs) or Global Goals - and have set itself limitations concerning Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions and mitigation and adaptation strategies for Climate Change.

What might be even more significant of the current era, is that for these two topics are being discussed in relation to each other. Increasingly, terms that were previously reserved for the development discourse - women's empowerment, equal distribution of wealth and resources, social justice, accountability - are popping up in the climate debate. Vice versa, the proposed Sustainable Development Goals contain a variety of environment-related aims on energy, marine life conservation, ecosystem protection and one goal - Goal 13 - entirely devoted to "taking urgent action to battle climate change and its impacts".

A shared burden

The connection between the two should come as no surprise. Climate change is inextricably linked to development issues such as poverty, health, food security, peace and migration - in both cause and effect. Droughts, floods, hurricanes and changing agricultural seasons - the increasing prevalence of which is commonly attributed to rising GHG emissions caused by human industrial activities[4] - have in the past caused and will in the future continue to cause harvests to fail, peoples' homes to be destroyed, infectious diseases to spread and people to leave their native lands. The global community has long since

1 http://www.cop21.gouv.fr/en

2 https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/summit

3 Report of the Open Working Group of the General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals (12 August 2014) http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/68/970&Lang=E

4 The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change writes in its 4th Assessment Report (2007): "It is extremely likely that human influence has been the dominant cause of the observed warming since the mid-20th century." https://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar4/syr/ar4_syr_full_report.pdf

recognised that not only are developing countries disproportionately affected[5] by these negative impacts of climate change, but also have fewer means to adapt to the new situation.

Developed countries, on the other hand, have since the Industrial Revolution around the turn of the 18th century been the largest beneficiaries of progress facilitated by innovations in transportation (the internal combustion car engine; jet propulsion for flight), production (coal and steam powered, conveyor belt factories), agriculture (mechanisation, pesticides and fertilizers) and communication (telephone, radio, TV, the internet). All these innovations are (potentially) major GHG emitters. In other words, developed countries have for two centuries reaped the spoils of activities which had negative side-effects not only for their own population and environment, but for the entire globe. Criticizing this fact, a group of developing countries lead by Bolivia submitted a proposal to the Bali Action Plan in 2009, introducing the term "Climate Debt": "developed countries' historical debt for their excessive past consumption of environmental space, and their continuing excessive per-capita emissions"[6]. The consortium called upon developed countries to repay their debt by taking the main responsibility in battling climate change. In fact, the 1992 Climate Change Convention[7] already called upon industrialized ("annex-1") countries to "[take] the lead in modifying longer-term trends in anthropogenic emissions". Unfortunately, the biggest industrialized countries (most notably the USA and China) have remained disappointingly unwilling to commit to any real mitigation efforts, either in their own territories or beyond.

The developed world's climate debt is not only historical. According to the Emissions Database for Global Atmospheric Research[8], the USA and the EU28 were jointly responsible for almost 23% of all the world's GHG emissions in 2010. The "big six" (China, USA, EU28, Brazil, India and Russia) gobble up an astounding 60% of the global emissions pie. Further, one should take into account that even when manufacturing activities - and thus the pollution, GHG-emissions and overconsumption of resources - are being outsourced to lower-wage countries in Asia, Africa and South-America, a very large part of the goods produced there are still being consumed by the West.

And now that developing countries are playing catch-up to the coveted Western standard of comfort and security, they are being told to do so without contributing to climate change. Quite the mission impossible, since economic development has (until now) invariably gone hand-in-hand with rising GHG emissions. According to WWF and the Global Footpint Network[9], if the entire world's population would consume resources at the same level at

5 The UN's resolution 10/4 on Human Rights and Climate Change (2009) recognizes that "while these implications affect individuals and communities around the world, the effects of climate change will be felt most acutely by those segments of the population who are already in vulnerable situations owing to factors such as geography, poverty, gender, age, indigenous or minority status and disability".
http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/E/HRC/resolutions/A_HRC_RES_10_4.pdf

6 Commitments for Annex I Parties under paragraph 1(b)(i) of the Bali Action Plan: Evaluating developed countries' historical climate debt to developing countries http://climate-debt.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/Bolivia-Climate-Debt-Proposal.pdf

7 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (1992)
http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/convkp/conveng.pdf

8 http://edgar.jrc.ec.europa.eu/overview.php?v=GHGts1990-2012&sort=des9

9 Living Planet Report 2014, WWF
http://awsassets.panda.org/downloads/wwf_lpr2014_low_res_full_report.pdf

which Latvia does currently, we would need 2,2 planets to sustain us. The environmental footprints of countries such as the USA or Australia are even bigger. Therefore it is vital that the developed world help the developing world skip this unsustainable step in their development, and together move to more sustainable patterns of production and consumption.

Mitigation, adaptation, compensation

If we are to completely halt and reverse man-made climate change, then society as a whole must level off and subsequently reduce its GHG emissions as soon as possible. Climate scientists have made models showing the possible implications to our climate if we were to continue emitting greenhouse gases at our current levels, and sketching possible scenarios for leveling off at different moments in time. The IPCC is currently focusing on a scenario that peaks at 450 ppm[10] (parts per million) CO2 or equivalent anthropogenic (man-made) GHG gas. This scenario would allow the global average temperature to rise 'only' 2 degrees Celsius above the pre-industrial level (1850). In order to reach this goal, we must decrease global GHG emissions by 20-40% in the year 2020, and by 80-95% until 2050[11]. By 2100, GHG emissions must be completely avoided, and even reversed through carbon capturing schemes.

Although almost all UN members already agreed this idea back in 1992, the how and who have been critical points of discussion ever since.

Mitigation

Under the umbrella term climate change mitigation, a host of technologies, economic schemes and political incentives have been proposed, tested and rejected - and more are under development still.

First of all, there are the technologies that are meant to help us overcome our dependence on fossil fuels for - most notably - transport, (food) production, heating and cooling. Alternative, (more) sustainable energy sources such as wind, solar, hydro, tidal and biomass are in various stages of development, but each comes with its own sets of problems. For instance, wind farms are often regarded as bird-killing eye-sores, while crops grown for bio-energy (rape seed, jetropha) could potentially take up land needed for food production[12]. A commonly heard expression is that there is no such thing as a silver bullet for the energy problem, but rather silver buckshot: a mix of various forms of sustainable energy that would together be enough to satisfy our (still growing) needs.

Another sector that is among the biggest energy consumers - and thus is seen as an

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10 To put this into perspective: our pre-industrial atmosphere contained only 275 ppm of CO2 (equivalent). The international NGO 350.org advocates 350 ppm as the absolute maximum beyond which "we risk triggering tipping points and irreversible impacts that could send climate change spinning truly beyond our control".
http://350.org/about/science/

11 Climate Change 2007 Synthesis Report of the IPPC
https://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar4/syr/ar4_syr_full_report.pdf

12 Ironically, NGOs are already reporting cases of land grabbing, where the land is being taken away from local communities to be used for seemingly sustainable green energy or carbon offsetting projects.
Caught in the Net: How "net-zero emissions" will delay real climate action and drive land grabs (2015), Action Aid
http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/caught_in_the_net_actionaid.pdf

important candidate for mitigation - is the agricultural sector. Since the Green Revolution of the mid-twentieth century, our food production has become heavily reliant upon petroleum; not only to fuel plows and harvesters, but also to produce artificial fertilizers and pesticides. Further, the cattle industry is one of the heaviest GHG emitters, accounting for 14,5% of global GHG emissions[13] (primarily methane, which is a much more potent GHG gas than CO2). Finally, soil and trees are a repository of nutrients such as carbon, sulphur, phosphorus and nitrates. Intensive farming and cutting trees cause these nutrients to be released into the atmosphere, causing a dual problem of soil depletion/deforestation and climate change. With up to 60% of the population of developing countries being employed in agriculture[14], mostly on small-holder farms, this is just as much a development issue as it is a climate change issue. But so-called Carbon Smart Agriculture, which was proposed by the FAO as a triple solution for reducing GHG emissions, supporting crop adaptation to climate change, and improving food security through higher crop yields, is already under criticism from NGOs for the risk that it "translate[s] into obligations for developing countries' food systems to take on an unfair mitigation burden."

While the above are examples of technologies that can replace GHG emitting activities with more sustainable ones are still under development, international bodies and governments are struggling with various carrots and sticks to force or entice individuals, companies and states to reduce their emissions.

Perhaps the easiest to understand is the concept of carbon offsetting - making up for carbon intensive activities by investing money in another climate-friendly activity. Most famous offsetting schemes for consumers are tree-planting initiatives which are promoted by airlines when purchasing a flight. Often these projects take place in the developing world, and have an air of development cooperation; replacing unhealthy, impractical coal-based stoves with solar-powered ones, or conserving rainforests through ecotourism projects. On a larger scale, the Kyoto Protocol[15] already included a Clean Development Mechanism, whereby industrialized countries would pay for emission reducing projects in non-industrialized countries in order to "contribute to compliance with part of their quantified emission limitation and reduction commitment". A major objection to this approach is the possibility for the emitter to "buy off his debt" without actually reducing his emissions.

More complicated are regulatory systems such as a Carbon Tax (based on the idea that the producer/consumer should pay the full price of a product, including the (often invisible) negative externalities such as pollution, GHG emissions and resource depletion) and Cap&Trade (a market-based mechanism that caps the total global amount of emissions, and then allows states/companies to buy the 'right to emit' off other states/companies). Although some (European) countries[16] have individually instated more or less explicit

13 Tackling Climate Change through Cattle (2013) - Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN
http://www.fao.org/docrep/018/i3437e/i3437e.pdf

14 FAO Statistical Yearbook 2012
http://www.fao.org/docrep/015/i2490e/i2490e00.htm

15 Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (1998)
http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/convkp/kpeng.pdf

16 Where is Carbon Taxed? http://www.carbontax.org/where-carbon-is-taxed/

carbon taxes, the EU as a whole opted for a Cap&Trade approach and proudly launched the EU Emissions Trading System[17] (ETS) in 2005. Somewhat disappointingly, ETS only limits power stations, manufacturing plants and aviation operators, covering in total only 45% of European emissions. For the first 8 years, ETS merely capped the amount of emissions allowed; from 2013 emissions allowances are reduced by 1,74% every year, which should lead to a 21% reduction by 2020. Unfortunately, on a global scale, where major emitters such as the USA and China refuse to commit to any of these regulatory schemes, "annual GHG emissions grew on average by 1.0 gigatonne carbon dioxide equivalent (2,2%) per year from 2000 to 2010 compared to 0.4 GtCO2eq (1,3%) per year from 1970 to 2000.[18]

Adaptation

And so, for smaller (and less developed) countries who may not contribute to climate change in the same amount as major states such as the USA, Russia or Brazil, but who will (and do already) feel the effects of climate change, the most urgent objective is to adapt to the new situation.

During the 2010 Climate Change Conference in Cancun, the UNFCCC urged all countries to start developing their own National Adaptation Plan (NAP) for climate change. Such a plan would help each nation analyse climate change-related risks, and develop the capacity to build adapt social, economic and ecological systems to a changing climate and build resilience.

Latvia, for instance, already started working on such a document in 2008[19] and has several policy documents related to environmental sustainability and climate change adaptation on the shelf, but has yet to publish a final NAP. Recognising that developing countries face arguably the biggest adaptation issues, a guideline[20] was drawn up by the Least Developed Countries Expert Group (LEG). Still, even with such a document as a support, carrying out an extensive risk analysis and actually initiating the necessary changes to build resilience is quite a tough nut to crack for countries that still struggle simply meeting the Millennium Development Goals. Yet again, the question boils down to: who will help countries adapt to this man-made global disaster?

Compensation

Even though it is clear that industrialized countries have disproportionately attributed to climate change through their historic and current GHG emissions, no country is ready to take full responsibility for any "climate debt". Similarly, even though there is a growing scientific consensus that disastrous climate-related events are increasing, "scientists are reluctant to attribute a single natural disaster to the change in climate."[21] Even harder, therefore, than the question of who is paying for mitigation or adaptation, is the question of who will compensate communities - specifically in developing countries - for any adverse effects they

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17 The EU Emissions Trading System - factsheet
http://ec.europa.eu/clima/publications/docs/factsheet_ets_en.pdf

18 Climate Change 2007 Synthesis Report of the IPPC
https://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar4/syr/ar4_syr_full_report.pdf

19 http://climate-adapt.eea.europa.eu/countries/latvia

20 Least Developed Countries - Technical guidelines for the national adaptation plan process (2012)
http://unfccc.int/files/adaptation/cancun_adaptation_framework/application/pdf/naptechguidelines_eng_high__res.pdf

21 Loss and damage from climate change: the cost for poor people in developing countries (2010) ActionAid http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/loss_and_damage_-_discussion_paper_by_actionaid-_nov_2010.pdf

might suffer due to climate disasters such as hurricanes, droughts, or slower processes such as rising sea levels or desertification.

In 2012 during COP18, the UNFCCC had its first lengthy negotiations about "loss and damages" in relation to climate change. The term is used to describe any unavoidable damages left after possible adaptation and mitigation efforts have been made. Understandably, developed countries were hesitant to set any precedents in accepting liability for a possibly endless list of claims. Equally understandably, least developed countries are worried that "at the existing pace it is unlikely that current levels of adaptation will allow societies to transition smoothly to a changing world."[22] Again, not only do they have fewer resources to bear the burden, but their burden is also heavier to bear. According to data from insurer Munich Re, developing nations currently spend 13% of their GDP on disaster relief, compared to 2% in developed countries[23].

During recent COPs, least developed countries lead by the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) which are facing the most acute risks, have become increasingly vocal about compensation budgets for climate change, apart from adaptation budget. An interesting proposal is to set up a climate change loss and damages insurance fund. In fact, as it is, the World Bank can already be seen as one of the world's largest insurers, taking into account all the development funds that it has redirected into disaster relief over the past years. A positive aspect of using the term "insurance" rather than "compensation" is that it takes away any connotation of guilt or liability. Critics of the idea, however, fear that any compensation or insurance scheme would take away the incentive for adaptation.

Climate Change and Development in Latvia

Meanwhile, in Latvia, neither climate change nor development cooperation seem to be very high on the public or political agenda, except in certain specialized circles of NGOs, universities and a small group of policy makers. Both topics are tucked away in their own corner: climate change falls under the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development[24], while development cooperation is handled by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs[25].

The large majority of Latvijas humble development budget (17 million euros) is funneled through multilateral EU and UN projects, giving Latvia only limited influence over its destination. The small bilateral budget (a little over 400,000 euros for 2015) is mostly spent on social projects in countries such as Georgia, Moldova,

22 Loss and Damages in Vulnerable Countries Initiative
http://www.loss-and-damage.net/download/6525.pdf

23 Loss and damage from climate change: the cost for poor people in developing countries (2010) ActionAid http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/loss_and_damage_-_discussion_paper_by_actionaid-_nov_2010.pdf

24 Vides aizsardzības un reģionālās attīstības ministrija (VARAM)
http://www.varam.gov.lv/lat/darbibas_veidi/Klimata_parmainas/

25 Ārlietu ministrija
http://www.mfa.gov.lv/arpolitika/attistibas-sadarbiba

Belarus, Ukraine and Afghanistan26. Neither climate change nor the environment is mentioned in the development plans for 2015.

In 2015, Latvia did have a major chance to to influence policy and procedure as it held the Presidency[27] of the Council of the EU during the first half of 2015. In this role, Latvia was part of drafting the EU's Intended Nationally Determined Contributions[28], which reaffirms Europe's commitment to the "2℃ objective" and a 40% reduction in GHG emissions by 2030.

But while Latvia obediently follows the international community (Latvia ratified the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in 1995 and the Kyoto Protocol protocol in 2002), there is little domestic urgency to tackle climate change. According to the Eurobarometer 2014[29], only 5% of Latvian see Climate Change as one of the most important issues facing the EU at the moment, and the topic was hardly mentioned in the last Saeima elections.

In fact, a warming climate might actually have some positive outcomes for a Northern country such as Latvia[30]. Longer harvesting and growing seasons, fewer springtime floods and more marine life in the Baltic Sea are some of the commonly named benefits. Resulting economic benefits would include more tourism and fewer necessity for heating during the winter. However, climate change does not simply mean that Latvian farmers can all start growing pineapples and coconuts; the entire ecosystem, forestry and agricultural system would need serious adaptation. And of course there are the foreseen and unforeseen negative impacts of climate change that also threaten Latvia: rising sea levels, heat waves, intense precipitation (rain, snow) spells. And more indirectly: rising food and oil prices, and a growing number of "climate refugees".

Concluding remarks: the climate as our commons

In 1968, ecologist Garrett Hardin wrote "The Tragedy of the Commons"[31], a now famous economic and sociologic article in Science magazine. Commons were pieces of communal land, widely used in Britain until the 17th century, which could be exploited according to need by the entire community (grazing sheep, picking berries, cutting wood). Hardin describes what happens to these commons when a single user starts acting in their own self-interest by over-using the land. The individual gain of, for instance, letting ten more sheep graze the commons far outweighs the shared loss through soil degradation. If you cannot stop your neighbour from over-grazing the field, what is to stop you from doing the same? The tragedy of the commons occurs when a few parties start over-exploiting them, finally biting

26 Attīstības sadarbības politikas plāns 2015. gadam, Ārlietu ministrija
http://www.mfa.gov.lv/images/Attistibas_sadarbibas_politikas_plans_2015.pdf

27 Results of the Latvian Presidency of the Council of the EU
https://eu2015.lv/images/news/2015_06_29_rezultati_EN.pdf

28 Intended Nationally Determined Contribution of the EU and its Member States (2015)
http://ec.europa.eu/clima/news/docs/2015030601_eu_indc_en.pdf

29 http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/pdf/spring_eurobarometer_july_2014.pdf

30 Globālās klimata izmaiņas un Latvija - Latvijas vides, ģeoloģijas un meteoroloģijas centrs
http://www.meteo.lv/lapas/globalas-klimata-izmainas-un-latvija?id=1863

31 http://www.sciencemag.org/content/162/3859/1243.full.pdf

themselves in the back, but first making the entire community suffer.

The World is our Commons. Our oceans, forests, fields - even the air we breathe - they are all part of a common property, which we may all fruitfully use. But when certain groups or individuals over-use it, we collectively carry the burden. Fortunately, the international community has started to realize that even though the short-term gains for certain companies or states might outweigh the short-term burdens - in the long run, we will all suffer from the negative impacts of climate change. As such, climate change might be the most important Sustainable Development Goal of all. And climate change mitigation is not just something that can be left to either developed countries as the ones who started over-using it in the first place, or to the developed countries who are now trying to catch up to modern production and consumption levels. Interestingly, in "Laudato Si'", pope Francis' 2015 encyclical on the environment, he deliberately moves the climate change-discussion into the domain of morals and ethics, calling upon all people of the earth to "forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God's image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures."[32]

It is a positive development that the international community (on many levels) finally seems to have recognised that climate change is a threat to both the developed and the developing world, and that the developing world has a large responsibility as well as the strongest power to mitigate it and help the rest of the world adapt to it. Another benefit of looking at the two topics in relation to each other is the possibility to avoid harmful impacts of mitigation activities on development issues, and vice versa. The impact on our climate must be considered for every single development activity we undertake, just as the impact on our planet and the people must be considered for every climate change mitigation activity that is proposed. However, we do have to avoid simply "sweeping the two topics into one bucket". Both Development and the Climate are vital, larger-than-life topics that deserve their own experts, activists, policy makers, and - perhaps most importantly - their own funding.

Materiāls izstrādāts Latvijas Platformas attīstības sadarbībai projekta "Glokalizācija – vietējā atslēga globālai attīstībai. Eiropas gads attīstībai 2015 un ES Prezidentūras projekts Latvijas ES Prezidentūrai 2015" ietvaros ar Eiropas Savienības (90%), Sabiedrības integrācijas fonda (5,42%) un Latvijas Republikas Ārlietu ministrijas (4,58%) finansiālu atbalstu. Autore: Janny Ramakers. Par materiāla saturu atbild tā autore un tas nekādā veidā neatspoguļo Eiropas Savienības oficiālo viedokli.
Vairāk informācijas www.lapas.lv

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Projektu līdzfinansē:

Projekta aktivitāšu ieviesēji: homo ecos:

32 Laudato Si' of the Holy Farther Francis on Care for our Common Home
http://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si_en.pdf