

How prepared is the international community to address the current environmental crisis?

To examine whether the international community is prepared to respond to the current environmental crisis, we must consider who makes up this community and the role they have within it. Too often, the phrase is used to refer to an exclusive group of industrialised countries because they are thought to be the most influential or committed to climate policy. It is becoming clear that the 'international community' is an inherently political term.

To adequately address the climate crisis, we must recognise the role of international collaboration and the detrimental impacts of acting alone. Therefore, the international community is made up of all the countries in the world regardless of their political stability, the size of their economies or their approach to climate change. As outlined by the IPCC's International Cooperation report, international cooperation is required because: greenhouse gases are mixing globally in the atmosphere, making anthropogenic climate change a global commons problem (1).

This essay will argue that the international community is not sufficiently addressing the climate crisis because

- i) The politicisation of green issues.
- ii) Industrialised countries are failing to help mitigate the effects of climate change on low-income countries.
- iii) Anti-immigration policies are threatening an effective climate response.

Political polarisation is dangerous when aiming for a united climate response. In an era heavily dominated by right wing populism, the climate crisis is becoming a positional issue

Eva Tollett

rather than a valence issue. A valence issue has a high level of consensus around the problem and its solutions. Whereas a positional issue has both alternative perceptions of what the problem is and its solutions. In Western democracies, policy is shaped by party competition. To appeal to voters, you must represent their attitudes and preferences on salient issues like climate change. The rise in populism has therefore impacted climate change policy because populist political parties advocate positions that place them outside the political mainstream to try and relate to the electorate and distinguish themselves from established political leaders. They acknowledge the inconvenience of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. By doing this, populist leaders contribute to the subsequent misconceptions that minimise the threat of the climate crisis. In the context of the United States, the response to the climate crisis differs dramatically between the Republicans and Democrats. Since Trump's election, Democrats across Congress voted for pro-environment legislation 92% of the time on average, compared with 5% for Republicans, according to an analysis by LCV (2). This climate scepticism translates into the behaviour and attitudes of individuals. For years, the environmental crisis was seen as a purely scientific issue, it was difficult for people to resonate with a phenomenon happening to the natural environment that they weren't necessarily in touch with. It can be argued that varying support for climate change policies now goes beyond party politics and is split by defining world views. Simplified, egalitarians are likely to believe that climate change is a huge threat not only because of the effect it will have on them but also on developing communities on the 'front line'. Whereas radical individualists put individual freedom and autonomy above all other values and are

Eva Tollett

therefore, less likely to support collective action. Whilst this is particularly prevalent in America's political landscape, it causes problems for effective climate response worldwide. If industrialised countries, who are less reliant on fossil fuels because they have the provisions to implement alternative forms of energy supply, can't generate consensus on climate issues – can they be trusted to influence the rest of the international community? We are seeing the implications of the politicisation of the environmental crisis in other countries too. For example, due to Abkhazia's main landfill site in Sukhum(i) being full, waste is being improperly disposed of in the southern Gal(i) region. The Abkhaz government claims that this is due to a lack of an alternative site and is aware that it is problematic. However, Georgia sees it as an abuse of the Georgian population of Gal(i), which is 98% ethnically Georgian, and the dumping is seen as politically motivated (3). This manipulation of the environment to gain political power cannot continue. If the international community wants to sufficiently address the environmental crisis, they must separate both party and state politics from their climate response.

Furthermore, the disproportionate impact that rising temperatures are having on the most vulnerable is becoming increasingly clear; industrialised countries owe the rest of the international community more assistance, as recognition for both the historical (during times of industrialisation) and current role they play in emitting greenhouse gasses. It is for a mixture of reasons that low-income countries will suffer most from the impacts, for example: their economies rely on agricultural jobs which will be threatened due to unpredictable weather events and therefore smaller yields, companies take advantage of

Eva Tollett

the lack of environmental regulation by dumping harmful waste in the water sources and their unstable healthcare systems mean vector- borne diseases induced by climate change can sweep through the population. This was acknowledged for the first time in the Paris Agreement in 2015 which reorientated the international agenda towards a “bottom-up” structure, emphasizing differing flexibility of governments to ensure there was wider participation amongst the international community. In a report by the IIED, published last month, it is suggested that 46 of the world's least-developed countries don't have the financial means to "climate proof" themselves. The IIED says these countries need at least \$40bn (£28.8bn; €33.8bn) a year for their adaptation plans. But between 2014-18, just \$5.9 billion of adaptation finance was received (4). Not only does this effect the countries' ability to mitigate and prevent the effects of the environmental crisis but also their ability to recover from it. Without satisfactory input, the conditions in the places will deteriorate, we will soon be seeing a large proportion of the world, particularly the global south, becoming inhospitable. There is conversation around trying to help developing countries reduce their emissions whilst maintaining a level of economic growth. For example, solutions considered include green investment into developing countries from both public and private sources to produce low-carbon jobs or meeting energy demands with investment into renewable options such as solar energy. Whilst reducing greenhouse gas emissions is important, it neglects the fact that the 52 lowest income countries produced only 1.6 percent of global CO₂ emissions in 2014, despite holding 19 percent of the world's population (5). Therefore, the focus should be shifted to ensuring industrialised countries are helping low-income countries respond to and recover from the impacts of climate change which will likely continue into the long term.

Finally, industrialised countries must consider how their anti-immigration policies will have to adapt as the environmental crisis continues. As the impacts of climate change continue, people will be displaced from their homes at an alarming rate. We will have to learn to live more efficiently because of the limits on resources and land space. We are already seeing the effects of the environmental crisis exacerbating conflicts and increasing the number of refugees. The Syrian civil war can be blamed for producing some of the largest numbers of refugees in recent history. However, there is growing recognition of the major role played by the drought that gripped the country from 2006 to 2010 had. This is because growing numbers of people in poverty moved into cities that were unable to care for them and therefore created conditions that led to conflict (6). There is an overwhelming consensus that as global warming and extreme weather events continue to rise, we will see a much larger number of refugees that can be directly attributed to the effects of climate change. Migrant's journeys can be exhausting and traumatic - dreadful tales of tragedies feature daily in the media. Those who do make it to their destinations continue to face uncertainty because of the lack of facilities in their host countries. Responsibilities are not well distributed: a small number of countries host disproportionate numbers of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants.

Through these three reasons, it is painfully clear that the international community is not prepared to address the environmental crisis. Politicisation of the environment has led to a spurt in climate scepticism and a lack of accountability when the environment is cruelly manipulated. Developed countries are evading responsibility for how their emissions are disproportionately impacting lower income countries. The increase in anti-immigration

sentiment and hostility further proves how the world isn't equipped to address the rise in migrants that will follow the climate crisis. These points are undoubtedly a case for further action, to protect the livelihoods of future generations who will have to deal with the climate disaster at its peak. In the words of David Attenborough at COP 26 – an example of the international collaboration needed that will hopefully set a precedent for the future – “Is this how it is doomed to end?”. To answer Attenborough's question, hopefully – no, but the international community must work together imminently to address this crisis.

- (1) https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/2018/02/ipcc_wg3_ar5_chapter13.pdf
- (2) <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/oct/11/political-polarisation-climate-crisis-trump>
- (3) <https://ceobs.org/environmental-governance-in-frozen-conflicts/>
- (4) <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-58080083>
- (5) <https://www.cgdev.org/publication/projecting-global-emissions-lower-income-countries>
- (6) https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/resrep28815.4.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Ae344a856f24341bb7dd2aa07a854d7b2&ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_search_gsv2%2Fcontrol&origin=

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