

Climate Justice

The world was never the same after 1492. This event resulted in a misshapen and malformed history that must be addressed on behalf of the generations that continue to be exploited. If at this juncture we do not address methodically, the consequences of the impact of European exploration, occupation and exploitation our futures will continue to be distorted and denied. Though there are many other issues we need to tackle, one of our very pertinent deliverables must be climate justice, significantly in the context of sustainable development. Countries where people of African descent live are now feeling the impact of climate change due to the occupation of European countries and their inhumane and ecological mismanagement. We need to understand that climate change did not simply emerge without any roots or chain of causation. Further that this issue cuts across all aspects of sustainable development including poverty reduction, education, infrastructure, sustainable cities, trade, transport and sustainable tourism,

Leading climate scientists and historians have all acknowledged that colonialism is a historic as well as an ongoing driver of the climate crisis. According to the 2022 Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the vulnerability of ecosystems and people to climate change differs substantially among and within regions and is driven by patterns of intersecting socio-economic development, unsustainable ocean and land use, marginalization, historical and ongoing patterns of inequity such as colonialism, and governance. There is also a current discussion on how the British utilised meteorological information to better connect territories colonised by the British Empire and speed up the exploitation of other people's land and water.

In, *How Britain Underdeveloped the Caribbean: A Reparation Response to Europe's Legacy of Plunder and Poverty*, Hilary Beckles articulates that from 1492, European encounters in the Caribbean and the Americas was marked by a system of wealth extraction that defined the region for four hundred years. It was this extraction system that led to the disproportionate impacts of climate change on low-income communities

and communities of colour around the world. It started with mining and the extraction of precious materials now found in the crowns and coffers of European royalty. It continued with sugar cane, tobacco and cotton which ensured an exploitative monopoly system that consolidated the development of each European country.

Those who have contributed the least to climate change are now bearing the brunt of the impact while the actions of colonialists, capitalists, and patriarchs continue to be denied by their descendants who are the primary beneficiaries of the development they enjoy due to the extraction from these countries, now viewed as under developed and backward. It is estimated that these countries which developed because of genocide and enslavement now contribute 80% of total greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, yet they deny their moral responsibility to address the impact of climate change on vulnerable countries like Small Island Developing States and low-lying countries. Let us call the names of those who are responsible for human-induced climate change: Spain, England, Scotland, France, the Netherlands, Portugal, Norway, Sweden and Denmark. To a

lesser extent we have Ireland, Russia, Germany and Switzerland. In *Capitalism and Slavery*— Eric Williams determined that European development and colonialism was dependent on African Slavery. He made the multi-layered connections between the growth of industrialisation in Europe and the enslavement of Africans and concluded that his work should not be limited to Britain as “the commercial capitalism of the eighteenth century developed the wealth of Europe by means of slavery and monopoly.”

According to a Report on the impact of hurricanes in the Caribbean since 1980, there have been over 280 recorded climate disasters in the whole Atlantic Region. These hurricanes include the dreaded names of Maria, Dorian, Irma and Michael. The cost of such catastrophes was estimated to exceed one thousand and 2 (1,002) Tn USD. This does not include the environmental impact of climate change on our oceans with coral bleaching, the migration of invasive species, the loss of low lying islands in the Bahamas; the evacuation of islands thereby creating climate refugees and the psychological impact of hearing heavy rains on our roofs.

Colonialism is not a thing of the past. Permit me to quote the news article in the Conversation that “historic injustices are not consigned to history: their legacies are alive in the present.” In fact, there are still approximately 61 colonies or territories in the world. Eight countries maintain them: Australia (6), Denmark (2), Netherlands (2), France (16), New Zealand (3), Norway (3), the United Kingdom (15), and the United States (14).

Today colonialism continues to oppress developing nations and minority communities globally. It destroyed subsistence farming and replaced it with plantations and commercialised farming; destroyed water ways and water supplies, which is now causing desertification in some areas; it forced the formerly enslaved to build their homes on marginalised lands away from the prime plantation lands; relegating them to precarious hills and mountain sides, on river beds and river banks, where they are now washed away by flooding; Yes colonialism and its institutions are alive and thriving as we continue to borrow money at exorbitant interest rates

to get us back on the path to development after annual disasters. Who will take responsibility for the constant repair and recovery.

Our call for climate justice must continue to resonate through out our calls for sustainable development and the right to development. We have to ensure that the calls for loss and damage are accompanied by statistics and evidence. We have to continue the fight for our survival and we ask for more resources be placed in the gathering of the necessary evidence. How many more must be washed out into the sea before we receive climate justice. We are worn out by the numerous futile climate change conferences, while the ominous fate of the hundreds of millions of inhabitants of SIDS seems watertight. Let us use the unambiguous scientific evidence but let us hear the voices of the affected, our youth must be more visible on the front line for climate justice. Finally, let our political leaders not flinch in the faces of the powerful deniers of their moral responsibility for climate justice. I thank you.