Colorado College at COP28 in Dubai:
Ethnographers Engaging UN Climate Action Efforts

A Collection of Final Student Projects

The CC delegation to COP28

Pre-departure photo taken on Nov. 10, 2023, by Cecilia Timberg '24.

INTRODUCTION:

Ethnographers with "Beginner's Mind" at COP28

The United Nation's 28th annual summit on climate change, also known as COP28 of the UNFCCC (Conference of the Parties for the United Nations Framework for the Convention on Climate Change), met in Dubai, United Arab Emirates in December of 2023. Of vital importance was the reaffirmation of the basic goal of the Paris Agreement, to confine warming to well below 1.5 degrees Celsius over pre-industrial temperatures. More specifically, the meeting was billed as the "Global Stocktake COP," assessing progress toward the Paris Agreement goals. In retrospect, a stand-out achievement of COP28 was an agreement on how a fund for Loss and Damage, to address the worst impacts of climate change on frontline communities in vulnerable nations, would be managed. Additionally, COP28 may in hindsight come to be viewed as landmark for consensus on "Transitioning away from fossil fuels in energy systems, in a just, orderly and equitable manner, accelerating action in this critical decade, so as to achieve net zero by 2050" (CMA2023: 28.d). Remarkably, this marked the first use of the words "fossil fuels" in a UNFCCC document.

For the fifth time, in 2023 a Colorado College delegation joined participating, civil-society observer organizations. This iteration came in the form of a course entitled "**Engaging COP28 in Dubai as Ethnographers."** Co-instructors Sarah Hautzinger and Myra Jackson selected eight students from over fifty applicants; most had completed the climate-facing prerequisite "Anthropocene," crosslisted in Anthropology and Environmental Studies. Both courses engage broad questions about the meanings of being human at a time of anthropogenically caused crisis. Approaching the COP as ethnographers invites a story-telling, "beginner's mind" approach to many facets beyond the central negotiations: students wrote about the people they met in attendance, what it meant for an authoritarian, oil-producing state like the UAE to host, and many of the side events, pavilions, and exhibits they took in on the periphery of the negotiations. As student ethnographers, they used straight-forward, first-person voices, avoided loaded or opinionated language in favor of thick description and evidence, and included the emotional weight – and commitment and passion – that our formidable climate challenges invoke.

--Professor Sarah Hautzinger, Anthropology and Environmental Studies

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Storytelling as Power: An Exploration of Empathy at COP28

April Kwan

Abstract

This paper is an ethnography of storytelling as an agent to engender empathy for argumentative strategies. Storytelling can be used as an appeal to people in positions of power, as observed at the 2023 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP28) in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. With this in mind, I am focusing on stories shared by minoritized people. At COP28, these stories coexist alongside the voices of world leaders and their efforts in negotiations and international solutions to "United, Act, Deliver" at COP28. I am concentrating on the stories of minoritized voices because of the deeply rooted inequalities in climate change issues. I will begin with my ethnography of storytelling at COP28 that includes talanoa dialogues and oral storytelling. Next, I will connect feelings and concepts of empathy to storytelling. Lastly, I will position storytelling within COP28 as an appeal to people in positions of power. This information forms a relationship between storytelling, empathy, and power as a means to create more equitable change. These connections seek to answer the question: Where is storytelling used? When is it powerful? In response, I argue that storytelling has the ability to create empathetic narratives of minoritized people to demand those in positions of power for more equitable solutions while celebrating minoritized identities.

Storytelling at COP 28

At COP28, it was quickly evident that climate change cannot be addressed without considering numerous lenses including policy work, international collaboration, reducing inequalities, and many more. The deeper I looked, the more complexities within different approaches and solutions to our climate crisis I saw. Still, I left each interaction and event at COP28 with a stronger understanding of the climate work that still needs to be done. My interests led me to events that explored relations between the Global North and South and that discussed methods to a more equitable relationship and called for a greater understanding between the two within the context of our current climate change crisis. The power dynamic between the global north and south is alarmingly apparent. The Global North is the highest emitter of greenhouse gasses while the Global South "bears the brunt of the burden," of climate change impacts, a phrase I heard numerous times at COP28. Bringing attention to climate injustices were followed by a call to action from indigenous voices, women, people of color, and

those from the Global South. These demands were frequently accompanied by stories, personal stories, community stories and storytelling as a general idea to be heard and shared. In every story shared, a marginalized voice was heard, celebrated, and contributed to climate action. I found myself in the role of listening and collecting information from people through their voices.

One mode of storytelling that was present at COP28 were talanoa dialogues.[*] A talanoa is an inclusive, transparent dialogue with no expectation of an end goal (Vaioleti, 2016). This process is indigenous to communities in Fiji and the broader Asian Pacific (Cintron-Rodriguez et al., 2021). It creates an environment where everyone's voices are heard and valued with no set collective agreement. The purpose of talanoa dialogue is to create a shared space for storytelling and to disseminate information. It has been present at COPs since COP23 and remains valuable as a method of storytelling (Cintron-Rodriguez et al., 2021). In talanoas people take turns sharing stories and listening to discover common ground, better understand differences, and form a connection.

At the Youth Talanoa Dialogue for Climate Action and Justice, youth from all over the world had the opportunity to participate by sharing their stories and listening. One woman used her space in the conversation to share someone else's story. She shared the story of someone in dire need for climate action because of the imminent threat to their livelihood. She used her voice in the conversation to make way for others and to spread awareness. Other participants talked about their purpose and role in climate action, shared their perspectives, and their emotional progression of their knowledge and feelings towards climate related topics. Everyone sharing their truth was as intimate and personal as the next. As participants, we listened with open hearts to acknowledge our similarities, our shared space, our collective learning and most importantly, our differences.

Another moment of moving storytelling was at the side event Loss and Damage, Human Rights & State and Corporate Accountability. One of the panelists, a Mongolian woman, shared about her home being one of the most affected places by climate change. Her community experienced loss of life due to the more frequent and extreme natural disasters. Additionally, they faced a loss of agriculture, something they heavily rely on. She shared a story about 124

[*] Editor's note: Some authors, including this editor, use upper case "Talanoa" – in part to uphold the privilege and responsibility Fiji bestowed by bringing their tradition into global service for climate work.

herders going missing as they searched for their livestock who had gotten lost in a dangerous storm. They were forced to undertake this risk because agriculture is their livelihood. As an audience member, I was struck by the intimacy and vulnerability we shared in the room. We listened as she shared a vulnerable moment and as listeners, we learned and left the space with newfound knowledge. Every story shared added to our collective understanding of climate change as a deeply personal crisis. A crisis that is more complex than sharing quantifiable statistics.

Another space I found impactful storytelling was at Africa's Green Industrialization where the host contrasted the formal conversation and demands of African heads of state with a more prosaic and grounding narrative. The host's prose-style narration provided a different approach to the formal conversation by introducing storytelling to connect their political statements. Heads of state discussed the potential for Africa in the role of fighting climate change through a political lens, discussing their nations resources and needs. In contrast, the host established a personal narrative within the overarching conversation by mentioning "Africa as mother" and how "The earth is crying, Africa is crying, and needs to heal with the earth", both sentiments created the story of Africa's stake. The creation of Africa's narrative personalized the political messaging and demands. Thus, setting the valuable role of storytelling and more personal conversations amongst the broader discussions of climate change. The host's poetic voice in discussing the role of Africa emphasizes the togetherness that is necessary to combat climate change as a global issue that impacts everyone because of our shared connection to the earth.

Participation and exposure to storytelling at COP28 provided real meaning behind demanding climate action that goes beyond quantifying the numbers of lives lost, people affected, and resources lost. These stories brought intimacy, context, and greater understanding to our climate crisis. People chose to be vulnerable and share stories to highlight the urgent need for climate action. In response the audience listened, and learned to create the shared feeling of empathy and urgency in the rooms.

Empathy

The strong feeling of empathy at COP28, raises the question: How is it useful? How can empathy promote collective action? For empathy to be effective, we must first break it from the

common understanding of empathy as ‘walking in someone else’s shoes’. We should reject the idea of sameness when looking at empathy. For empathy to be used as a method for more equitable solutions, there must be an acknowledgement and understanding of difference, no matter how uncomfortable. Theorist Hannah Arendt argues in support of using empathy to illustrate difference, to “visit” others, in order to come to terms that people experience the world differently, a call to acknowledge pluralisms and differences as opposed to grounding experiences in sameness and stagnant narratives (Matthiesen, Klitmøller, 2019). Empathy should be used to establish difference as opposed to sameness as a foundation for just resolutions (Matthiesen, Klitmøller, 2019). Through listening to stories at COP28, we can understand the different circumstances of individuals and use the elicited empathetic feelings to promote collective action. In the context of storytelling, engendering empathy is a method of demanding action through humanizing the climate crisis and addressing the inequitable differences people experience.

Storytelling as an Appeal to People in Positions of Power

In the context of our climate crisis, sharing stories is a strategy for minoritized people to provoke feelings of empathy in people/groups in positions of power. Storytelling is a safer, implicit form of “everyday resistance” that pushes against power structure, including the prevailing narratives (Scott 1985, 23). Storytelling draws upon feelings of empathy to encourage collective action as a demand to people in positions of power through the humanization of personal stories. The acknowledgement of differences can be used to address inequities at hand. Valuing storytelling is valuing the variety of experiences and calls for attention and problem-solving towards climate inequalities. It is then that we can work together on a global scale towards equitable climate action. As a form of everyday resistance, storytelling provides an avenue for defiance and livelihood for minoritized voices. Together, storytelling and empathy work to challenge dominant actors in the climate crisis, who do not prioritize minoritized voices. This goes beyond demanding collection action, resistance, and survival by opening to doors for celebrating minorized identities.

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Class at COP28, joined by co-instructor Myra Jackson

The Political Unrest and its Impact on Climate Change Efforts in Myanmar

Anonymous

Myanmar, a country full of natural wonders and rich cultural heritage, faces an unprecedented convergence of challenges caused by the military coup in 2021. This has exposed the country's shortcomings, aggravating an already precarious relationship between environmental stability and political turbulence.

Political Unrest and Climate Vulnerability

Standing as one of the most vulnerable countries to environmental catastrophe in the world, Myanmar is facing enormous problems brought on by the changing climate. The country, ranked second out of 183 countries in the 2021 Global Climate Risk Index, faces a variety of hazards, including heatwaves, floods, droughts, rising sea levels, and more intense cyclones. These threats jeopardize food security, worsen land scarcity, jeopardize livelihoods, and contribute to biodiversity loss. Human activities like agriculture, mining, and deforestation compound these difficulties, wreaking havoc on the country's ecosystems (Liu, Wallace, and Reporter in Myanmar, 2021; Chambers and Kyed, 2023; Kyed and Chambers, 2023).

Until 2021, Myanmar's civilian government demonstrated its firm dedication to tackling climate change. The nation's first National Climate Change Strategy, issued in 2019, emphasized climate resilience, mitigation, and adaptation. However, after the coup in 2021, official efforts to address climate challenges, including pursuing more renewable energy projects, were disrupted and delayed. The turmoil brought new risks, such as extensive displacement, environmental degradation, and a growing gap in education and capacity advancement (Lo and Hoy, 2023).

More than 1.95 million people have been displaced in Myanmar as a result of a confluence of violence, environmental disasters, and conflict (Chambers and Kyed, 2023). According to the United Nations, climate change and ecological risks threaten nearly 21 million people, or roughly 40% of Myanmar's population. Given the disruptions caused by the military operation, this assessment is probably an underestimation of the true perils and vulnerabilities (Lo and Hoy, 2023).

Furthermore, due to international sanctions and the need to finance their activities, the military junta has escalated resource extraction, exacerbating existing environmental issues in Myanmar. This accelerated exploitation increased deforestation, which is especially concerning in flood-prone southeastern regions. Environmental and civil society groups have noted a dramatic increase in unregulated mining in the absence of any regulatory framework to prevent it. This unrestricted mining activity pollutes waterways, destroys trees, alters landscapes, and causes landslides that endanger communities and vulnerable ecosystems (Liu, Wallace, and Reporter in Myanmar, 2021; Lo and Hoy, 2023; Chambers and Kyed, 2023).

Militia and military-affiliated businesses have a significant part in unregulated mining activity. Nonetheless, more armed players are engaging in resource exploitation that is harmful to the environment as a result of the unchecked war economy that the growing conflict supports. This trend hastens environmental degradation, exacerbating the long-term repercussions of climate change. The military's crackdown has greatly hampered previous programs aimed at boosting public awareness about climate change and calling for equitable climate action (Kyed and Chambers, 2023).

Significant concerns are also raised by the military's intentions to restart controversial hydropower projects and expand palm oil plantations. These plans pose severe threats to riverine

ecosystems, native forests, and indigenous groups' traditional livelihoods (Chambers and Kyed, 2023). Concerns that the military, which depends on natural resources, will exploit these for its dictatorship and violent activities are growing (Liu, Wallace, and Reporter in Myanmar, 2021). According to satellite data, significant deforestation has occurred after the coup, which suggests that the country's abundant rainforests have been exploited. (Kyed and Chambers, 2023).

The coup's aftermath also saw a concerning shift in the landscape for environmental advocates. As a result of the increased military crackdown, many were forced to flee the nation, faced imprisonment, or sought refuge in hiding (Lo and Hoy, 2023). They were previously able to advocate for climate action, but their current circumstances prevent them from continuing their critical work in tackling climate concerns in Myanmar (Kyed and Chambers, 2023).

Furthermore, Myanmar's rising education disparity is set to have long-term consequences. The upheavals of 2021 have severely harmed the country's higher education sector. Between 2020 and 2022, there was a 60-70% decrease in the number of students taking matriculation examinations, enrolling as new university students, and public university faculty numbers. This sharp decline portends the probable demise of a whole generation of young professionals, which might have far-reaching consequences for the future workforce committed to combating the problems caused by climate change (Lo and Hoy, 2023).

The ramifications go beyond immediate numbers, drastically altering the educational landscape. Students have been robbed of critical opportunities to develop skills and knowledge in relevant disciplines such as technology. The reduced prospects for practical laboratory and field-based learning experiences further diminish their capacity to participate in crucial research projects. This educational gap impedes the holistic development of future leaders and specialists, which is critical for addressing Myanmar's climate-related challenges (Lo and Hoy, 2023).

Voices from Myanmar's Indigenous Communities

At COP28, I had the honor of interviewing two remarkable people from Myanmar, who will remain named K and L for safety concerns. As members of an organization fighting for indigenous rights and environmental conservation, K and L bring attention to the complicated

issues that indigenous communities in Myanmar face due to environmental degradation and political instability.

K emphasized the numerous issues indigenous populations face, primarily the loss of biodiversity caused by human activities such as agriculture, mining, and illegal logging. Reporting environmental challenges created a dilemma for the organization, leaving them conflicted between reporting the issues to the oppressive military junta and the Ethnic Resistance Organizations (EROs), with a preference for the latter due to their more pro-environmental positions.

K focused on the history of ethnic exploitation and highlighted the Burmanization, which was the military's effort to assimilate indigenous peoples into the dominant Bamar race after the 1962 coup. This was further intensified after the coup in 2021. The military's continued exploitation of the indigenous communities and nature, as well as the organization's operations being halted due to armed conflicts, creates the crucial necessity for thorough documenting of these events, which is essential for future advocacy and possible legal action.

L's observations echo K's, highlighting the dire consequences of unpredictable weather patterns and increasing temperatures that lead to catastrophic droughts and the destruction of vital industries like agriculture. Bamboo blooming, which used to occur every 100 years in areas such as Kachin and Bago Yoma, is now happening every 60-70 years. As L points out, this abnormal phenomenon is a clear indication of climate change's accelerating pace. L also expressed his worry that deforestation and the construction of dams are exacerbating floods. These environmental changes pose a double threat to indigenous peoples' cultural practices and traditional ways of life, as well as the preservation of livelihoods, leading to great despair through forced relocation.

L underscores the importance of adapting to changing climate conditions by embracing age-old indigenous wisdom. They urge a return to a more modest lifestyle and a more conscious use of resources, with sustainability and reciprocity at the forefront. For instance, L spotlights the importance of crop rotation, an ancient yet essential agricultural practice. It is a circular farming system in which a small plot of land is first cultivated, then reforested, and then moved to a new

plot of land. This rotation improves soil fertility and ecological equilibrium by allowing land to recover and renew itself.

In addition, L emphasized the need to use the subtle cues from nature as a map for agricultural and adaptation plans. Indigenous peoples in Myanmar, who are attuned to environmental indicators, perceive the behavior of natural elements to infer weather patterns. For example, studying the location of bird nests in trees can provide insight regarding different wind speeds. These biological indicators are crucial, assisting in decision-making for ideal time frames for planting and reducing hazards linked with severe weather conditions. By combining these traditional practices with modern science, L believes in mitigating the harmful effects of climate change on ecosystems and anthropogenic activities while preserving the fragile equilibrium between the two.

However, these efforts face impediments due to myriad prevailing challenges. Among these issues is a systemic lack of recognition for indigenous communities, which has been perpetuated by historical marginalization and deliberate exclusion from recognition. Furthermore, as a result of the military junta's long-term assimilation efforts, indigenous peoples have had their inherent human rights erased, leading to a general lack of understanding and awareness about their entitlements. The struggle for survival and resilience in the face of environmental and social upheavals is made even more difficult by resource scarcity, which compounds these issues. Isolation persists among indigenous communities due to language limitations, which in turn impede their ability to communicate effectively and gain access to critical resources. This is especially true considering this applies over a 70-year period, crippling linguistic and cultural reproduction. There is also a lack of solidarity among various indigenous groups due to the junta's divisive activities since 1962. Inadequate capacity in terms of knowledge and infrastructure also restricts their ability to respond to the rising difficulties effectively. Furthermore, the complex political landscape, combined with the abuse of power by certain Ethnic Resistance Organizations (EROs), exacerbates the vulnerability of these groups, with instances of human rights violations committed by those in charge exacerbating their struggles.

K and L strongly advocate indigenous knowledge preservation and emphasize the critical need for legal acknowledgment and inclusive representation of indigenous populations. Consistent with L's viewpoint, K also emphasizes crucial approaches for adaptation and mitigation. These approaches include maintaining forests, securing funds, promoting community support, and training youths to protect resources for the future, with a particular emphasis on preserving traditional knowledge. Both underline the importance of raising awareness, establishing discussions, and developing forums for indigenous groups. L also addresses the vital topic of indigenous communities' limited rights, pushing for comprehensive recognition that includes cultural, language, and land rights. The call for legal recognition of indigenous populations through policies and laws is emphasized, as is the urgent need to educate both the general public and legislators about environmental issues. Furthermore, they emphasize the significance of inclusive representation in administrative positions to provide equitable representation and support for indigenous people.

In addition, both K and L affirm the critical need for assistance from the global community and plead for a greater degree of flexibility in their approach to providing aid. In describing the difficulties encountered by their group, L elucidates the constraints imposed by the junta, particularly concerning the registration matter, which the military junta deemed unlawful. Due to their unregistered status, not only are they in constant threat of arrest, but it is also difficult for them to get assistance from international groups. They argue for the international community to be more flexible in cases like Myanmar's, where organizations functioning under difficult conditions seek help.

Supporting Myanmar during these difficult times requires strategies that combine local efforts with international collaboration, with an emphasis on inclusivity, environmental consciousness, and legal acknowledgment; this is particularly important for indigenous communities, as accounted by K and L.

Assisting Myanmar Amid Climate and Political Challenges

Despite being severely vulnerable to climate change, Myanmar has been absent from COP for the third year in a row. Both the Myanmar military's and the National Unity Government's (NUG) (a coalition of elected politicians and indigenous community members)

efforts to send a delegation to COP26 and COP28 were rejected. The exclusion of both the junta and the NUG has highlighted the exclusionary nature of the UNFCCC's state-centered COP structure, particularly for countries with disputed governance like Myanmar (Chambers and Kyed, 2023).

An important question arises from the current scenario in Myanmar: should the UNFCCC reconsider its state-centric strategy for nations whose central rule is not recognized by either the people or the UN (Chambers and Kyed, 2023)? This would entail extending negotiation power to local entities genuinely committed to climate change action and recognizing them as legitimate 'parties.' However, the UN normally only recognizes states, excluding alternative delegates from high-level deliberations, providing a substantial barrier.

Myanmar's post-coup scenario complicates issues by making defining a legitimate state tricky. Although the junta is "in control" of the country, it lacks legitimacy in the eyes of the people and around the world, and it lacks control over much of the country. Foreign governments, like the European Union, and most civilians in Myanmar acknowledge the NUG as the country's legitimate representative. EROs also control certain regions in the country. As a result, Myanmar does not consist of a single state (Chambers and Kyed, 2023). However, the UN only recognizes states, leaving alternative delegations in a bind.

Despite the uncertainty in defining Myanmar's legal state, indigenous organizations, EROs, and the parallel NUG government are at the forefront of tackling climate challenges, unlike the military junta. Due to their unofficial status, they face challenges in collecting funds and connecting with international agencies because the existing UN system funnels most climate funding through states, limiting its usefulness in situations like Myanmar. Concerns are also raised about the exclusion of alternative delegates from high-level negotiations due to the traditional state-centric strategy, especially given the effective work done by local groups despite limitations (Chambers and Kyed, 2023; Kyed and Chambers, 2023).

It is imperative to reconsider existing climate change strategies. The current state-centric approach risks ignoring vulnerable communities in times of conflict. Transitioning away from this system is critical, with finances and technical assistance directed toward local entities actively involved in grassroots climate initiatives (Chambers and Kyed, 2023). These

organizations, which include civil society organizations, non-state resistance groups, and indigenous-led organizations like the ones K and L belong to, are critical actors on the ground. Their active participation is essential for promoting long-term transformation and fortifying communities against climate change. This change necessitates a redesign of tactics as well as a dedication to conflict-sensitive methods integrated into local movements. By combining policy support with these movements, there is a chance of fostering effective climate action in Myanmar (Kyed and Chambers, 2023). Providing these local actors with the tools they need to engage actively in global climate forums and have their opinions heard will go a long way toward improving climate-related activities in conflict-stricken regions. This all-encompassing strategy seeks to empower non-state actors so that they may actively contribute to making Myanmar more climate resilient.

Conclusion

Myanmar's problems, which are intertwined with political turbulence and environmental difficulties, illustrate the vital link between government upheaval and climate vulnerability. The stories of indigenous activists like K and L highlight the situation in Myanmar and echo the hardships experienced by nations affected by war around the world. Their call for help, "Myanmar should not be left alone," echoes across the globe and highlights the importance of standing together in times of global crises.

A global paradigm shift is necessary to address these intertwined problems. There is an increasing urgency to embrace inclusive, grassroots initiatives as opposed to traditional, state-centric approaches. Amplifying the involvement of local communities, civil society organizations, and indigenous groups becomes critical, necessitating conflict-sensitive techniques and acknowledging the essential role of non-state actors. The experiences of Myanmar's indigenous groups serve as a rallying cry for a holistic, all-inclusive approach to government, conflict, and climate change. Only through collaborative action and tailored, people-centered solutions can help nations navigate complex landscapes toward resilience and sustainable development.

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Without Incentives: The Significance of Article 6.8: "Non-Market Approaches"

Lucy Kramer

I met Ghazali Ohorella in the back of the room at a late-night Article 6.8 negotiation. I was observing with Tomohiro Harada, who has been following Indigenous People's participation at the UNFCCC process for years. He pointed to a man sitting at the other side of the deserted back row: "That's who you should be talking to," he proposed. Ohorella is the executive secretary of the Indigenous Coordinating Body of the UN, focusing specifically on Article 6. A little way into the meeting, he asked me what my hopes were for Article 6.8, in a way that implied that he had hopes himself. I tried my best to summarize what might be the thesis of this essay: "I hope that it validates mitigation efforts outside of capitalism, including how we live as a whole." He nodded, in seeming agreement.

Article 6 of the Paris Agreement concerns how countries can collaborate on their Nationally Determined Contributions. At COP28, there were three negotiations on subarticles: Article 6.2 related to trading emissions reductions and carbon removals, 6.4 related to the creation of a global carbon trading mechanism, and 6.8 focused on non-market approaches, shortened as NMAs (Carbon Market Watch, 2022).

But I didn't know this when I was first introduced to Ohorella. He asked me what the title of Article 6 of the Paris Agreement even is in the first place. I make a few guesses in vain: "mitigation?" "No." In the end, I looked it up. "Cooperative Implementation," according to Google. "The market is the only way that they trust to cooperate," said Ohorella. These approaches use money as the only metric of success. "Cooperation" through carbon markets is not exclusively about climate change; it is also about allowing those playing the market to capitalize on climate change. Economic "cooperation" in this sense reproduces neocolonial inequity and extraction of labor and resources from the global South to global North.

As geographer David Harvey explains in *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, free market capitalism with minimal regulations became not just an economic system, but a way of life that in "'substituting for all previously held ethical beliefs', emphasizes the significance of contractual relations in the marketplace." The 1980's boom of neoliberalism was a historic transition away from what Ghazali explains as the basic principles: "all previously held ethical

beliefs." Harvey describes how neoliberalism became "hegemonic as a mode of discourse;" contractual methods for collaboration dominate Article 6.2, Article 6.4, and negotiations within the UN under the guise of "common sense."

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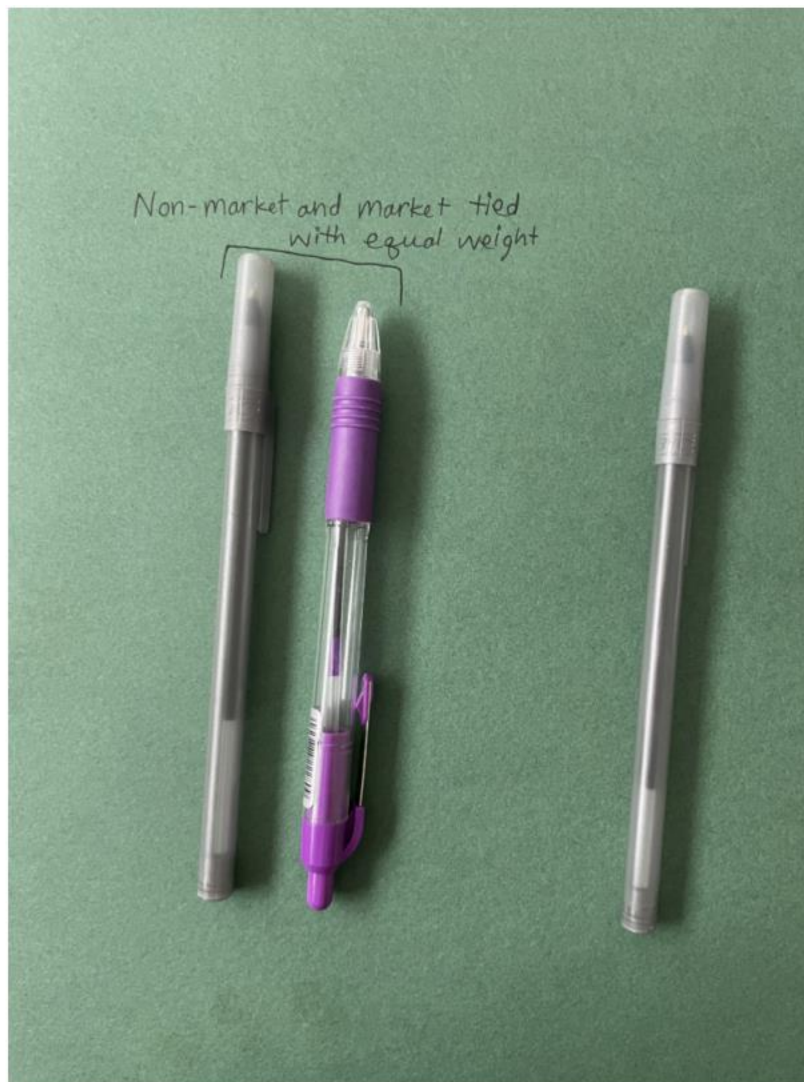
Ohorella sets three pens on the negotiation desk. Two are identical black pens, and the other is purple. "These two are worth ten," he says, pointing to the identical ones, "and the other one is free. Which one is more valuable?" "The free one," I answered. He smiled. "Okay, not to you, but to a normal person in society." "Then of course, the $10 pens."



"Exactly. What Bolivia did when they devised 6.8, was to sandwich 6.8 between the

market approaches, where it would hold equal weight. They were supposed to be a package,non-market and market approaches." Subarticle 6.8, in Bolivia's plan, used the UNFCCC framework to position non-market approaches with equal importance to market approaches like carbon pricing. Carbon markets are already incentivized, because they allow institutions to continue business and profiting while trading carbon. He drags the purple pen away from the black pens.

"This is what happened instead." Parties have spent most of their energy focused on the monetary solutions, because again, the goal is not just saving the climate, but maintaining the current economic order. The co-chair for Article 6.2 on trading urged that "the markets are not stopping without us and our framework," in order to get the parties to pass the document. In the meantime, the markets are already trading carbon in the guise of "carbon neutrality" without Regulation.

Bolivia, in alliance with Indigenous Peoples, is advocating for solutions and cooperative frameworks that address the root of climate change, and allow for creativity outside of a profit margin. "What Indigenous people see is that we need to return to basic principles, respect and reciprocity," said Ohorella.

As I was following the COP, I was looking for well-being paradigms I heard at events with Indigenous peoples, the UN, health, biodiversity, and beyond to be represented in negotiation spaces. These simple ideas seem radical compared to politically constrained and technical negotiations. Is there a place in the texts for these words and principles to guide the action that we move forth with?

"That's where 6.8 comes in," said Ohorella. As we were walking to a negotiation, Harada explained 6.8 as a "litmus test" for community engagement; "The parties don't know what non-market approaches actually are or how to implement them." This creates an essential window: the document calls on "participation… in the identification, development and scaling-up of non-market approaches including by encouraging the participation of relevant stakeholders, including Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities." Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities are mentioned 3 times in this text as those most fit to build NMAs. The inclusion of this language is the beginning of recognizing that "We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them," as Einstein famously said. For starters,

6.8 helps to recognize the knowledge and practices of Indigenous people and their paramount importance for addressing climate change.

The discussion of mitigation through lowering emissions at COP28 was focused on energy transitions that perpetuate an overconsumption across the global North. I heard about techno-solutions and "scaling-them-up" in the consulting/business area, as well as in the carbon removals in Article 6. The Indigenous Environmental Network in collaboration with other organizations passed out a zine on the first day called "Hoodwinked in the Hothouse," which explains how these practices are "false solutions" masking and enabling the polycrisis: climate change, pollution, biodiversity, and social inequity. Without addressing hegemonic practices like neoliberalism, the problematic paradigm Full solutions are complex, yet hold onto the simple principles of respect and reciprocity.

There are a few voices speaking about diverse mitigation, including one of the best side events that I went to entitled "Beyond Growth: Sufficiency for a sustainable and equitable future," which names mentalities of continual growth, progress, and development as fundamental causes of the polycrisis which must be addressed in solutions. The co-president of the Club of Rome gave a riveting speech to a room packed full of people: "This COP is not talking about de-growth, and it is certainly not talking about sufficiency." Indeed, the incredible event that followed titled "Sustainable Lifestyles" around Europe and Japan had only a handful of attendees scattered about the rows. We are not talking about NMAs that involve confronting our lifestyle—at best, we are only beginning to do so.

The non-market sharing platform deepens the discourse on mitigation and climate change as a whole. Indigenous people are fighting to have their knowledge, practices, and intrinsic ways of knowing recognized as legitimate epistemologies and solutions. Ohorella explains it like this: "They're fighting over whether they want an apple or an orange. We know that fruit is good for us all, and we're waiting for that to be realized. They think that it's one or the other, one way of doing this, but it's not." Article 6.8 is offering the beginning of an equal footing between Western and Indigenous epistemologies. The increase of stakeholder participation in NDCs is proven to
increase ambition with NDCs (Peterson, 2023). The opportunity 6.8 offers is to not just provide *more* ambition, but a different *kind of ambition.*

What does a UN document like 6.8 even do? It all goes back to the Paris Agreement, which is referenced by Article 6, Section 8. UNFCCC documents are formed by consensus, meaning that by the time a document is approved, it has been signed off on by every party, either through direct approval or not participating in the interventions. The Paris Agreement serves as a precedent in international law and provides standards for mitigation ambition in NDC's (Voigt, 2023). These documents then provide the framework for how to think about the climate crisis itself, and how to proceed. The documents hold soft power because parties buy into the process. Moving forward, who decides what counts as a valid NDC approach, and what is included is extremely important.

Countries are already using approaches beyond market solutions. While I was at the opening meeting for a coalition on NDC collaboration with Ministers of Finance, I noticed how influential sharing these could be. First, Singapore shared what they had done to bridge mitigation and adaptation, which was to invest heavily in public transport, because electric cars weren't going to make the traffic any better on a small island. The U.S. went next, and expressed the success of the Inflation Reduction Act, which created economic incentive for buyers to choose clean energy and cars. The U.S. agenda at COP focused on this approach, making it clear that each country will have a unique response based on circumstances.

To me, this was an attempt to justify the continuation of individual transportation and green vehicles versus focusing on public transportation, because the U.S. is not a small island where it is otherwise necessary. Involvement of Indigenous perspectives on Work programs like 6.8 can provide additional validation to holistic methods that bridge mitigation, adaptation, and human rights, and move beyond the bare minimum climate response. The U.S. NDC has no mention of NMA's. Passing a document like 6.8 gives confidence in non-market approaches, and has the potential to further increase their presence in NDCs.

Yet the language in this document is still weak in terms of its suggestions. UNFCCC documents italicize the first words of each paragraph, which show the strength of the statement. In 6.8, almost all of the initial words are non-commital: "invites," "requests," "recalls." There were no strong terms such as "urges." Non-market and Indigenous perspectives have the potential to directly address the complexity of the polycrisis.

The second section, simply called non-market approaches, has two paragraphs. The first

reads: “Recalls the thirteenth preambular paragraph of the Paris Agreement, which notes the importance of ensuring the integrity of all ecosystems, including oceans, and the protection of biodiversity, recognized by some cultures as Mother Earth, and noting the importance for some of the concept of “climate justice”, when taking action to address climate change.” The U.S. adamantly opposed the language “Mother Nature,” on the grounds that it was beyond what was written in the Paris Agreement and the mandate for this text. Now, only “some cultures” recognize Mother Earth in the final document. Recognizing Nature’s right to be healthy is an integral step to challenging exploitative capitalism, and regaining our sense of connection with ecosystems.

Furthermore, this document begins to “note…some of the concept of ‘climate justice’” with trepidation. While it is noted in concept, it still needs to be operationalized in the text and beyond, including mandates for incorporating and financing NMA’s. As Ohorella notes, the consensus method forces Indigenous peoples and countries like Bolivia to add more and more “water with our wine, diluting our solutions to the most acceptable scenario.” What is acceptable for many wealthy countries, as well as countries seeking development, is the continuation of neoliberalism. Weakened language in the text “kills Indigenous people and removes our rights: the people that protect the Earth.”

The balance of the three pens is still being sought. “It’s even in the name,” Ghazali explains. “Which one seems more attractive: non-market *approaches* or market *mechanisms*?” “Market mechanisms” imply that there is already a solution in motion, and it’s just a matter of working out the kinks. By using indirect language that only refers to “Non-Market Approaches” through negation, NMAs are implied as peripheral to the central market mechanism. They are undefined, and simply other to market collaboration. Myra Jackson, a long-time advocate for the Rights of Nature and a member of the Sustainable Development Goals Working group,emphasized that language is everything, and that “we can’t use the paradigm of markets to describe holistic solutions being sought in NMAs.”

I was sitting next to Harada and Ohorella during the last day of the Article 6 negotiations. The co-chairs opened: “It’s far too late to hear your thoughts. We’re here to listen if you accept or reject the text.” We started with 6.4, the medium-controversy text. Almost every party rejected passing the text. Next, 6.8, the less controversial of the three, sandwiched in between. Besides

the United States' dissatisfaction with carbon pricing being cut from the final text, and the Coalition of Rainforest Nations wanting to pass all of the article 6 passages together, 6.8 got the green flag. Following Mexico's staunch disapproval, the carbon-market focused 6.4 and 6.2 did not pass. I looked at Ohorella, who smiled. As Harada implored earlier; "A bad text passing is worse than no text."

At the last minute, the parties expressed interest in extending their time in order to get all of Article 6 to pass. It was the United States, at the very end, that refused to continue working on 6.2 and 6.4—they were not going to pass this year. Ohorella looked around in disbelief at his colleagues in the audience. At COP28, non-market approaches passed alone. I looked at Ohorella, not sure whether my excitement was premature. He smiles, "Get excited. Balancing the scales."

So many of the conversations at COP outside of negotiation rooms urge for a new economic system that considers planetary boundaries and whose goal is to meet human needs. Now that the framework for non-market co-operation has passed, it is up to the "stakeholders" to use NMAs to shift the climate action paradigm. Can future COPs be a space beyond corporate profit and neoliberalism? Can we do things simply because they are better for society, and better for the wellbeing of the planet? Can we protect and restore Indigenous rights and Rights of Nature? Paragraph 14 of the 6.8 text "Invites Parties and observers to submit via the submission portal by 31 March 2024." We must ensure that Article 6.8 passes the "litmus test" by participating in real cooperation and real solutions. And ideally, taking us places we don't yet know: where we can learn, develop, collaborate, and emerge.

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Indigenous Knowledge and Climate Colonialism at COP28
By Mckenna Ryan and Riss Banuelos

Introduction

In this paper, we will analyze Indigenous perspectives and participation at COP28. We will work from a decolonial perspective to conduct a critical ethnography on Indigenous peoples' (IP) participation, mainly through side events. We will explore the significance of Indigenous epistemologies culturally and as climate solutions. We will also echo the call for a more holistic and reparations based framework to aid that acknowledges non-economic losses and centuries of violent colonial extraction. We will situate our findings in the colonial capitalist roots of climate change and shortcomings of the UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) as an institution - namely, it continues to be governed at every level by these oppressive systems. In this paper, we will explore IP's perspectives and presence at COP28, critiques of the Loss and Damages (L&D) fund and the profound potential of traditional ecological knowledge (TEK). By no means does this paper attempt to homogenize and define a single "Indigenous perspective." Instead, it seeks to highlight perspectives shared by IP at COP28 to emphasize their vital importance, particularly at the intersection of climate action and human rights.

Climate Colonialism

Though rarely acknowledged as such, capitalism and colonialism are root causes of climate change. These systems require endless consumption, rampant exploitation of the earth and its beings, and the destruction of countless lifeways. IP, who have historically safeguarded the environment, have been and continue to be subject to genocide and displacement from their lands to keep the colonial-capitalist machine running. The destruction of Indigenous peoples and epistemologies has caused severe environmental degradation. Most Indigenous communities not displaced from their communities lack access to basic necessities through the contamination of waterways and food systems. As sacred lands are destroyed, IP's deeply personal, traditional, and spiritual connections to Nature are also threatened.

Climate change is a direct result of the development of neo-colonial empires, and the impacts of climate change continue this colonial legacy. The success of the world's most effective colonial powers (namely the Global North, and especially the US and UK) is largely due to their accumulation of capital and energy capacity through resource and fossil fuel extraction. This extraction has harmed countless communities internationally, but our primary focus here will be Indigenous communities. Colonialism and capitalism justify ongoing resource extraction on Indigenous land, including new fossil fuel projects, in the name of profit (Meredith, 2023). Both continued resource extraction and climate change are colonial forces as they attempt to erase countless beings, cultures, identities, traditional knowledge systems, and peoples' connection to Nature.

The level of power and influence that the Global North currently enjoys is dependent on the continued dominance of colonial capitalism. With exploitation and overconsumption of fossil fuels financially supporting the mobilization of power and control, countries like the US have been hesitant to commit to a fossil fuel phaseout.

Importantly, our transition to sustainable, renewable energy sources must not deploy false solutions that disproportionately distribute costs to the Global South and Indigenous and Local Communities (hydropower is a notable example). As stated by many Indigenous attendees of COP28, the phaseout must be "fast, fair, and funded for everyone". In contrast to the current system in which "those least responsible for contributing to climate breakdown are impacted more accurately over longer periods" (Sultana, 2022), the just transition must include a decision-making process that is transparent, accessible, and equitable. We must consider solutions that directly name capitalism and colonialism as the main cause of climate change. We cannot equitably mitigate it if these systems remain intact.

The UNFCCC as a Colonial Capitalist Institution

Indigenous Peoples continue to face widespread systemic exclusion from political and economic power, and, unfortunately, the climate sector is no exception (Comberti et. al. 2019). Though recent COPs have seen an uptick in meaningful inclusion of Indigenous voices and knowledge systems, Indigenous communities nonetheless remain at the periphery of climate work, a fact that is entirely inexcusable. This inequity not only perpetuates colonial power

dynamics but is senseless considering the efficacy of TEK. 80% of biodiversity exists on indigenously stewarded lands (World Bank, 2023). IP empowerment is essential to a more equitable and ecologically balanced world. In 2018, the UN created the LCIPP. This platform is said to “ensure [that] the sharing of experiences, information, and good practices” from the Indigenous perspective are integrated into UNFCCC decision-making (UNFCCC, n.d.). Though this is a step in the right direction of giving space to and respecting traditional knowledge systems, it does not ensure meaningful integration. Overall, COP28 served to uphold exclusionary anti-Indigenous practices and reinforce colonial power.

We observed IP to be the only people to name climate change as a direct result of colonial capitalism at COP28. Even use of the terms “colonial” or “capitalism” was rare. Bolivia (a prevalent advocate for Indigenous rights) pointed to “carbon colonialism” during the GST negotiation, and criticism of the “current economic system” was more prevalent than direct criticism of capitalism but was still generally veiled behind critiques of consumerism rather than the economic structure *itself*, which undeniably drives the rampant overconsumption of the Global North.

The UNFCCC enacts colonial power dynamics. On the surface, all parties have an equal seat at the table, and all decisions are reached by consensus. But the reality is far more complex. Colonial power dynamics heavily influence negotiations, as discussions center the priorities of wealthy colonizers from the Global North and ignore the needs of the most vulnerable, such as IP and Small Island Developing States (SIDS). “In the end, the consensus is driven by the most powerful” (Lakhani, 2023). Speakers are prohibited from criticizing specific member parties, supposedly in the spirit of collaboration (UNFCCC, 2003). But who does this really benefit?: Countries like the US that are causing the most harm and stand to profit the most from the continued emission of fossil fuels.

SIDS are a fantastic example of how Global South party members are systematically disenfranchised at COP. They show up to negotiations as citizens of countries that are decades away from being swallowed by rising sea levels. They are forced to beg for the resources to save their homes from colonizers whose resource extraction and cruel labor practices put them in this position in the first place. Not only this, but colonial norms on what is considered “professional" govern these spaces. Negotiators are barred, implicitly or explicitly, from behaving as an

individual or from expressing emotion during these harrowing conversations. How can we call this an equitable process?

Indigenous peoples are even more disenfranchised than vulnerable colonized countries in negotiations. Since Indigenous tribes are not recognized parties in the UN, IP can only attend the COP as observers and cannot actively participate in negotiations. This is why some IP advocate for their tribes to be recognized by the UNFCCC as nations separate from the colonizer states within which they are situated (Native American Rights Fund, n.d.). They argue that this would also allow Indigenous tribes as UN member states to gain a more legitimate place at the table, with easier access to high-level spaces and decision-making power in negotiations. Furthermore, being recognized as UN member states would allow for tribal nations within developed countries to access the L&D fund, a point which we will discuss in more detail later. Even though Indigenous participation in the COP process is rising, they continue to primarily occupy side event spaces, the Indigenous Peoples' pavilion, and protests. While these spaces are important, they also keep Indigenous voices in the margins (Comberti et al., 2019).

Even outside of negotiations, Indigenous perspectives still have not been meaningfully integrated into the COP. Mckenna attended a LCIPP Youth Roundtable early in week one in which most of the event was devoted to small-group discussion with other attendees. The conversation that followed was long and intimate. Joining fifteen or so other people from North America, Mckenna was the only non-Indigenous person present. Participants were largely young climate professionals; most had attended COPs before and were well-acquainted with the UNFCCC process. As such, the conversation focused on how Indigenous people can have a more established presence in international climate work. The biggest issue identified was simply that Indigenous people are still not welcome at the COP. Though the official language has changed significantly in recent years to better include IP, there is still a shocking lack of representation in spaces where decisions are being made, and this is because, fundamentally, Indigenous ways of thinking have not been respected by or integrated into the UNFCCC process. This must change.

Like the twenty-seven Conference of Parties before it, COP28 boasted high ambition from the start but under-delivered. Necessary mitigation and adaptation measures were not agreed upon, and no progress was made in making L&D funding accessible to IP or in increasing resources and recognition for Indigenous epistemologies. At the COP, the collective imagination

is limited by the colonial structure of the UNFCCC. There is limited capacity for the integration of traditional Indigenous knowledge into climate solutions because Western science is accepted as the ultimate form of knowing. Additionally, the UN functions under short timelines in a manner that demands rapid solutions and ultimately reinforces the status quo. Under this limited worldview, the best solutions to climate change are the ones that change as little as possible and thus maintain current structures of domination. TEK systems have proven their efficacy in providing actionate climate solutions, yet they still lack support because they fall outside the bounds of Western science. This limited worldview continues to marginalize and limit the capacity of IP — and everyone else — to adapt to and mitigate climate change impacts. Without respecting Indigenous rights and addressing colonialism as an ongoing and ever present feature of the UNFCCC and root cause of climate change, COP will continue to be a space that makes very little progress on the climate crisis.

In the Margins: Restoring Lifeways of Indigenous People and Mother Nature

After centuries of systemic oppression, erasure, and marginalization, Indigenous communities today are one of the most disenfranchised groups in the world. IP represents 6% of the global population but 19% of the extremely poor, and have lower life expectancies by up to 20 years compared to non-Indigenous people (World Bank, 2023). In part, this may be because IP often do not have legal recognition of their lands, territories, and natural resources, and are often the last to receive public investments and basic services (World Bank, 2023). Further, their geographic positions are often on climate-vulnerable and barren or otherwise undesirable lands due to forced migration. IPs face many barriers to full participation in political processes, the formal economy, and access to justice (World Bank, 2023). These conditions are the remnants of the colonial-capitalist machine that has exploited IP and their lands, and reminds us that human rights must be central in order to create a just transition that addresses the legacy of colonial capitalism.

Despite all of these barriers, Indigenous peoples are resilient, and much of their traditional knowledge systems remain intact today. TEK is an essential component of addressing climate change effectively and equitably, and must be present in diverse and locally informed mitigation and adaptation solutions. Importantly, Indigenous TEK is not a monolith, and varies

tremendously based on the local context in which it is situated. Indigenous people possess a deep knowledge about their particular environment and its needs. Centrally, we observed over and over again at COP28 that Indigenous knowledge systems seem to unilaterally emphasize a relationship of care, respect, and reciprocity with Nature, often reminding their audience that humans themselves are a part of Nature.

The depth of TEK spans from thousands of years of stewardship; IP can provide direct testimonies and suggest solutions that are more effective than what is proposed by outsiders. For example, a panelist at the "Loss and Damages: Human Rights, State, and Corporate Accountability," side event who was indigenous to Hawaii shared that their fisheries were destroyed because of irresponsible development, including the Disney Hotel and resulting water contamination. Reefs absorb 90% of wave energy which limits costs associated with erosion while providing food security. The panelist asserted that with Indigenous stewardship of the land, restoration of the reef is possible. This is just one example of how collaboration with IP can help improve the health of Mother Earth and its inhabitants. Traditional knowledge systems can offer solutions across many ecosystems and contexts if IP are supported and their TEK is appropriately recognized and respected.

Importantly, though, spaces like COP must ensure that a focus on Indigenous rights also remains central so that Indigenous knowledge is not appropriated while their communities remain disenfranchised. At the same panel another Indigenous panelist stated that "we can help remediate our planet but we must be seen as human beings. In most spaces, we continue to not be recognized." The violation of Indigenous rights must stop. To support Indigenous lifeways is to support all life on this planet. Further, support of Indigenous people can and should liberate IP from oppressive systems and transform climate policy.

The Loss & Damages Fund as a Microcosm of Indigenous Rights at COP

A central issue at COP28 was operationalizing the loss and damages fund (L&D), a mechanism agreed upon at COP27 in which developed countries would provide developing countries with reparations for climate damages overwhelmingly caused by the Global North. The main issue with this framework (besides the fact that it is still woefully underfunded at $700 million out of the $400 billion needed to address loss and damages annually), is that a

developed/developing dichotomy does not acknowledge those experiencing L&D in the Global North (Lakhani, 2023). IP in developed nations have been especially outspoken about how this limited, state-centered framework fails their communities.

Additionally, non-economic losses and damages are not addressed by the L&D fund. For example, at various side events, IP from the U.S. shared how climate change-driven impacts threaten their relationship with the land and traditional knowledge systems, including the threat of salmon extinction in the Pacific Northwest. The L&D fund can not account for the spiritual, cultural, and social losses of climate change, particularly for IP, whose very identities are intertwined with the land on which they reside. In many panels but again, particularly, "Loss and Damages: Human Rights, State, and Corporate Accountability," Indigenous panelists called for non-economic loss and damages (such as to biodiversity or culture) to be included in climate policy. Not only is biodiversity a conservation concern, but food systems connect IP to ancestors and are central to identity and health. For many Indigenous communities, losing biodiversity means losing traditional medicines and other cultural practices. Further, displacement from land, such as among Inuit communities in the Arctic due to rising sea levels and erosion, threatens the very core of Indigenous cultural identity as traditional practices and lifeways become obsolete in unfamiliar land.

Panelist also called for a complete reframing of the fund, stating that "L&D shouldn't be seen as aid, but historical reparation for what capitalism has done." To quote once again from the panel, "L&D must be grounded in human rights and Indigenous rights." If we want the L&D fund to be a vehicle for legitimate change, we must address the historic violence and loss that has culminated to this moment.

Fundamentally, marginalized communities at COP28 emphasized the need for the Global North to provide climate reparations to both developing nations *and* Indigenous communities in developed nations. Furthermore, L&D must be redefined to include non-economic losses that negatively impact Indigenous well-being. The fund must acknowledge that colonialism is responsible for marginalized communities suffering the most losses and damages as climate change progresses. Instead of being framed as aid, negotiators should recognize L&D as reparations which directly respond to the centuries of extraction experienced by victims of colonialism.

Conclusion

The world needs traditional knowledge holders to mitigate the worst effects of climate change and create a more just world. Over and over again, Indigenous peoples provide vital insight into how to live sustainable, equitable lives; we know they have been able to provide for their communities and maintain equilibrium with their environment for thousands of years.

Importantly, the UNFCCC (and the broader Western world) must integrate TEK into climate policy through human-rights centered collaboration with IP. Non-Indigenous people should not appropriate Indigenous knowledge without empowering Indigenous peoples themselves; to do so is merely reproducing neocolonialism.

By supporting IP, we can pave the way for a more just world that keeps 1.5°C alive while naming colonial capitalism as the root cause of climate change. To do this, we suggest,

- TEK be placed on an equal footing with Western science and be integrated into decision-making.
- The rights of Indigenous communities to use their ancestral lands are promoted to support the practice of their TEK.
- Indigenous communities residing within developed countries have access to L&D funding in addition to developing countries. Adequate funding must be mobilized by developed countries and made easily acceptable to local communities.
- A reframing of the L&D fund as reparations for the impacts of colonial capitalism be included in negotiations.
- Non-Indigenous peoples collaborate with IP to create a L&D framework that addresses non-economic losses and damages.
- Funds mobilized through the L&D fund be delivered directly to communities.
- Indigenous parties are created to participate in the UNFCCC consensus process.

Despite all its flaws, the COP remains an invaluable opportunity to transform climate justice. It holds space for diverse perspectives and "can be seen simultaneously as one of the theaters of climate colonialism (led mainly by corporations, powerful governments, and elites) and also as a site of decolonial, anticolonial, antiracist, and feminist politics (led primarily by activists, youth, Indigenous groups, academics, and unions)" (Sultana, 2022). Integrating

Indigenous TEK into the UNFCCC process is necessary to create a climate response that is rapid, equitable, and actually up to the task at hand. Doing so is fundamentally a question of prioritizing human rights.

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Unveiling the Language of COP 28: Weasel Words and Progress Made

Tristan Durocher

The Conference of the Parties (COP) serves as a critical arena where nations converge to address pressing global environmental issues. More relevant and specific to this past December, COP 28 was a conference to address the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change or the UNFCCC. Amidst the multitude of discussions and negotiations, the language employed in official documents emerges as a powerful tool, shaping expectations, defining values, and signaling societal priorities. The importance of COP documents cannot be overstated. They serve as guideposts for the future, providing a framework for international collaboration on environmental issues. Through these documents, nations set expectations and interpret the data received from scientists, enabling a collective response to urgent challenges. The language within these documents is pivotal, as it delineates what society values and, perhaps more intriguingly, what it may not explicitly prioritize.

With the adoption of the Kyoto Protocols in 1997 and its implementation in 2005, the United Nations Framework on Climate Change (UNFCCC) began operationalization. This first piece of necessary documentation sets the ground rules going forward. The Kyoto Protocol established that climate change must be faced head-on, setting GHG emission targets for 37 industrialized countries, targeting a 5% decrease in the protocol's first commitment period from 2008 to 2012 (Böhringer, 2003). Though ultimately unsuccessful in reducing emissions, this documentation has led the way for all other negotiations regarding verbiage going forward. The Kyoto Protocol is continuously referenced in newer statements, helping to cement its legacy as a crucial piece of climate change history.

Following the Kyoto Protocol's footsteps came its successor, the Paris Agreement. Agreed upon in the wee hours of the morning at COP 21 in 2015, it was hailed as a monumental success. It aimed to chain nations to legally binding emission targets and strengthen the language surrounding adaptation, mitigation, and an official target of preventing a temperature rise above 2°C. Though lauded as a sensational achievement in its own right, the Paris Agreement did not avoid its fair share of criticism in the academic and public eye. In its development, the accord

faced many challenges, some being linguistic, at the hands of the Global North, specifically the United States. Author Radoslav S. Dimitrov even claims,

In private bilateral consultations, however, they were so adamant against legally binding mitigation and finance that leading diplomats stated with complete certainty: “If we insist on legally binding, the deal will not be global because we will lose the US” (top EU official). In the end, the US weakened mitigation commitments for developed countries in the new agreement (Dimitrov, 2016).

As a result of the hesitation by the United States, the language surrounding the push at 1.5°C became muddled. Instead of being the warming target, it became a creatively worded section allowing for, as Marshallese author and climate activist Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner put it at COP 28, “weasel words” to make their way into documents. These “weasel words” allow developed
countries to squeeze their way out of agreements, using loopholes and weak language to fall through on emissions commitments, Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), and other vital goals. For this section, the United States proposed a swap of wording that said, “Developed countries ‘should’ rather than ‘shall’ undertake economy-wide quantified emission reductions” (Dimitrov, 2016). A seemingly minute request, this surgical introduction allowed a further implied reduction in legally binding action.

More uplifting is an example of progress made and ground broken from COP 15 for Biodiversity (CBD), a separate event from the UNFCCC’s COP, held in Montreal in 2022. In a similar fashion to language in their constitution, Bolivia pushed for including the rights of nature and an actual mention of “Mother Earth” in the ensuing Global Biodiversity Framework that came out of the summit. Though seemingly simple, the consideration of the rights of nature and the concept of Mother Earth gives incredible legal precedence for the defense of the environment and, hence, the protection against mounting climate change (Bustamante & Ragettli, 2022). This initiative represented a paradigm shift, acknowledging that the climate possesses inherent rights. Beyond symbolic significance, this move led to legislative protections for nature, recognizing its independent status and intrinsic value. Examining language shifts in previous COPs unveils other noteworthy changes. These instances are markers of evolving global attitudes and commitments, reflecting the ever-growing urgency of addressing environmental concerns.

COP 28 brought about groundbreaking developments, building on the momentum of previous conferences. Comparing the GST draft from the 5th of December to the Final COP 28 document on the Global Stock take reveals evolving language and approaches. A stark difference exists between the language that survived the event and the language that became watered-down, plushy attempts at so-called "progress." We must not take the usage of progress very literally in this context, as progress can often be seen as a development that is uncaring to the lives of the people who do not control progress. Instead, the progress I describe outlines what new ground we make in creating more substantial legal and social documentation in the fight against climate Change.

First, the most considerable glaring difference that highlights where the document may have fallen through between the copy of the GST from the 5th and the final copy is the treatment of coal power. In the earlier draft, there is strong language regarding coal that calls for not only "A rapid phase out of unabated coal power this decade" but also "an immediate cessation of the permitting of new unabated coal power generation" (UNFCCC, 2023). This language points to the complete elimination of coal by calling for a "phase out" and an "immediate cessation" of new coal power generation. The language in the final copy is as follows and calls for "rapidly phasing down unabated coal and limiting the permitting of new and unabated coal power generation." Pay particular notice to the change to a "phase down" and moving from "immediate cessation" to a "limiting" (UNFCCC, 2023).

However, not all of the changes made between these two drafts were negative, and there are even highlights to talk about, such as the GST becoming a brand-new reference point. Most exciting was the actual calling out of fossil fuels in documentation in the GST twice in the second article. This was relatively new ground for a COP document and is one of the only instances fossil fuels are specifically called out in writing on this scale and power level. The final published copy mentions fossil fuels three times. However, concepts such as human rights are only mentioned twice in the document. Overall, huge strides were made in the GST despite some sections needing to be stronger.

In conclusion, the language of COP documents is far from arbitrary; it reflects global values, commitments, and evolving perspectives on environmental issues. Including the rights of

nature and the explicit mention of fossil fuels, all underscore a changing narrative in global ecological discourse. The developments at COP 28 highlight the ongoing evolution of language and commitments. Comparative analyses of documents reveal the nuanced changes in approach and priorities over the years. As we navigate the complex landscape of environmental negotiations, it is imperative to recognize the significance of language in shaping the trajectory of global environmental policies. In essence, the language of COP agreement documents is a dynamic force, shaping the world we envision for the future. It is not merely a collection of words but a reflection of our shared commitment to safeguarding the planet. As we dissect the language of COP, we gain insights into the past, present, and potential future of global environmental cooperation. The choices we make in language today lay the foundation for a sustainable and equitable tomorrow.

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The Twin Crises of Debt and Environmental Sustainability: Lessons from COP28

Zoriaz Zafar

In the backdrop of the COP28 conference, a pressing issue that emerged was the twin crises of debt and environmental sustainability, particularly in developing countries like Pakistan and Sri Lanka. This essay explores the intricate relationship between these crises and proposes a nuanced approach to addressing them, drawing from the rich tapestry of discussions and experiences at COP28.

Developing countries are increasingly grappling with the dual challenge of environmental degradation and burgeoning debt. Pakistan, for instance, has been hit hard by climate-induced disasters, exacerbating its already precarious economic situation. The devastating floods and heatwaves 2022 have not only caused immense human suffering but also strained the country's financial resources. Similarly, Sri Lanka's recent economic turmoil and its vulnerability to torrential storm damage underscores the fragile balance between environmental and fiscal stability.

The first step in addressing these crises is acknowledging that they cannot be resolved solely through increased spending. While financial resources are crucial, the focus must also be on revenue generation and innovation. This was a recurring theme at COP28, where discussions often centered around sustainable economic models and pioneering ideas that do not compromise environmental integrity.

A key aspect of this approach is ensuring that climate-related projects are 'bankable.' However, the traditional definition of bankability, often centered around private financial returns, needs reevaluation. At the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank session on 'Pathway to Net Zero Incentives and Carbon Markets,' the concept of bankability was discussed in the context of carbon markets and climate finance. It became clear that cost-benefit analyses in these projects often overlook the social benefits, an aspect crucial for developing countries.

To address this, developing countries should seek partnerships with Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) and local private companies and innovators. This approach was

exemplified in discussions at the World Bank and AIIB pavilions, where the focus was on collaborative models that distribute risks and rewards more equitably. Such partnerships can lead to 'socially bankable' projects that not only yield financial returns but also deliver substantial social and environmental benefits.

The Finnish pavilion provided a compelling example with their advocacy for using the Baltic region's hydrogen power generation capabilities. This initiative, while environmentally beneficial, also faces demand-side constraints, as highlighted by a McKinsey consultant. This scenario underscores the need for projects that balance environmental sustainability with economic viability, with the combined influence and will of government entities and private collaborators to enact real change.

Moreover, the concept of 'socially bankable' projects was further reinforced during discussions on Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) at the World Bank event on 'Private Sector Mobilization for Climate.' The Jamaican Minister of Finance emphasized the importance of resilient infrastructure in the face of increasing natural disasters, a concern particularly relevant for small island nations with limited global visibility.

The experience at COP28 also highlighted the importance of innovative solutions in addressing these crises. For instance, the session on 'The Future of Financing Partnerships for Energy Transfers' by the AIIB underscored the need for realistic pathways to net zero, emphasizing the role of the private sector in forgoing some private profits for greater environmental good.

In conclusion, the twin crises of debt and environmental sustainability in developing countries demand a multifaceted approach. The lessons from COP28 suggest that a combination of fiscal prudence, innovative financing models, and socially responsible investment can pave the way forward. Developing countries must leverage partnerships with MDBs and local innovators to embark on projects that are not just financially bankable but also socially and environmentally beneficial. This approach not only addresses the immediate challenges but also lays the foundation for a sustainable and resilient future. As we move forward, new questions arise: How can we further refine the concept of 'social bankability' to include and quantify broader societal benefits? And through what mechanism can we ensure that these innovative financing models are accessible and equitable for all developing countries? These are the

questions that will shape our path in the ongoing fight against the twin crises of debt and environmental sustainability.

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The Essential Need for Public-Private Partnerships

By Connor Johnson

The Sustainable Development Goals or SDGs were created as an essential framework for improving life for every living being around the world. The SDGs require various initiatives to be taken to reach these seventeen goals. SDG 17-partnerships, may be one of the most important goals for creating change. Partnerships of all kinds are vital for creating lasting relationships and change worldwide as no one can accomplish much alone. Partnerships are especially significant with the looming threat of climate. Partnerships of all kinds are required to better combat climate change. When examining the business realm, partnerships between public and private sectors are crucial for financing and incentivizing the growth of climate technology. The most important factors that encourage both the private and public sectors to invest time and resources into projects are transparency and bankability. These two aspects are crucial for the growth of public-private partnerships and so these partnerships can be sustained. Ideas of transparency and bankability from talks and panels at COP 28 will be discussed, as well as how partnerships can be applied in a huge industry such as cement manufacturing.

When attending COP 28 in Dubai, I noted that at many talks and panels, the theme of transparency was repeated. Transparency was called from both private companies and projects as well as the public sector agencies. The need for transparency is equal between both sectors as government agencies and companies are hesitant to finance projects if they do not know where their money is going towards. Public-private partnerships are key to holding both sides accountable for their stated initiatives; incentivizing timeliness and higher quality of work. Venture capital firms in a country will be more willing to invest in eco-friendly projects if the government has also invested in the same projects, keeping account of where money is going as well as the progress of the company.

Listening to a panel at the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank pavilion, a conversation stuck out to me regarding carbon-neutral pledges. Many companies are hiding in their pledge to become carbon neutral as many do not have plausible or concrete ideas when pledging on how to accomplish carbon neutrality. Many private companies falsely believe they will figure it out

before the date they pledged. Public-private partnerships help resolve this problem by creating pressure from both sectors to follow through and be transparent about their carbon-neutral goals. Further funding from the partnership will also help companies meet their goals. Progress reports or oversight within the partnerships push companies into creating more plausible ideas and goals of carbon neutrality.

Private sector representatives discussed the need for environmental projects to be bankable on many talks and panels. Bankability refers the the ability of a project to generate revenue. The bankability of projects is mainly a concern of the private sector as this influences their financing decisions. I listened to a panel with Bo Li, the Deputy Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund. He emphasized that we cannot rely solely on expenditure policies but must look to revenue policies as well. There needs to be a focus on how revenue can be raised by these projects for countries as well as financers to help bring more actors in climate finance and technologies. He also mentions in regards to the public sector that straightforward financing is not enough. Different government subsidies are needed to create more incentives to further the worldwide goals such as tax cuts. These may also be cheaper than traditional financing of these projects. Bo Li also noted the public sector's responsibility to create sustainable debt for developing countries investing in climate technologies. It is very risky for the private sector to invest in technologies in places where there is a possibility they cannot be paid back or earn revenue. Bankable projects also benefit developing countries as they too profit off project revenue and may help finance other projects or pay debts. During a talk from the World Bank pavilion regarding sustainable debt, they suggested longer maturity periods on loans with little to no interest. This may be hard for companies, especially smaller ones to afford which limits opportunities for the countries and companies.

During a panel by the Finland pavilion regarding hydrogen power, there was a discussion about how crucial the demand for climate technologies supply is. The public and private sectors can fund numerous projects of more sustainable technologies such as hydrogen power, however, these projects' growth depends on the demand for these technologies. The public sector needs to take the initiative by buying and deploying these technologies themselves. The public sector should also provide incentives for others to use these projects from companies to other government agencies. Companies in the private sector may be hesitant to use these technologies

as they are new and unknown. If the public sector is not attempting to integrate these technologies, why would the private sector?

One area of business that was constantly mentioned when discussing the need for greater change and public-private partnerships was real estate development; specifically the cement industry. Cement is the second most used substance after water according to the UNFCCC (UNFCCC Report 2023). This widely used substance creates countless tonnes of carbon emissions every year. According to a study conducted by McKinsey and Company, "Cement making is responsible for almost a quarter of all industry carbon emissions" (McKinsey and Company 2022). This is a crucial area that needs to start transitioning away from the traditional way of production. Traditional cement has been used for countless years everywhere because it is the most reliable and cheapest. Public-private partnerships can be exercised in multiple aspects of the cement industry to accelerate this transition.

Government funding of research is essential to help discover more sustainable materials to build with than cement. Research can be funded to study the existing way of cement manufacturing and create new ways for cement to be produced more sustainably. Government funding can go towards private companies working on more sustainable yet just as effective alternatives for cement. Funding these private companies can be crucial to creating breakthroughs. Private venture capital firms may be hesitant to invest in companies creating new alternatives as their effectiveness is unknown. Government funding of these companies creating alternatives may entice others in the private sector to invest in them as well as it is less risky with public sector support. Established cement companies may be hesitant to start transitioning to more sustainable alternatives as it is seen as an extra cost. Government funding of carbon capture technologies in addition to financing the transition of alternatives will play a key role in reducing emissions of long-standing cement companies by financially helping and providing incentives.

The public sector can also partner with construction companies to provide incentives to buildings with sustainable alternatives to cement and other materials. This is where government subsidies can be used differently to encourage builders to buy these materials with loans, grants, and tax cuts for building. Pledges have been taken by the public and private actors in the cement industry to transition to more sustainable building. According to UNFCCC, "By 2030 there will be a 25% reduction of carbon intensity to 463kg CO_2 per ton of cement" (UNFCCC 2022).

Companies such as McKinsey and Company are working to consult and support companies in the cement industry transition.

During the negotiations, Saudi Arabia, speaking on behalf of the Arab group along with other country representatives, expressed their concern with the definition of climate finance. Countries would like to see a more concrete definition of what is climate finance. This creates a better understanding of how to invest in climate finance and helps both the public and private sector as well as civil society have a better grasp of the concept. This can lead to further awareness and support for climate financing. The COP and other negotiations are vital to spurring change as there is significance in just the wording of documents relating to climate finance. Years of work need to be done to combat climate change thoroughly, but neither the public nor private sector can do it alone. It requires both sectors and consumers to have the same goals and initiatives. That is why of all kinds partnerships are very important. It is essential everyone is on the same page to save the planet.

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