

Climate Justice: Achieving 1.5° Centigrade

Joyeeta Gupta, Hebe Verrest, Courtney Vegelin, Karin Arts, Kate Dooley & Kyra Bos

Goal 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

Key messages:

- Goal 13 and the Paris Agreement call for addressing climate change in a just manner.** The SDGs specify that all goals should be met in an interlinked and just manner and that the Right to Development (RtD) is to be respected.
- Addressing climate change in a just manner implies accepting the Right to Promote Sustainable Development (RtPSD).** Both the RtD and the RtPSD apply to all states in the world, but with greater consideration of the special position, needs and rights of poor countries.
- Equity should not be misused or depoliticized in promoting risky science and technology**
The urgency of the climate change problem requires immediate mitigation action; however, risky negative emission technologies and geo-engineering should not be justified on equity grounds.
- The Paris bottom-up approach does not imply that climate commitments should not be fair.**
All states claim that their bottom-up targets are fair; but research shows that such claims are often dubious. Bottom-up approaches should be scrutinized for fairness.
- Social movements and courts are successfully pushing the climate justice agenda. Court cases supported by social movements are testing different climate justice claims.**

Goal 13 and the Paris Agreement call for addressing climate change in a just manner

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) state that the goals are integrated, interrelated and indivisible. This implies that the Climate Goals cannot be met at the cost of other Goals. It states that “The new Agenda recognizes the need to build peaceful, just and inclusive societies that provide equal access to justice and that are based on respect for human rights (including the **right to development [RtD]**), on effective rule of law and good governance at all levels and on transparent, effective and accountable institutions.”

Just climate change action implies acceptance of the Right to Promote Sustainable Development (RTPSD)

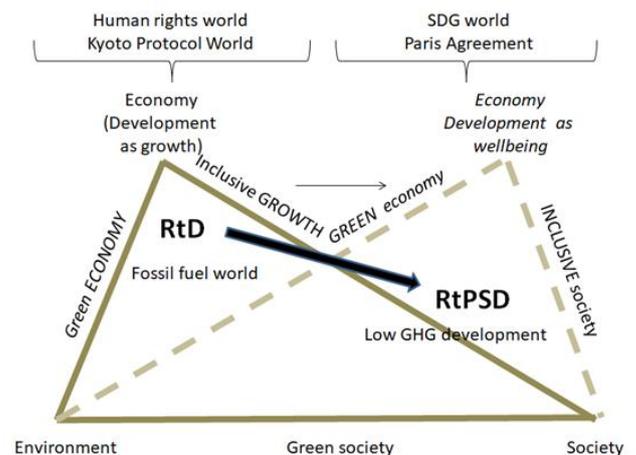
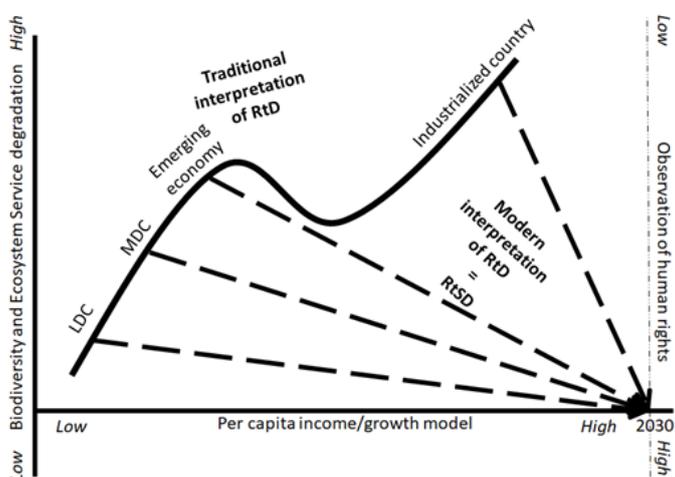


Figure 1. The RtPSD; Source: Gupta and Arts 2018: 21

The Centre for Sustainable Development Studies (CSDS) was launched on 24 June 2015 as a new venture of the Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research (AISSR) at the University of Amsterdam. This series of policy briefs is the outcome of the ‘Critical Perspectives on Governance by Sustainable Development Goals’ Conference organized in Amsterdam from 27-29 June 2016.

The UN General Assembly has recognized that individuals and peoples have a Right to Development (RtD). The Climate Convention has modified this into the state Right to Promote Sustainable Development – in other words that development cannot come at the cost of socio-ecological aspects. Given that there is a very limited Carbon budget and time is running out, it is becoming difficult for developing countries to argue that their right to development gives them the right to continue emitting greenhouse gases. But, it is even worse when rich countries continue to evade their own responsibilities. Both groups are subject to the RtPSD and this has implications for development trajectories.

Figure 2. Implications of RtPSD for development



Source: Gupta and Arts (2018): 21

Equity should not be misused, ignored or depoliticized in promoting risky science and technology

Partly to avoid difficult discussions about achieving a low carbon economy, some scholars use equity as an excuse to promote dangerous technologies, such as solar radiation management, as a way to protect the poor (Flegal and Gupta 2017). Others promote carbon dioxide removal technology using cost-benefit analysis. While profits may accrue to the companies investing in them, the risks are spread across society, and methods like cost-benefit analysis usually ignore the wider societal risks (Faran and Olsson 2018). Still others promote negative emission technologies like afforestation rather than mitigation options but if such risky technologies do not work, the acceptance of such risks leads to greater carbon lock-in (Dooley and Kartha 2018). Equity discussions are sometimes presented in cooled down IPCC texts, but perhaps they can better be presented as heated up debates and discussions that enable all aspects to be considered (Lahn 2018).

The shift from a top-down to a bottom-up approach does not imply that NDCs should not be fair.

Failure to reach a top-down distribution of responsibilities in the climate negotiations along the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities led to a bottom-up declaration of what was possible (the Intended Nationally Determined Contributions - NDCs). Countries were asked to explain how fair they thought their contribution was. Winkler et al. (2018) concludes that most countries feel that the marginal contribution of their country to the total emissions justifies low mitigation action and a focus on adaptation instead. However, there are no standards against which they make their equity claims. If bottom-up approaches are used without a clear commitment to what climate equity and justice is, then it is more than likely that the 1.5°C-2°C target will not be achieved or will be achieved through the use of risky technologies (Winkler et al. 2018).

If the climate goals are to be achieved, there is an active and urgent need to revisit and discuss the need for climate justice, the Right to Development and the Right to Promote Sustainable Development.

Social movements and courts are successfully pushing the climate justice agenda

Bottom-up processes through social movements and using the courts can successfully play a role in countering climate injustice. Court cases are pushing states and other actors to take appropriate action. Examples include cases in the Netherlands (Urgenda vs. Dutch government), in South Africa (EarthLife Johannesburg vs. South African government) and in the USA (Juliana vs U.S.).

References

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