

JUSTICE AND EQUITY



We may end up with a net zero world that is not worth having. How do we avoid making choices now to save the planet that benefit the few and fail the many?



The climate crisis must catalyse bold action in political, social and economic spheres. But there is a risk that the suspension of norms and the pressure to step far outside the Overton window may have dire consequences for the most vulnerable, while benefiting those in positions of power. How do we design and deliver a future worth having for all?



— Innovation bias – Given current market structures and drive for profit, technology is often designed for the wealthiest 1 per cent and funded by venture capital firms who are focused on financial return rather than wider public benefit.

— Understanding and addressing vested interests becomes more critical every day so that we can drive a just transition to address climate change. People who control carbon have a deep interest in retaining control. Change will need to include moving from current finance models and the financialisation of resources to climate finance models that safeguard the commons.

— Rural and urban tensions – Political and cultural power is often centred in cities, which can lead to an imbalance of power and divisiveness. There is a growing perception in many places that those in the city tell those in rural areas ‘how to live’ without the connection to or real understanding of rural settings. We must harness

rural knowledge and give people more agency to make decisions in their local context.

— Marginalised voices and indigenous voices need to be heard. This is important for an equitable transformation, but also to preserve critical knowledge and know-how. For instance, indigenous women are playing a significant role in preserving land and biodiversity across the world. Women make up between 60 and 80 per cent of farmers in non-industrialised countries.

— Equity and poverty – The transformation needed to address climate change is a huge opportunity to address equity and poverty. It is also a prerequisite to enable change and ensure it endures. As climate impacts effect the poorest communities first, developed nations should address this purely from self-interest, if not from ethical motivations.

— The human and financial costs of mass migrations precipitated by

climate disaster in vulnerable regions will create huge upheaval for all. Trust is already fracturing between global south and the global north over assumptions about equity, sufficiency, and loss and damage repayment. Climate justice will become impossible in the absence of trust.

— Employment – For many people, vulnerability is a matter of jobs: dignified, well-paid jobs. If we can begin to create economic circles of success – locally-based green wealth – everyone has a reason to make the place they live better.

— Rights of nature is underway to treat nature as a legal entity with rights, and therefore protections of its own, could be a significant step in protecting the natural environment. This is indelibly linked with how to best protect the most vulnerable communities. Likely this movement will benefit from a growing respect for the natural world which can be seen over the last 10 years or so.

PROTECTING COMMON HERITAGE

Justice and equity questions are intensifying in relation to the concept of the common heritage of humanity, for example in the context of biodiversity. Genetic modification of seeds – for greater climate resilience or productivity – leads to patenting which effectively captures and privatises something that is common heritage. Advances in seed technology sound good but are being used in a way that sidelines farmers. This is an example of disconnected regimes of regulation and trust in markets that result in perverse consequences.

The challenge is to change regulation, not change seed-based research. A necessary social political debate about public goods and the use of natural resources needs to be embedded in our action on climate and nature together with research on equitable mechanisms to scale adoption.

EARTH4ALL

The Club of Rome has published a report to respond to the 1972 “Limits to Growth”, which warned of the consequences of exponential economic and human population growth in a world of finite resources. “Earth4All” identifies poverty and inequality as the two most destructive constraints to action on climate. It recommends a complete redefinition of what matters in economic policy to focus on wellbeing so as to enable societies and individuals to overcome deepening divisions and polarisation.

This includes debt cancellation for all low-income countries, and intellectual property rights waivers on patents related to sustainability and health. It endorses the creation of a citizens’ dividend fund to give everyone a fair share of the global commons and national wealth. Enhanced support for women and girls is crucial.

EIT Climate-KIC is Europe’s leading climate innovation agency and community, supporting places and industries bridge the gap between climate commitments and current reality.

This is one of ten insights derived from a series of conversations hosted by EIT Climate-KIC. Thinkers and practitioners from multiple disciplines discussed emerging trends, challenges, possibilities and implications for climate actions.

“If we think in terms of climate equity and work towards it, we can tackle several of the most critical issues at the same time.”

“Who owns the right to technology that can change or manipulate behaviour; how it will be deployed, by whom and to what ends?”

“We will do as little as possible until feedback from natural systems is extreme enough to make us act meanwhile the delay is impacting the most vulnerable populations.”

“We need to return to the notion of the ‘commons’; that we all have shared ownership of cultural and natural resources versus exploitation by the few for profit.”



INNOVATION FOR ALL

How could organisations embed justice and equity into its work and into its mission? Is it enough for any innovation actor to align to an impact mission that seeks to limit climate change without explicitly naming that this must be delivered in a way that is just and provides a positive and desirable future for all? Awareness of vested interests and unintended consequences of actions will be paramount.

UNITY THROUGH DIVERSITY

The EU is a large enough economic region to have an inevitable spill over effect with full scale laboratories and large enough demonstrations that prove wellbeing and sustainability are mutually possible and attractive. How could European-based organisations help amplify marginalised voices and diversity of perspectives from across the globe in that work, and where and how should it act beyond Europe? Exchanging learning needs to pay conscious attention to context and meaning.