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Inequality

The Climate Solution is Social Justice. Discuss.

When we talk about ‘Accelerating to Net Zero’, what do we mean? What does a net zero world look like? At the third session of the Institute of Directors Global Conference, this question was on everyone’s mind.

People everywhere are already feeling the weight of a legacy of human and non-human exploitation. But don’t forget when we talk about human exploitation, that the vast majority of exploited people inhabit the Global South. When we talk about devastation of the non-human world, we know it is the Global South that endures crippling extractivism funded by forces in the Global North. There are exceptions of course (fossil fuel corporations will drill for oil wherever they can find it), but just look to businesses attempting to drive profit from the booming ‘green tech’ industry for an example. This so-called ‘sustainable technology’, like electric vehicles, has simply swapped the conventional (fossil fuels) for the trendy (cobalt, lithium, etc) while continuing to drive extraction and exploitation of land and people for profit.

Samantha Suppiah (Sustainability Strategist) made the point that this type of ‘conscious capitalism’ only continues to perpetuate systemic injustice - the profits fall into the hands of the rich while the people and environment they depend on are left devastated. As she says, a net zero world could still rely upon the oppression of others.

And so, I will ask again: what will our net zero world look like?

This does not mean that technology has no place in our sustainable future. For example, we need renewable energy to liberate ourselves from the chokehold of fossil fuels. Mark Logan (Scottish Technology Ecosystem Transformation) rightly said that the billions of pounds being poured into the fossil fuel industry could quickly be transitioned towards investment in hydrogen fuel, carbon capture, and even nuclear fusion. But technology cannot fix all our problems.

Not only because mass production of anything will likely reproduce colonial-like inequalities, but also because it simply won’t work. Realistically, nuclear fusion is decades away from significant participation in our energy infrastructure; there is no evidence suggesting carbon capture technology can be scaled up to the extent that would solve our emissions problem; and ultimately, our planet has a finite supply of resources to draw from.

However, what if the solutions to climate and social crises are one in the same? Vanessa Nakate (Rise Up Movement) pointed out that quality education for girls has a direct impact on social and environmental conditions across the world. Samantha spoke of a decolonisation movement that could both restore indigenous peoples’ sovereignty and allow them to lead the way to a re-flourishing of life. After all, indigenous communities comprise only 5% of the world’s population, but 80% of global biodiversity is under their care – this is not a coincidence.

So, let’s prioritise the solutions that can be implemented right now, and even better, that will maximise the wellbeing of people everywhere. And let’s utilise the power we hold to dismantle systems of oppression rather than uphold them.

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