United Nations
Economic Commission for Africa

Critical reflections on climate change and development in Africa the post-COVID-19 era

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Discussion paper

"We shall require a substantially new manner of thinking if mankind is to survive."

Albert Einstein

I. COVID-19

1. The world is currently in the throes of an unprecedented health and economic crisis brought on by the global spread of the novel corona virus disease (COVID-19). The virus has already infected tens of millions of people worldwide, with hundreds of thousands of fatalities. The globalized and interconnected nature of our societies and economies has allowed a public health event to quickly morph into a global political, economic, psychological and social crisis of epic proportions. Public health systems across the board have been strained beyond existing capacities, revealing the vulnerabilities of the world's populations to a pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic has also wrought havoc on economies as a result of the shutting down of almost all economic activities as part of the effort to contain the spread of the virus. The long-term effects and impact of the pandemic are still being assessed and will be felt for many years after the pandemic ends. It is already forecast that there will be no economic growth in 2020 and 2021, and the economy will recover to pre-COVID-19 levels only in 2022.

2. Initial indications are that COVID-19 is a zoonotic disease caused by a novel corona virus that made the leap from wildlife to humans, possibly through an intermediate species. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that there are clear links between human health and the environment. Biodiversity loss and proximity to wildlife can create the conditions for illnesses to spread. Research suggests that the emergence of new human diseases is closely linked to the loss and degradation of ecosystems and habitats, which in turn is driven by climate change, resource extraction, urban and agricultural expansion and pollution. Rising temperatures have been linked to changes in the range of malarial mosquitoes, and the spread of malaria and the Zika virus. The extent to which growing human pressures on the natural environment is responsible for zoonoses remains the subject of ongoing study. Other environmentally related illnesses, such as chronic lung and heart conditions due to long-term exposure to pollution, make pathogens like the novel corona virus even more dangerous. However, biodiversity can act as a buffer against the spread of pathogens. Healthy ecosystems translate into resilient and healthy societies.

3. In its fifth assessment report, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) noted the significance of vector organisms in transmitting infectious diseases, and that climate change might alter the distribution of vector species, depending on whether conditions were favourable or unfavourable for them to breed. Even before the novel corona virus outbreak, plans were in place to explore the links between biodiversity and climate change through a joint meeting (scheduled for May 2020, now postponed) of IPCC and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES). Climate change and biodiversity loss are deeply interlinked, and both are driven by the same factors. However, they have tended to be treated separately in policy and practice.1

4. One of the key findings of a recent project exploring the dynamic drivers of disease in Africa was that "over the past few decades, more than 60 per cent of emerging infectious diseases affecting people have had their origin in wildlife or livestock. As well as presenting a threat of global disease outbreak, these zoonotic diseases quietly devastate lives and livelihoods".2 This was before COVID-19, which is presently devastating whole economies and livelihoods. In one of the publications produced as part of that project, it was concluded that, inter alia, addressing the underlying drivers of vulnerability was essential

1 Seddon, Nathalie and others. "Understanding the value and limits of nature-based solutions to climate change and other global challenges". Available at https://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/10.1098/rstb.2019.0120.
2 See the website of the Dynamic Drivers of Disease in Africa Consortium (https://steps-centre.org/project/drivers_of_disease/).

in tackling zoonotic disease in Africa.3 Like other political-economy analyses, the study proceeded to demonstrate how political interests, commercial investments and conflict all generated patterns of vulnerability, reshaping the political ecology of disease landscapes, influencing traditional coping mechanisms and affecting health-service provision and outbreak responses. The study echoes the political-ecology approach adopted by the African Climate Policy Centre, among others, which recognizes that climate change exacerbates existing vulnerabilities and inequalities, and that historical, political and economic factors determine societal vulnerability to climate-change hazards and risks.

5. While a great deal of focus has been devoted to the economic cost of the pandemic, little attention has been paid to the systemic weakness that it has exposed. Public health systems in both developed and less developed countries have been shown to be unfit for purpose in a major pandemic. Much of this is because of systematic under-expenditure on research and development, infrastructure and human capacity-building in the sector, owing to cuts in public expenditure in pursuit of so-called global economic competitiveness. COVID-19 has brought into sharp focus the common globalized vulnerabilities to zoonoses. The mutation of the novel corona virus from its wildlife reservoir to humans is most probably the result of increasing proximity between humans and wildlife caused by the inexorable expansion of agriculture and urban development into nature, and exacerbated by the production of domestic livestock in factory farm conditions that creates the perfect setting for the replication of viruses.

3 Dzingirai, Vupenyu. and others. "Structural drivers of vulnerability to zoonotic disease in Africa". Available at https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2016.0169.

II. Climate emergency: lessons from COVID-19

6. In addition to global economies going into a recession, the world is facing two emergencies simultaneously – the climate emergency and COVID-19. Suggestions that we cannot afford to address climate change, biodiversity loss and economic crises at the same time represent a false choice;4 all crises must be addressed at the same time. The climate emergency has been unfolding over many decades, and the first global response to it was enshrined in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, concluded in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1992. The COVID-19 emergency, on the other hand, came into public view only in December 2019, and was declared a global emergency in mid-January 2020. In a matter of weeks, COVID-19 has changed the world as we know it. It has brought commerce to an almost complete standstill, locked down whole nations and quarantined whole populations indoors, in accordance with the Siracusa Principles on the Limitation and Derogation of Provisions in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.5 The response to COVID-19 has been an unprecedented mobilization of society, businesses and State resources.

7. There are many parallels between COVID-19 and climate change, and many lessons can be learned from the COVID-19 response. The Economic Commission for Africa estimates that COVID-19 could cause African economies to contract between 1.8 and 2.6 per cent, potentially pushing 27 million people into extreme poverty.6 At the time of writing, COVID-19 has infected more than 6 million people worldwide, with over 370,000 deaths. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that climate change-related disasters are responsible for 150,000 deaths per year, and this is projected to rise to 250,000 per year by 2030. By way of comparison, in April 2019, Cyclone Idai struck three Southern African countries (Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe), resulting in over 1,000 deaths, 2,486 persons injured, 196,255 households displaced, and 2,968,895 persons affected.7 Add to that more than 800,000 hectares of crops destroyed just before the harvest season, and over 3,000 classrooms and 45 health facilities flattened. That single event alone caused more than $3 billion in damage to the economies of those three countries.8 The costs cited relate to physical damage caused by the high-impact climate event. However, it is impossible to calculate the cost of secondary effects on physical and emotional well-being, food and water

> Suggestions that we cannot afford to address climate change, biodiversity loss and economic crises at the same time represents a false choice; both crises must be addressed at the same time.

4 Members of the European Conservatives and Reformists group in the European Parliament have argued for the rolling back of environmental commitments by the European Union. See, for example, https://ecrgroup.eu/article/ecr_group_we_need_to_put_pragmatism_first .

5 Diego S. Silva and Maxwell J. Smith. "Limiting rights and freedoms in the context of Ebola and other public health emergencies: how the principle of reciprocity can enrich the application of the Siracusa Principles". Health and Human Rights, vol. 17, No. 1.

6 Economic Commission for Africa (2020). "COVID-19 in Africa: protecting lives and economies". Available at https://www.uneca.org/publications/covid-19-africa-protecting-lives-and-economies.

7 See https://www.uneca.org/climate-change-and-development-africa-post-covid-19.

8 Ibid.

scarcity, the spread of mosquito-borne and water-borne diseases, displacement, migration and so on caused by such events.

8. The systemic weaknesses in public health systems that have been exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic are mirrored in the meteorological sector in Africa. The continent is characterized by extremely low levels of investment in weather and climate observation infrastructure, limited capacity to analyse and interpret existing climate information, and even more limited uptake and use of climate information in policy and decision-making. According to the World Bank,9 only 10 out of 54 African countries offer adequate meteorological services, and fewer than 300 of the continent's weather stations meet the observation standards of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO).10 The pan-African component of the Weather and Climate Information Services for Africa (WISER) initiative, implemented by the African Climate Policy Centre, is working to support the development of a policy and legislative environment that is conducive to increased investment in weather and climate information services across the continent in order to stimulate the uptake and use of those services. A few other initiatives with a similar focus are underway in various countries. The COVID-19 pandemic brought to the forefront the need to provide adequate funding for public health systems in Africa. Similarly, a massive injection of resources into national meteorological and hydrological services across the continent is required, in line with the scale of the climate threat to all sectors of the continent's economies.

9. Like COVID-19, climate change will eviscerate African economies. The direct economic impact of climate change responses on the continent have been underlined in the IPCC special report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels , in which it was projected that model pathways for limiting global warming to 1.5°C would involve an annual average investment in energy systems of around $2.4 trillion, representing about 2.5 per cent of global GDP, between 2016 and 2035.11 According to the Africa Renewable Energy Initiative, the African continent requires 300GW by 2030 just to address its energy access challenges.

10. Vulnerability to climate change is globally generalized and locally specific. This is to say that, while everyone is vulnerable to the impact of climate change, developing countries are much more vulnerable because of the structural and historical factors that restrict their ability to absorb the costs of climate-related events, such as droughts, floods and heatwaves, and their limited ability to adapt their economies to operate efficiently and sustainably in a changing climate. Without external assistance, they also have limited capacity to take advantage of existing opportunities to respond to climate change – such as investing in clean renewable energy, climate proofing infrastructure and adopting smart agricultural practices. While it is estimated that COVID-19 will cost the world economy up to 5 per cent of GDP, adverse climate phenomena is already costing most African economies between 3 and 5 per cent of GDP annually, with some incurring losses of up to 10 per cent of GDP. Thus, quite clearly, climate change already poses an even greater risk to lives, livelihoods and ecosystems than the COVID-19 pandemic has thus far. Yet the response to climate change has by and large been lacklustre. How are we to understand that disparity, and what is to be done to ensure that climate change receives the urgent attention that it deserves?

9 World bank 2016. "Modernizing meteorological services to build climate resilience across Africa". Available at www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2016/11/10/modernizing-meteorological-services-to-build-climate-resilience-across-africa .

10 "Africa's 20,000 weather station plan". See www.scidev.net/global/data/supported-content/africa-s-20-000-weather-station-plan.

11 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), 2019. "Global warming of 1.5°C: an IPCC special report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways, in the context of strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change, sustainable development, and efforts to eradicate poverty".

11. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated yet again that infectious diseases spread rapidly across national borders and are a threat to everyone. The WHO-led response has also emphasized the necessity of international collaboration and organization to block the spread of the virus. While nations are mobilizing their own resources to fight the pandemic within their respective borders, this is being done within the context of scientifically proven and globally prescribed measures. Urgent efforts have also been made to mobilize resources to assist the most vulnerable developing countries. The global response to the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the utility of multilateralism and the common interest of humanity.

12. Similarly, climate change is a global challenge emanating from the pollution of the atmosphere, which is a global commons. The climate response must therefore be organized internationally and collaboratively if it is to be effective. Global problems require global solutions. This is not new. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and its treaties reflect global efforts to solve the climate crisis. But the implementation of the solutions provided for under those treaties has been grossly inadequate. Greenhouse gas emissions have been increasing every year, despite commitments to cut those emissions by every signatory to the Paris Agreement.

III. Global warming

13. 13. Since the coming into force of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in 1992, greenhouse gas emissions have been on a continuous upward trajectory, save for a brief lull after the 2008 financial crisis. Although efforts to give effect to the Convention have seen a plethora of climate change laws and regulations, mechanisms and provisions, such general agreements at the global negotiation level have had little effect on greenhouse gas emissions. In fact, between 2011 and 2015, greenhouse gas emissions grew by more than 2 parts per million, and spiked to an unprecedented 3.05 parts per million in 2015. There are multiple reasons for the ineffectiveness of the Convention, but chief among these is the lack of political will.

14. The Paris Agreement, concluded in 2015, is the principal treaty that defines how the parties will fight global warming. It has three main objectives:

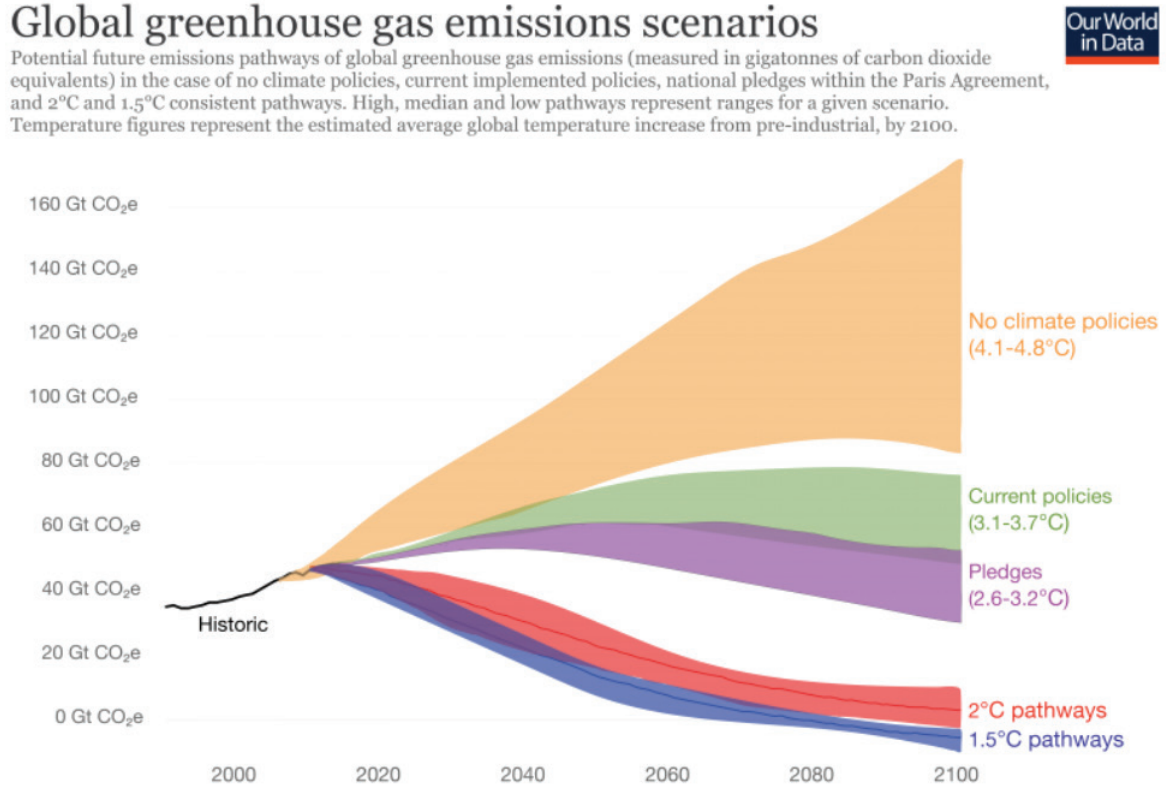
    a. Holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels;

    b. Increasing the ability to adapt to the adverse impact of climate change and to foster climate resilience and low-greenhouse-gas-emissions development, in a manner that does not threaten food production;

    c. Making financial flows consistent with a pathway towards low greenhouse gas emissions and climate-resilient development.

15. Unlike its predecessor, the Kyoto Protocol, in which parties recognized the historical responsibilities of nations for cumulative greenhouse gas emissions in the atmosphere through the principle of common but differentiated responsibility (the polluter pays principle), the Paris Agreement was grounded in the principle of enlightened self-interest. The latter principle holds that each nation

Figure I



will mitigate its own emissions because it is in its enlightened self-interest to do so. The inadequacy of that principle is glaring. The Agreement is thus a voluntary agreement in which enlightened self-interest is represented by nationally determined contributions, which are statements made by nations concerning the actions that they will take to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions between a base year and 2030. The current rate of emissions has put us on a pathway to global warming of more than 3°C by the end of the century (see figure I). However, to avoid irreversible interference with the climate system, warming cannot surpass 2°C; the Paris Agreement objective is to limit warming to 1.5°C, if possible.

16. According to WMO, if the planet keeps warming at its current pace, the average global temperature could increase by 1.5°C in the next 10 years. That rise would worsen extreme weather events, and many of the dangerous effects of climate change might become irreversible. This year, 2020, was supposed to be a landmark year for the Paris Agreement. All parties to the agreement were to ratcheted up their nationally determined contributions, thereby demonstrating their increased ambition to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions, and thus put the world on the path towards a climate-resilient future. The advent of the COVID-19 crisis has all but extinguished any hope of countries allocating significant budgetary resources to reducing fossil fuel dependence and investing in green technologies.

17. The COVID-19 response has been underpinned by science. Researchers and scientists at WHO and other organizations have been continuously engaged in the evolution of policies to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. The measures to control the spread of the virus have been determined by health scientists and largely accepted by politicians, who have translated them into drastic policies that have been unprecedented. In turn, the public has readily accepted such measures because they are understood to be scientifically grounded rather than politically driven. For example, a key study conducted by scholars at Imperial College London helped to change the course of COVID-19-related government policy in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America, which possibly saved many thousands of lives.12 Similarly, on 23 April 2020, while reviewing measures to control the spread of the novel corona virus in South Africa, President Cyril Ramaphosa made it clear that the spread of COVID-19 could not be allowed to outpace the ability to effectively address it. As such, he declared that the government of South Africa would introduce a tiered system to respond to the pandemic, in consultation with scientists and other experts.

18. With respect to climate change, the climate science produced by IPCC (on the basis of a massive body of research), WMO, the United Nations Environment Programme and numerous national and regional organizations has been contested and ignored by policy- and decision-makers. For instance, the Twenty-First Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change commissioned IPCC to study the impact of 1.5°C warming. IPCC published the results of the study in October 2018, ahead of the meeting of the Twenty-Fourth Conference of the Parties, to be held in Poland. In the study report, it was noted that the world was off-track towards achieving the temperature goal of the Paris Agreement, and that, if it continued on that trajectory, the world would warm by at least 3°C by the end of the twenty-first century. To achieve the target of limiting global warming to 1.5°C, the world would need to make rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society. If warming during the twenty-first century were to be limited to 1.5°C, then emissions of carbon dioxide would have to be reduced by 45 per cent by 2030 and reach net zero by 2050.13 Such radical emissions cuts would require massive transformations in the global energy and transport systems, and the protection and restoration of natural ecosystems. While the report received widespread acclaim

12 New York Times, 2020. "Behind the virus report that jarred the U.S. and the U.K. to action". Available at https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/17/world/europe/coronavirus-imperial-college-johnson.html.

13 IPCC, 2019. "Global warming of 1.5°C".

in social, political and scientific circles as a road map towards stabilizing the climate system, the Twenty-Fourth Conference of the Parties failed to agree on endorsing and adopting the findings and key recommendations of the report. In a dramatic pushback against enhanced climate ambition, the Conference of the Parties instead "welcomed the timely completion" of the report and "invited Parties to make use" of its content.

19. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change itself is tenuous, with countries choosing to withdraw completely from treaties under the Convention, or simply not implementing voluntary commitments. The lesson of the COVID-19 pandemic is that science can in fact be translated into urgent and drastic policy decisions if there is sufficient political will to do so. Similar to the status of health science research, climate science research in Africa is weak and underfunded. Most of the available weather and climate information relating to Africa is based on observations from satellites and other remotely-collected data, with very little investment in climate observation infrastructure in Africa, and even less investment in building the capacity of national meteorological services. In order for development policy on the continent to be responsive to climate science, there has to be significant investment in climate information services.

20. The response to COVID-19 has been based on unprecedented government intervention and almost universal social acceptance of the radical measures adopted by all but a few governments. Countries that were quick to respond have handled the crisis more effectively. The same degree of urgency is needed in the response to climate change. However, while countries have closed borders and stopped international travel to contain the spread of COVID-19, borders cannot be closed to counter climate change. Global cooperation and action are therefore urgently required to manage the global climate system. COVID-19 has given rise to an uncontested recognition of the centrality of the State in managing crises. The State is also demonstrating its potential to play a decisive, transformative role in post COVID-19 recovery and reconstruction. In Africa, the erosion of the State's role and the weakening of its institutions in past decades has prompted significant concern about the capacity of the continent to plan and implement an effective pandemic response strategy should infections start spreading at rates seen in China, Italy, Spain and the United States of America. In Africa, weak State institutions and even weaker economies are sources of great precarity across the continent. Post-pandemic green development planning and practice will require significant investments in building the capacity of the public sector. In many ways, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has already acknowledged the centrality of the State in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. COVID-19 has demonstrated the urgent need to build State capacities.

> **It is not even clear that political leaders have fully recognized the true extent of the climate emergency, and the very real possibility of irreversible damage within the decade. The political will to embark on carbon neutral trajectories, termed "ambition" in climate change speak, has been woefully lacking.**

21. A new political economy calculus that is grounded in solidarity, equality and environmental

sustainability is a prerequisite for drastic action to address global climate change. The response to date has not exhibited anything close to the levels of cohesion and urgency that are required. Despite the increasing reliability of climate science, political and administrative leaders have disassociated themselves from acting on the basis of that science, which has resulted in policy paralysis. It is not even clear that political leaders have fully recognized the true extent of the climate emergency and the very real possibility of irreversible damage occurring within the present decade. The political will to embark on carbon-neutral trajectories, termed "ambition" in climate change speak, has been woefully lacking.

IV. Financing the fight against the twin crises

22. The pandemic has created new budgetary pressures on all countries. Most African economies are already facing massive falls in revenue as a result of the impact of adverse weather events related to climate change, which, in turn, have compelled emergency spending to save lives and livelihoods. This has already severely constrained the budgets and functioning of public institutions; the COVID-19 pandemic will only exacerbate these trends. Unlike developed economies, which have been able to mobilize new financing to mitigate the economic impact of the COVID-19 crisis, developing countries have had to solicit international financial institutions for emergency funding and the suspension of debt repayments. While such short-term measures will temporarily provide some fiscal space and resources for beneficiary countries to beef up health-care spending, low-income and emerging-market countries will find it difficult to avoid falling further into debt as a result of the pandemic.14

23. To be sure, the interim relief measures do not address the structural causes of fragility and could even result in the long-term decline of available financing, as was the experience with some funders during the debt write-off initiative for highly indebted poor countries. African governments require concessional financing to deal with the budgetary pressures of COVID-19. Such concessional financing should also be made to support their adaption to climate change. It is also important that the Economic Commission for Africa invest in better defining the causes of fragility to allow for a better focus on resilience-building. To that end, a vulnerability index for African countries would be a useful addition to the existing set of tools.

24. With the possible exception of South Africa, measures adopted across Africa to cushion against the impact of the pandemic on economies and livelihoods mostly have consisted in minimalist welfare and have largely been dependent on international aid. Such measures are not sustainable in the long term without increased economic growth, which will be difficult to achieve given the low levels of growth experienced before the pandemic. The heightening of awareness of structural deficiencies brought on by the COVID-19 crisis provides an opportunity for African countries to mobilize the resources necessary to carry out major infrastructure investment and to urgently address the energy deficit that is impeding industrialization. However, states lack the domestic resources that are needed for such investments.

25. Various national economic stimulus packages have been proposed, and some are already being implemented. To save African economies from fully imploding, it is essential that such packages address the structural causes of vulnerability in ways that are pro-poor and that put countries onto green development pathways. We cannot return to business as usual, which is what caused the public health and climate change emergencies in the first place. Sustainability in a post COVID-19 world should be based on reducing greenhouse gas emissions and protecting the environment. Recovery plans must not reinvest in dirty, polluting industries but promote meaningful employment, ensure just transitions, and be based on available science.

26. In contrast to the dismally low amount of funds that have been devoted to financing the response to climate change, the response to COVID-19 has shown that governments can in fact mobilize the requisite resources at short notice and in adequate amounts. This has been evident in particular among the countries that are members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation in Development (OECD). In contrast, African countries have much less capacity to mobilize

14 Economist Intelligence Unit. "Sovereign debt crises are coming". Available at https://www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/sovereign-debt-crises-are-coming/.

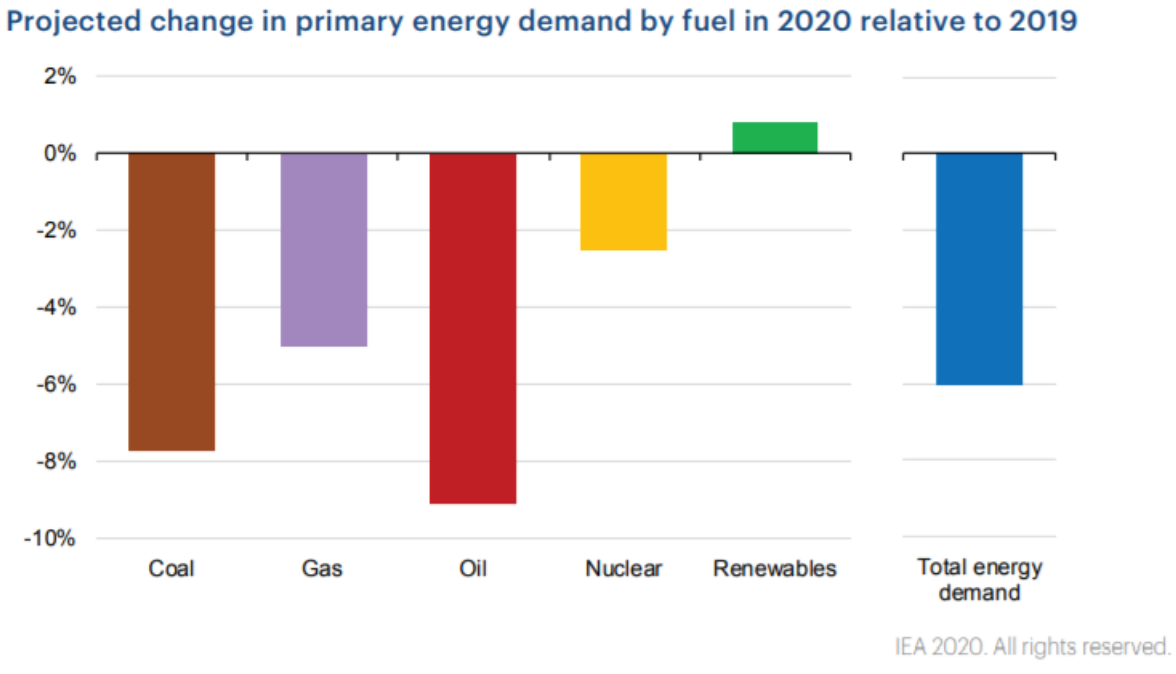
large amounts of resources at short notice. However, OECD countries have not demonstrated the same level of urgency in mobilizing climate finance, despite having committed to doing so in 2015 in the Paris Agreement and in its predecessor, the Kyoto Protocol. It is apparent that what is required for the full capitalization of existing climate funds is political will. Governments have responded to COVID-19 in ways that demonstrate the existence of abundant political will to take drastic measures that have immense short-to-medium-term financial, political and economic implications. Therefore, the funds required to underwrite climate action actually exist, and the same approach used to mobilize COVID-19 funds should be used to secure an even greater investment in a carbon-neutral economy. For instance, the Green Climate Fund is supposed to be capitalized at a rate of $100 billion annually by 2020 to support investment in carbon-neutral development. While that $100 billion is far short of what is actually required to fund mitigation and adaptation actions, the capitalization of the Green Climate Fund has not reached even 10 per cent of that level.

V. Energy transition

27. The achievement of emission-reduction pathways consistent with global warming of 1.5°C with no or limited overshoot would require rapid and far-reaching transitions in energy, land, urban, infrastructural (including transport and buildings) and industrial systems. The required systems transitions would be unprecedented in terms of scale, but not necessarily in terms of speed, and imply deep emissions reductions in all sectors. This would pose a policy dilemma for most African countries, which are attempting to increase access to electricity and energy to drive their industrial development (IPCC, 2018). In the short term, growth cannot be driven by domestic demand, since the incomes of most people will have disappeared or been significantly reduced as a result of lockdowns and inevitable layoffs. Export-led growth will also be constrained by limited global demand owing to the global recession. Nevertheless, opportunities exist to mobilize funding for renewable energy through the Green Climate Fund. As stated earlier, the Fund has remained undercapitalized and is highly unlikely to reach its target of $100 billion annually by 2020. Developed countries have demonstrated that they have the capacity to mobilize the requisite funds at short notice, and should thus take the lead in demonstrating their commitment to sustainable recovery in the post-COVID-19 era by meeting their pledges to the Green Climate Fund.

28. The Green Climate Fund (IEA) has reported that, compared to the first quarter of 2019, demand for electricity in the first quarter of 2020 had declined by 20 per cent, coal by 8 per cent, oil by 5 per cent and gas by 2 per cent as a result of the economic slowdown caused by the global response to COVID-19. During the same period, renewables were the only source that posted growth in demand.15 IEA also forecasts a 6 per cent contraction in energy demand in 2020, the largest contraction ever in absolute terms, and about 7 times larger than that which occurred in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis. Demand for

Figure II



15 International Energy Agency. "Global Energy Review 2020". Available at www.iea.org/reports/global-energy-review-2020.

renewable energy is expected to increase because of low operating costs and preferential access. IEA further forecasts that global CO2 emissions will decline by 8 per cent, or 2.6 gigatons, to 2010 levels, which is six times larger than the 0.4 gigaton decline in 2009 following the financial crisis. IEA concluded that, "As after previous crises, however, the rebound in emissions may be larger than the decline, unless the wave of investment to restart the economy is dedicated to cleaner and more resilient energy".

29. The projected massive reduction in emissions, while almost certainly temporary, shows that it is possible to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels. We should take this opportunity to ensure that a post-COVID-19 world is a greener and more sustainable world, and avoid the type of rebound that occurred in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis. However, without a massive investment plan to address the social consequences of COVID-19 and to transition towards a carbon-neutral economy, the effort to move towards a greener and more resilient future will never get off the ground. If COVID-19 recovery plans do not include strong social and environmental policies, we will have learned nothing from 2008, when, notwithstanding a major decline in greenhouse gas emissions, recovery measures led to a decade of austerity, wage stagnation and a massive rise in emissions, which accelerated climate change without any benefit for working people. This time around, recovery measures must be socially and environmentally progressive.

VI. Climate change perceptions

30. The origin of the novel corona virus in wildlife points to the dangers of the disruption and destruction of natural ecosystems and biodiversity, which have brought us much closer to wild animals – and their viruses. This ecosystem destruction has been brought about by growing global demand for crops and animal-based foods, combined with unsustainable production practices (in particular industrial agriculture), and has resulted in the breaching of several thresholds, including with respect to land use, climate change and genetic diversity.16 This has also reduced the resilience of agricultural systems to external shocks. Building the resilience of agriculture in Africa will require supporting small-hold farmers in adopting agro-ecological practices, thereby supporting local sustainable food entrepreneurship and strengthening local and regional markets. The hardship brought on by lockdowns has demonstrated the need for rural communities to become more resilient to future pandemics. There are opportunities to invest in climate-smart agriculture that is grounded in sustainable smallholder agriculture.

31. A fundamental reason for the recognition of the threat posed by COVID-19, in contrast to the limited recognition of the threats posed by climate change, is that COVID-19 has been clearly understood as an immediate and present menace to global development, whereas climate change continues to be viewed as a long-term and uncertain threat to some remote communities in the world. An additional challenge is the representation of climate action in terms of a temperature goal. While the impact of viral infection is represented in terms of the resulting disease and its impact on the human body (which is readily comprehensible to all), the temperature goal of the Paris Agreement does not easily translate into a visual or experiential perception of what will actually happen if that temperature threshold is breached.

32. As a consequence, the perception of the linkages between viruses, health and economics has been long-established, as evidenced by the prevalence of dystopian representations of pandemics in cinema and other expressions of popular culture. In contrast, there are hardly any representations of the impact of climate change in popular culture. At best, people are occasionally exposed to television images of a cyclone or a forest fire that almost always is affecting other people, rather than being something for all of us to worry about and respond to collectively. And none of those representations actually link the atmospheric temperature to the event. A fundamental shift in perceptions and attitudes is urgently required to bring about a development-centric understanding of climate change. This can be achieved by simplifying the representations of the linkages between temperature increase, climate change and climate variability.

33. Shifts in attitudes and perceptions will lead to the emergence of social movements that can compel policymakers and decision-makers to act urgently to address the climate challenge. Civil society organizations and youth and women's movements have already emerged to call for urgent climate action. Greta Thunberg and other young people are gaining increasing recognition and iconic status as voices that are holding political leaders accountable for climate disruption and environmental destruction. Clearly, the challenge of climate change requires the large-scale engagement of populations. The threat of COVID-19 has caused people worldwide to accept unprecedented constraints on their everyday freedoms and way of life. Such acceptance has been based on scientific advice from WHO to health departments worldwide. It is important that movements led by African youth, women and civil society groups take up the mantle to push for the adoption of progressive carbon-neutral policies and practices in the post COVID-19 era.

16 Stockholm Resilience Centre. "The nine planetary boundaries". Available at www.stockholmresilience.org/research/planetary-boundaries/planetary-boundaries/about-the-research/the-nine-planetary-boundaries.html.

VII. Can lessons from the global response to COVID-19 benefit climate action?

34. Fighting climate change is not just a job for governments; along with the mobilization of civil society, the private sector has played a key role through research and development and the deployment of renewable energy technologies. Similarly, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the private sector has played a central role in creating solutions to fight this new biological threat.

35. Our expectations of a progressive post COVID-19 dispensation should be tempered by the realization that the recovery from the financial crash of 2008 was premised on massive bailouts of the financial sector and fossil fuel interests. Such a reaction was predictable; as noted by the economist Milton Friedman, "only a crisis—actual or perceived—produces real change … When that crisis occurs, the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying around".17 It would appear that the dominant ideas currently lying around are not entirely in favour of a just and green transition.[18]

36. During the 2020 iteration of the Petersberg Climate Dialogue, an annual global meeting of environment and climate ministers, participants undertook to design pandemic responses that would drive a transition to more sustainable, zero-carbon societies. There are already indications, however, that there is a gap between those optimistic aims and the unfolding realities on the ground. Governments in some of the lead polluter nations are providing bailouts to brown energy industries and excluding green energy industries from stimulus packages. For example, the government of the United States has mobilized $2 trillion to support industries and workers affected by the pandemic. Although the oil and gas industry does not directly qualify for loans under that initiative, [19] the airline industry will receive $61 billion in relief loans. It is more important to note, however, that green energy providers did not get the tax relief as they had sought. In fact, there has been heavy lobbying against tax incentives for the renewable energy sector on the basis that climate change is not an immediate threat to humanity, as expressed by the Texas Public Policy Foundation in its letter to members of the United States Congress:

"… However, we were deeply disturbed by recent reports that some lawmakers are considering loading the phase three stimulus package with tax incentives and spending for unreliable 'green' energy programs. Taking advantage of a national emergency to pursue a political agenda is unconscionable and immature political opportunism in a time when Americans' lives are literally at stake ... In fact, expanding renewable energy subsidies will harm our economy by favouring intermittent, expensive energy that weakens our electric grid, creates few jobs, and needlessly raises the cost of electricity — which, ironically, actually harms public health in the long run as struggling families are forced to choose between putting food on the table, refilling life-saving prescriptions, and paying utility bills".[20]

37. Meanwhile, in March 2020, China approved five new coal-fired power plants with a total capacity of 7,960 MW (versus 6,310MW of coal-fired power station capacity having been approved in that country in all of 2019).21 In Canada, the government has extended direct tax relief to the tar sands industry in Alberta Province and for the renovation of oil wells in the Provinces of Saskatchewan and British Columbia as part of its

17 Milton Friedman. "Capitalism and Freedom" (Chicago, Illinois, The University of Chicago Press, 1962).
18 Farand, Chloe. "Coronavirus: which governments are bailing out big polluters?". Available at www.climatechangenews.com/2020/04/20/coronavirus-governments-bail-airlines-oil-gas/.
19 Sanzillo, Tom and Kathy Hipple. "IEEFA update: loan program for coronavirus-impacted businesses excludes oil and gas companies. Or does it?". Available at https://ieefa.org/ieefa-update-loan-program-for-coronavirus-impacted-businesses-excludes-oil-and-gas-companies-or-does-it/.
20 Available at https://files.texaspolicy.com/uploads/2020/03/23175236/Coronavirus-Stimulus-Letter.pdf.
21 See https://www.gem.wiki/Coal_and_Coronavirus#China.

industry bailout plan.22 Australia has put in place provisions to waive oil and gas exploration fees and approved the expansion of the New Acland coal mine. In the United Kingdom, the Bank of England has committed to buying debt from oil companies as part of its stimulus programme in response to the COVID-19 crisis.23 Similarly, while the European Union has agreed that the pandemic response of member States must be aligned with the European Union's Green Deal, the European Central Bank has committed 870 billion euros through its Pandemic Emergency Purchase Programme to buy back bonds to stabilize the euro. Some of the bonds purchased in the first three weeks of the programme included those of major oil producers such as ENI Group, Shell and Total.24 Similar patterns of fossil fuel industries benefitting from COVID-19-related stimulus packages are also evident in Brazil, the Russian Federation, India, China and South Africa25

A post Covid-19 recovery should address the fundamental causes of vulnerabilities and should go beyond fiscal and monetary adjustments whose sole aim is to ensure the survival and perpetuation of the current system of production, consumption and distribution, which is responsible for the climate crisis.

38. Given these and many other issues emerging from the pandemic, the African Climate Policy Centre is calling for a broad-based discussion on the structuring of post-pandemic dispensations. The post COVID-19 recovery should not be about merely reverting to the status quo of the pre-COVID-19 era. The pandemic has brought into focus the vulnerabilities created by the status quo and their consequences for public health. Climate change has had and will have an even greater impact on vulnerable economies, societies and ecosystems. The post-COVID-19 recovery should address the fundamental causes of those vulnerabilities and go beyond fiscal and monetary adjustments, the sole aim of which is to perpetuate the current systems of production, consumption and distribution that are responsible for the climate crisis.

39. The COVID-19 response has demonstrated the importance of adopting a whole-of-society approach. People have positively responded to containment measures requiring them to shelter-in-place, engage in social distancing and self-quarantine, and have willingly done so for extended periods of time wherever possible. Certainly, people have resisted such measures when they perceived them as being onerous. In the case of climate change, it is not the possibility of widespread social resistance that has constrained drastic action, but rather the influence of powerful hydrocarbon interests on policymakers. A whole-of-society approach has the potential to counteract the inordinate influence that hydrocarbon interests have over the fate of our planet.

22 See https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=69881BCC004DB-C3DC-DCD7-B62724AFB886EE9C .
23 The Guardian. "The Bank of England 'failing climate' with COVID-19 stimulus programme". Available at https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/apr/16/bank-of-england-failing-climate-with-covid-19-stimulus-programme-oil-firms-debt-bond-governor?CMP=share_btn_tw.
24 See https://influencemap.org/report/The-ECB-and-Pandemic-Bonds-ece9791d5425bf38b78df95a8376b358.
25 See, for example, www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-brazil-energy/update-3-brazil-government-considers-emergency-coronavirus-loans-for-power-sector-idUSL1N2BN1BC.

VIII. Conclusion

40. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that responding in a timely manner to a global crisis is of the essence. It marks the difference between containing the crisis and allowing it to spill over and completely overwhelm the ability of public organizations to function effectively. With regard to the climate change crisis, transformative actions based on society-wide discussions and agreement on how to implement a just transition, are required. The necessary transformative actions should include the following:

    a. African governments must demand that, under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, actionable measures be immediately put in place to limit greenhouse gas emissions, in line with the time scales prescribed by IPCC, to prevent the climate emergency from spiralling out of control and resulting in irreversible anthropogenic interference with the climate system. As it stands, there is every reason to fear that the nationally determined contributions are ill-suited to this task, and many are outdated before they are even implemented. The mechanism for ratcheting up contributions needs to be urgently put to the test. If the revised contributions fail to put the world on course for the target below 2°C, then an immediate review of the contributions should be called for.

    b. Participation in the meeting of the Twenty-Sixth Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change should be opened to all major stakeholders to ensure that the outcomes are democratic and not determined by financially powerful interests, and to put in place enforceable accountability mechanisms. All stakeholders need to be on board for such strategies to work.26

    c. Strategies for climate action should be evidence-based and make full use of both historical and current data. The response to climate change thus far has been characterized by political expediency. COVID-19 has demonstrated that scientific evidence is key in garnering public support for radical measures. African governments should increase investment in national hydrological and meteorological services to build the reliable observation infrastructure that is needed to ensure the production of world-class early-warning weather and climate information. They should also put in place laws and policies to enable the uptake and use of weather and climate information in development planning and practice.

    d. In addition to investing in improved early-warning systems, a vulnerability index for African countries would be a useful addition to existing tools to support resilience-building.

    e. The Twenty-Sixth Conference of the Parties should accept the key recommendations made by IPCC to reduce CO2 emissions by 45 per cent by 2030 so that the goals of reaching net-zero CO2 emissions by 2050 and keeping global warming below 1.5°C by 2100 can be achieved.

    f. The Conference of the Parties should acknowledge that such radical emissions cuts will require massive transformations in global energy and transport systems, and the protection and restoration of natural ecosystems. Making such transformations in Africa will require access to predictable sources of finance for African countries.

    g. The Conference of the Parties should move from perpetual negotiation to a deliberative and democratic process where representatives of all stakeholders agree on the best ways to transition to a sustainable future, including

26 The Government of the United Kingdom, in its capacity as president of the Twenty-Sixth Conference of the Parties, has committed to taking a whole-of-society approach to the organization of the upcoming meeting of Conference of the Parties.

by imposing restrictions on detrimental activities and determining the allocation of responsibilities, costs and reparations.

h. The Paris Agreement should be implemented on the basis of the common-but-differentiated-responsibility principle and set out enforceable emissions-reduction targets with requisite penalties for non-compliance.

i. Given that climate change has been a global emergency for decades, the response requires concerted action by all governments on the basis of agreed priority actions, sequenced interventions and fixed implementation timeframes. Adequate resources should be set aside for these actions. The determination and prioritization of these actions and the corresponding allocation of resources should be the business of the Conference of the Parties.

j. A socially fair and just transition to a sustainable, green economy should be prioritized. To that end, transformative actions should not be limited to a few sectors, but be grounded in broad-based approaches to address the underlying causes of vulnerability and to put in place mechanisms to ensure that no one is left behind.

k. The reduction in carbon emissions and the plummet in oil prices brought on by the COVID-19 crisis should not result in economic recovery policies that are skewed in favour of preserving carbon-based production systems and consumption patterns. Developed countries should take the lead in ensuring that recovery policies put the global economy on a green development pathway.

l. The recovery of the global economy should be based on a complete system reset. The transformation of the global economy should ensure that it meets the needs of the world's peoples and the planet itself. We should not seek to simply restore the pre-pandemic status quo. A paradigm shift is required. Green transitions are not only about energy transitions; they are about transforming everything from food systems to consumption and waste management. A whole-of-society approach is required to ensure that all stakeholders, especially those who are most vulnerable to the long-term impact of climate change, are the principal actors in that system reset.

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