

Commentary

Carbon Justice: Incorporating Compassion in Development

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Climate Change (CC) is a global problem, that is why it is discussed in international conferences of countries. Thus, a country is the unit of CC negotiations and decisions making processes. However, the world is highly inequitable. Globally, the top ten countries account for most of fossil fuel carbon (FFC) emission. It is often argued that the onus to take corrective measures in regard to climate change is largely on the developed countries. The climate change issues have become strongly internationalized, and disconnected from the common people and local communities. Here, my focus is on the plight of poor people of several countries, who have remained almost non-emitters of FFC all these years, but have suffered the most. This particularly applies to the people of Himalaya, where even in 2020 per capita CO₂ emission is less than 1 t yr⁻¹, compared to global average of 4.79 t yr⁻¹ (Climate Watch 2020).

Position of a poor individual who is almost non-emitter of FFC

While the representatives of developing countries often argue that though their contribution to climate change is minor, they are disproportionately more vulnerable to CC impact. The poor people of developing countries even hardly know that by remaining non-emitters or very low-emitters of FFC, they have contributed to keeping the global warming within a limit. The rich and capable people who are also big emitters of FFC have not even shown courtesy to acknowledge contribution of poor people. Generally, these poor people are most vulnerable and the least capable of adapting to climate change impact. They include, as an example the cobbler who repairs our shoes sitting next to a road and exposed most to vehicular pollutants, women in Himalaya living next to a disappearing glaciers, a poor farmer,

living next to a river bank liable to losing his agricultural land because of landslides, a non-emitting hawker who sells banana each day without entitlement to any space of the planet and, so many other marginal people. These people have survived almost without consuming fossil fuel all these years of growing uncertainties.

True, the poor are not genetically different from the rich, they did not emit FFC because they could not afford it, and they too would emit FFC once they have access to money. But it does not mean that they are not suffering from both poverty and CC-induced storms and floods. We ought to be considerate and compassionate to them. They are not only non-emitters of FFC, they also are not even aware that by so doing they serve the entire humanity.

All carbon sequestrations are not eligible for payment

At global level, one gets carbon credit only when he contributes to “a new carbon sequestration”, ongoing carbon saving practices however good they are, not eligible for carbon payment. The carbon sequestration effort should affect global carbon balance. A forest user group in Himalaya which has been maintaining its forests well for decades is not given carbon credit. However, a user group having a highly degraded forest will get carbon credit if it decides to improve. Women in Himalaya have contributed to carbon savings by keeping biomass removal low (Danielsen et al. 2011). They may take several decades to cut branches and leaves equal to the trees we cut in a day with modern machines and tools for infrastructure development. These people have every right to have access to a clean cooking energy (Singh and Singh 1992). A regular support of cooking gas to them can be justified by the enhanced carbon sequestration in forests due to stopping of

tree cutting for firewood.

The educated, cultured, and capable people ought to be considerate and compassionate to the problems of poor, and contribute to the cause of carbon justice. Compassion to those who could not succeed economically should be a part of development.

Since the rising greenhouse gases in atmosphere are the cause of global warming, the balance sheet of their emission has to be monitored at global level. However, within a country all practices which avoid FFC emission should be recognized and paid.

We common persons are not wealthy enough to afford payment for carbon savings, but we can collect some money to address the acute misery of some people and provide support so that they continue to largely remain non-emitters while earning income. More importantly, by integrating carbon justice with poverty reduction, we can make people aware of climate change crisis and its potential impact. It will help mainstreaming the climate change crisis, so important for taking effective adaptation strategies.

Extinction of skills and jobs

Another aspect of this endeavour is that it allows diverse ways of giving credit to poor people for keeping climate change within a limit. Because of the poor, many services, skills and jobs are still existing and they often promote sustainability. For

example, a cobbler has developed a skill which may go extinct if we fail to contribute to its economic viability. His son is unlikely to be a cobbler unless the profession fetches enough money to live properly. By giving a stitching machine to him, we can make his earnings good enough to live with dignity in an uncertain condition of urban areas. Then, by repairing shoes a cobbler delays the waste matter generation. Numerous people are employed by repair and nursing works- repair of clothes, cooking stoves, and building cycles, furniture, gardening which nurses' a piece of land in an urban setup, etc. are now important not only from the stand point of carbon savings, but also as a source of employment and skill development.

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