Climate Change, Human Rights and Power

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HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE ENVIRONMENT IN THE EU // TOWARDS AN INCLUSIVE DEBATE

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Introduction

Scanning news headlines across the globe, it's easy to conclude that climate change is causing widespread havoc. Whether it's devastating floods in Pakistan, Malawi or Mozambique, droughts in Europe, wildfires in Hawaii, or changing weather patterns causing food shortages and impacting water supply across Africa, climate change has already caused substantial damage and increasingly irreversible loss. This, in turn, is negatively impacting human rights, posing fundamental risk to the right to life, health, food and an adequate standard of living.

Despite the signing of the Paris Agreement in 2015, a legally binding international treaty aimed at limiting global warming to 2ºC, with an ambition for 1.5ºC, action to reverse climate change remains wanting: emissions keep rising, climate finance remains in a void, and adaptation is far too slow for a rapidly changing environment. Central to the discourse on climate change are the negotiations within the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC); their mandate to conduct scientific research, hold meetings and negotiations, and develop policy agreements significantly influences the decisions made to address the climate crisis.

Those decisions, however, are deeply influenced by global power dynamics. For centuries, the global North has maintained an economic and political stronghold over the global South, and many of the activities to support this dynamic have been significant drivers of climate change. While the narrative of the global North is one of climate ambition, this paper will argue that those in power have used different mechanisms to influence the climate negotiations to serve their own interests, ensuring the maintenance of the status quo rather than that of climate action.

After providing an examination of Lukes' theory[1] of the three-dimensional views of visible, hidden, and invisible power, this paper will broadly apply those concepts to the UNFCCC climate negotiations, offering a reflection on how power dynamics operate within this space. By understanding the broader power dynamics that influence climate action, this paper will argue that to effectively address climate change, we fundamentally need to shift the power dynamics that underpin the current global system.

[1] Lukes, S. (2005) *Power: A Radical View*. 2nd Edition. Palgrave Macmillan.

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The World Today

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) Sixth Assessment Report (AR6) is a bleak read. After eight long years of drawing on the findings of nearly 1,000 scientists from around the world, the 8,000-page report details the devastating consequences of climate change, including the destruction of homes, loss of livelihoods, fragmentation of communities, and the irreversible damage this will do to life as we know it[2].

The report is also clear about one thing: climate change is already affecting many regions across the globe. Widespread and rapid changes have occurred in the atmosphere, ocean, cryosphere, and biosphere, leading to widespread negative impacts on both nature and people[3].

News streams from around the world pay testimony to this new reality. The deadly floods in Pakistan in 2022 that killed over 1,000 people and left a further 33 million people impacted have been labelled as the "worst humanitarian disaster of this decade"[4]. Not six months later, cyclones Idai and Kenneth displaced tens of thousands of families across Mozambique and Malawi, causing widespread flooding, the destruction of 780,000 ha of agricultural crops, and leaving more than 1.8 million people in need of humanitarian assistance[5]. Even more millions in the greater Horn of Africa are facing acute hunger while experiencing one of the worst droughts in recent decades[6]. Historical towns were destroyed and more than 100 people killed in wildfires across the tropical island of Maui after dry weather conditions, strong winds, and soaring temperatures[7].

These climate impacts, and the hundreds of others being experienced around the globe, have devastating consequences for human rights, both directly and indirectly. It has long been recognised that a clean, functional, and healthy environment is integral to the enjoyment of human rights, including the right to life,

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[2] Boehm, S. and Schumer, C (2023) '10 Big Findings from the 2023 IPCC Report on Climate Change,' *World Resources Institute*, 20 March 2023, https://www.wri.org/insights/2023-ipcc-ar6-synthesis-report-climate-change-findings; IPCC (2023) Summary for Policymakers. In: *Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* [Core Writing Team, H. Lee and J. Romero (eds.)]. IPCC, Geneva, Switzerland, pp. 1-34, doi: 10.59327/IPCC/AR6-9789291691647.001

[3] IPCC (2023), Ibid.

[4] Saifi, S. (2022). Pakistan floods hit 33 million people in worst disaster in a decade, minister says. CNN https://edition.cnn.com/2022/08/25/asia/pakistan-flooding-climate-minister-intl-hnk/index.html 26 Sugust 2022

[5] UNICEF (2003) Massive flooding in Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe, https://www.unicef.org/stories/massive-flooding-malawi-mozambique-and-zimbabwe

[6] WHO (2023) *Situation Report: 01 Apr - 30 Jun 2023, Greater Horn of Africa Food Insecurity and Health Grade 3 Emergency*, https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/emergency-preparedness/ghoa-food-insecurity-and-health-sitrep--09-(april-june-2023)_final.pdf?sfvrsn=b9d3f216_1&download=true

[7] Al Jazeera (2023) 'Hawaii wildfires: What caused deadliest US blazes in more than 100 years?' *Al Jazeera*, 14 August 2023, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/8/14/hawaii-wildfires-what-caused-deadliest-us-blazes-in-more-than-100-years

health, food, and an adequate standard of living. Climate change is impacting human rights across the board – sudden-onset events pose a direct threat to human lives and safety, and the more gradual forms of environmental degradation undermine access to clean water, food, fuels, housing, adequate standards of living, safety and security, self-determination, development, health and sanitation, access to education, and other key elements that support the quality of human life[8].

It is also important to recognise that the impacts of climate change are not being experienced equally: communities in Africa, Asia, Central and South America, Least Developed Countries (LDCs), and small island developing states (SIDS) are experiencing the brunt of the impacts. The AR6 report estimates that more than 3 billion people live in contexts that are vulnerable to climate change, and these vulnerable communities, predominantly in the global south, have historically contributed the least to creating climate change, yet are disproportionately affected by it[9].

It must be recognised that the present challenges of high vulnerability in some areas are heavily influenced by historical and ongoing patterns of inequality, such as colonialism, systematised racism, and exploitation. Colonialism was motivated by the promise of plundering the environment and subjugating populations to the benefit of the colonising group, which helped to increase the vulnerability of specific people and places[10]. Years of colonial exploitation left the vast majority of people in developing countries without basic health, education, and food infrastructures, while simultaneously dismantling the cultures and essential techniques of indigenous peoples that had been protecting the resources that provided those services. While the global North developed into more liberal societies, the "seeds of regressive social practices and corrupt, authoritarian governments were sown for the colonised[11]". The widespread disparity in global economic growth arose from the extensive degradation of ecosystems, along with the suppression and exploitation of communities, culminating in a significant increase in emissions. In this way, the legacy of colonialism not only continues to exacerbate the social and economic impacts of climate change, but also affects the adaptation and mitigation strategies available in the global South.

The role colonialism has played is now recognised in the AR6 report[12]. By connecting climate change to colonialism, the IPCC is sending a clear message that addressing the effects of climate change cannot be

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[8] UNEP (2015) *Climate Change and Human Rights*, UNON Publishing Services: Nairobi; OHCHR (2015*)* Understanding Human Rights and Climate Change, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/ClimateChange/COP21.pdf

[9] IPCC (2023), Ibid.

[10] Varanasi, A. (2022) *How Colonialism Spawned and Continues to Exacerbate the Climate Crisis*, Columbia Climate School: State of the Planet https://news.climate.columbia.edu/2022/09/21/how-colonialism-spawned-and-continues-to-exacerbate-the-climate-crisis/#:~:text=For%20the%20first%20time%20in,driver%20of%20the%20climate%20crisis; Corvino, F. and Andina, T (2023), Global Climate Justice: Theory and Practice, E-International Relations, Bristol; Letzing, J. and Sung, M. (2022) 'What does colonialism have to do with climate change?' World Economic Forum, 9 September 2022, https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/09/colonialism-climate-change-pakistan-floods

[11] Corvino, F. and Andina, T (2023:46), Ibid.

[12] IPCC, 2023, Ibid.

achieved without also addressing the legacies of power dynamics, recognising that this is fundamentally an issue of justice[13].

Colonialism was, in essence, a display of power that resulted in economic exploitation, cultural domination, political control, and the establishment of social hierarchies. While the era of colonialism has ended, the power imbalances created have had a profound and lasting impact on the formation of today's society, contributing to global inequalities, cultural assimilation, political challenges, and social divisions. Many of these power imbalances are present in the UNFCCC climate negotiations, and in order to understand them better, it is necessary to reflect more thoroughly on what power is and how it works.

Concepts of Power

The notion that some people have more power than others is one of the hallmark characteristics of our human existence. Indeed, the idea of power is one of the most ancient and omnipresent discussions in social theory, with a 'parade of great names'[14] from Plato and Aristotle to Machiavelli and Hobbes to Pareto and Weber devoting their energies to understanding this phenomenon. Despite this wealth of contribution, the concept of power remains 'essentially contested'[15] and the word is used in fundamentally different ways.

Most people have an intuitive notion of what power means - everyone possesses it and is affected by it in all aspects of their lives. In its broadest sense, power is understood as the ability to influence or control the behaviour of people and the world we live in[16], making it fundamentally relative, dependent on the specific relationship between two or more parties and the ways in which they engage[17]. The ability to influence or control behaviour is largely dependent on the degree of control over material, human, intellectual, and financial resources exercised by different actors. The control of these resources becomes a source of individual and social power[18] and as such, power is an integral dynamic of politics[19].

At the heart of the discussion about power, however, lies an age-old tension in social theory – the debate between 'agency' and 'structure'[20]. At one extreme, power is seen as something 'possessed' by certain actors and not by others. It is often viewed negatively, associated with domination, manipulation and force, and

[13] Corvino, F. and Andina, T. (2023), Ibid.
[14] Dahl, R. (1957: 288) 'The Concept of Power', *Behavioral Science*, 2(3), pp. 201–215.
[15] Lukes, S. (1974:34) *Power: A Radical View*. London: British Sociological Association.
[16] Dahl R. (1957), Ibid; Wernham, A. (1958) *The Political Works of Benedict de Spinoza*. Edited by A. G. Wernham. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
[17] French, J. and Raven, B. (1959) 'The bases of social power', in Cartwright, D. (ed.) *Studies in Social Power*. Ann Arobor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press.
[18] Batliwala, S. (1993) 'Women's Empowerment in South Asia - Concepts and Practices'. ASPBAE/FAO - Asia Pacific Bureau of Adult Education's (ASPBAE) 1993 study undertaken with FAOs Freedom from Hunger campaign; VeneKlasen, L. and Miller, V. (2007) 'Power and empowerment', in *The New Weave of Power, People and Politics: The Action Guide for Advocacy and Citizen Participation*. Just Associates Publication, pp. 39–58. Available at: http://www.justassociates.org/ActionGuide.htm.
[19] Guzzini, S. (2005) 'The Concept of Power: a Constructivist Analysis', *Journal of International Studies*, 33(3), pp. 495–521.
[20] Pettit, J. (2010:26) 'Multiple Faces of Power and Learning', *IDS Bulletin*, 41(3), pp. 25–35.

because power is unequally distributed, it is often associated with a struggle involving conflict[21]. As such, power is the capacity for deliberate domination in the 'zero-sum' contest between winners and losers[22]. At the other extreme, power is seen as deeply and unconsciously embedded in social and cultural norms and ideology, found in the web of relationships and discourses that affect everyone, and not held by a single person[23]. In this way, power is dynamic and multidimensional rather than absolute, it is internalised, affecting the beliefs and behaviour of all actors, and it changes according to context, circumstance, and interest[24].

Theories of power as domination have evolved through understanding the different dimensional views of power. Robert Dahl offered the first-dimensional view of power, stating that power is the ability of A to get B to do what B might not otherwise do[25]. Power is thus understood as the product of conflicts, controlled by the source and domain of resources that can be exploited to effect behaviour[26]. Decision-making is a focal point of study; as it is contended, power is about 'who participates, who gains and loses, and who prevails in decision-making'[27].

In response, Bachrach and Baratz argued that power was not only about who won or lost in the debate on key issues, but rather, what was preventing issues and actors from joining the discussion in the first place. They contended that power is not only reflected in the embodiment of concrete actions or decisions, but also in the extent to which barriers to air conflicts are created or reinforced, often seen as 'non-decision-making'[28]. As they commented, 'some issues are organised into politics while others are organised out'[29], meaning some issues are politicised while others are not. In this way, power was not just about prevailing in a struggle, but also in determining the agenda of the struggle, which was achieved through the mobilisation of bias. It was argued that those in power could mobilise bias in favour of suppression of different issues through coercion, influence, authority, force, and manipulation[30]. Although there is a clear distinction between the first and second dimensional views of power, both ideas are characterised by a conflictual relationship between agents advancing their self-defined interests against the interests of others, and thus can be constituted as a 'liberal conception of power'[31].

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[21] Bachrach, P. and Baratz, M. S. (1970) *Power and poverty: Theory and practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Batliwala, S. (1993), Ibid; Gaventa, J. (2005) *Reflections on the Uses of the 'Power Cube' Approach for Analyzing the Spaces, Places and Dynamics of Civil Society Participation and Engagement;* VeneKlasen, L. and Miller, V. (2007), Ibid; Pettit, J. (2010), Ibid.
[22] Pettit, J., (2010:26), Ibid.
[23] Gaventa, J. (2005), Ibid; Pettit, J. (2010), Ibid.
[24] Batliwala, S. (1993), Ibid; VeneKlasen L. and Miller, V. (2007), Ibid; Pettit, J. (2010), Ibid.
[25] Dahl, R. (1957), Ibid; Digeser, P. (1992) 'The Fourth Face of Power', *The Journal of Politics*, 54(4), pp. 977–1007; Gaventa, J. and Cornwall, A. (2001) 'Power and Knowledge', in Reason, P. and Bradbury, H. (eds) *Handbook of Action Research: Participative Inquiry and Practice*. London: Sage Publications, pp. 70–80.
[26] Dahl R. (1957), Ibid; Lukes S. (1974), Ibid; Gaventa, J. and Cornwall, A. (2001), Ibid.
[27] Polsby, N. (1963) *Community Power and Political Theory*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
[28] Bachrach, P. and Baratz, M. S. (1970), Ibid.; Lukes, S. (1974), Ibid; Digeser, P. (1992), Ibid.
[29] Bachrach, P. and Baratz, M. S. (1970: 642), Ibid.
[30] Schattschneider, E. (1960) The Semi-Sovereign People - A Realist's View of Democracy in America. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Wilson; Bachrach, P. and Baratz, M. S. (1970), Ibid; Parenti, M. (1970) 'Power and Pluralism: A View From the Bottom', *Journal of Politics*, 32, pp. 501–531; Lukes, S. 1974, Ibid; Pettit, J. 2010:26, Ibid.
[31] Digeser, P. (1992:979), Ibid.

While the second-dimensional view explains some hidden operations of power, it did not go so far as to include the possibility of a false or manipulated consensus, where the bias of the system can be 'mobilised, recreated and reinforced in ways that are neither consciously chosen nor the intended result of particular individuals' choices'[32]. Lukes suggested that through the socially structured and culturally patterned behaviour of groups and the practices of institutions, those in power prevented conflicts from arising by influencing consciousness and awareness of the grievances that shaped them, thus proposing a 'radical conception of power'[33]. As Lukes contended:

Is it not the supreme and most insidious exercise of power to prevent people from having grievances by shaping their perceptions, cognitions and preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things, either because they can see or imagine no alternative to it, or because they see it as natural and unchangeable, or because they value it as divinely ordained and beneficial?[34]

With this, Lukes pointed to the relationship between power and ideology, highlighting how socialised consent prevents people from questioning or envisioning any possibilities for changing these relationships or addressing injustices, and that 'processes of socialisation, culture and ideology perpetuate exclusion and inequality by defining what is normal and acceptable'[35].

This approach is consistent with the Gramscian concept of cultural hegemony that considers how social forces and historical patterns lead to the 'engineering of consent' for subordinate classes[36]. Gramsci argued that the stabilisation of a particular worldview, and the acceptance of that view from different groups (often against their own interests), is achieved through an operation of hegemony. He argued that those in power try to manipulate hegemony, not simply by changing the physical environment, but the way in which people relate to their environment through everyday activities[37]. In this way, Gramsci transformed the notion of ideology – instead of referring to a specific system of ideas, ideologies are instead 'active, organising forces with a psychological 'validity' to them'[38] and are formed 'through everyday experience illuminated by common sense'[39].

Bourdieu developed this idea further, claiming that power is cultural and symbolic, continuously recreated through the interplay of agency and structure[40]. He offered a theory of practice or 'habitus', where learned norms and dispositions that shape our behaviour constantly interact with the social field, which itself is

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[32] Lukes, S. (1974: 25) Ibid.
[33] Lukes, S. (1974: 23) Ibid; Digeser, P. (1992), Ibid.
[34] Lukes, S. (2005:24), Ibid.
[35] Acosta, A. M. and Pettit, J. (2013) '*Practice guide: A Combined Approach to Political Economy and Power Analysis Discussion Note Prepared for the Swiss Development Cooperation'*, Work in progress paper: SDC-IDS Contribution Providing Support to SDC's Democratization, Decentralization and Local Governance Network, (May), p. 23.
[36] Edelman, M. J. (1985) *The symbolic uses of politics*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
[37] Loftus, A. and Lumsden, F. (2008) 'Reworking hegemony in the urban waterscape', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers,* 33(1), pp. 109–126.
[38] Loftus, A. and Lumsden, F. (2008:114), Ibid.
[39] Kipfer, S. (2002) 'Urbanization, everyday life and the survival of capitalism: Lefebvre, Gramsci and the problematic of hegemony', *Capitalism Nature Socialism,* 13(2), pp. 117–149.
[40] Bourdieu, P. (1990) *The Logic of Practice*. 6th Edition. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press; Pettit (2010), Ibid.

structured by symbolically mediated relations of domination[41]. Economic, political, legal and judicial institutions and structures established and mediated by the state typically reinforce the dominant ideology and the power of the dominant groups within it, even though their stated objectives and policies may be superficially egalitarian[42]. While habitus is socially formed, it is also physically inscribed in our bodies – it is not just a fixed way of doing things, but rather the formation of attitudes that are emotional and intellectual, underlying our response to everything in life[43]. In this way, the three-dimensional view spoke to the more invisible forms of power, offering a serious sociological explanation for how political systems prevent demands from becoming political issues[44].

Considering these different dimensions of power, it is important to identify the specific instruments and mechanisms of power[45], essentially, the inner-workings and techniques of how power is obtained, shaped and exercised.

The first-dimensional view of power includes among its various 'instruments' two fairly straightforward mechanisms – the threat of coercion, and the promise of reward. If power is primarily understood by who succeeds in the resolution of key issues, different mechanisms and political resources can be brought into the decision-making arena and how well those resources are wielded can determine the outcome of the game[46.] This is often referred to as visible power, the formal rules, structures, institutions, authorities and procedures that clearly define aspects of political power, essentially, the power of coercion. These can take the form of biased laws or policies, or closed, corrupt or unrepresentative decision-making structures[47].

The second-dimensional view adds to these resources a mobilisation of bias, the 'rules of the game'[48] that not only control who is at the decision-making table, but also what is on the agenda[49]. It is argued that bias is wielded not only in decision-making arenas, but is also sustained through the non-decisions that suppress challenges to the interests of decision makers, which is essentially a form of de-politicisation. This can be seen in how existing norms, precedents, or rules of procedure are maintained, or can stem from institutional inaction, the sum effect of incremental decisions, and the rule of anticipation. As such, this is considered to be a hidden form of power[50].

The mechanisms of power in the third-dimensional view are the least developed and understood, often because they are not always intentionally deployed. What is at stake is identifying the specific ways in which

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[41] Bourdieu, P. (1990), Ibid; Pettit, J. (2010), Ibid; Yuval-Davis, N. (2011) *Power, Intersectionality and the Politics of Belonging*, FREIA Working Paper Series. Available at: http://www.freia.cgs.aau.dk/Publikationer+og+skriftserie/Skriftserie.
[42] Batliwala, S. (1993), Ibid
[43] Bourdieu, P. (1990), Ibid; Pettit, J. (2010), Ibid; Dewey, J. (1997) *Experience and Education*. New York: Touchstone.
[44] Darder, A., Baltodano, M. and Torres, R. (2003) *The Critical Pedagogy Reader*. London: Routledge Falmer.
[45] Galbraith, J. K. (2001) *The Essential Galbraith*. Edited by A. Williams. Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin Company.
[46] Gaventa, J. (1980) *Power and Powerlessness - Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley*. University of Illinois Press.
[47] Gaventa, J. (2005), Ibid; VeneKlasen, L. and Miller, V. (2007), Ibid.
[48] Bachrach, P. and Baratz, M. S. (1970:952), Ibid.
[49] Bachrach, P. and Baratz, M. S. (1970), Ibid; VeneKlasen, L. and Miller, V. (2007), Ibid.
[50] Bachrach, P. and Baratz, M. S. (1970), Ibid; Gaventa, J. (1980), Ibid; VeneKlasen, L. and Miller, V. (2007), Ibid.

power influences or shapes conceptions of the necessities, possibilities and strategies of a potential challenge in situations where conflict is latent[51]. These mechanisms also shape subjectivity, the social identities that define how people engage within the hierarchy of possibilities and whether this empowers or disempowers action[52]. This is referred to as invisible power, in that it renders competing interests as invisible and its mechanisms are far more subtle[53].

The control of knowledge is a central mechanism of both hidden and invisible power. In producing knowledge, different rules are used to determine its validity and knowledge can be produced to accentuate the voices of some, while discrediting the legitimacy of others[54]. As Rahman contends, 'domination… is rooted not only in the polarisation of control over means of material production, but also over the means of knowledge production, including control over the social power to determine what is useful knowledge'[55.] Knowledge mechanisms, such as education, media, and information control, can influence consciousness and shape political beliefs and ideology[56]. It is important to consider how social myths, languages, symbols, and even the communication of information shape or manipulate power processes, as this helps to locate the power processes behind the social construction of meanings and patterns that serve to get the powerless to the believe and act in a manner that they would otherwise not[57]. These processes of control may have observable forms, such as the control of information through mass media, or may be observed more indirectly by recognising how power alters political conceptions.

Knowledge and the sense of powerlessness experienced in the first two dimensional views of power can be internalised to such an extent that the powerless alter their conceptions as an adaptive response to continual defeat, leading to fatalism, deprecation and apathy about a situation[58]. This is described as 'psychological adaptations to the state of being without power'[59] or as Freire describes, a 'culture of silence'[60]. The powerless are highly dependent – they are prevented from both self-determined action and reflection upon their actions – and without this dialectic process, they become more susceptible to the values, beliefs or 'rules of the game' and simply reinforce the interests of the powerful[61]. This internalisation leads to socialised compliance, where powerless groups are unable to articulate their interests or even perceive social conflict, and instead accept the

[51] Gaventa, J. (1980), Ibid.
[52] Laclau, E. and Mouffe, C. (1985) *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, Verso (New Left). United Kingdom: Verso (New Left).
[53] VeneKlasen, L. and Miller, V. (2007), Ibid.
[54] Gaventa, J. and Cornwall, A. (2007) 'Power and knowledge', *The Sage handbook of action research: Participative inquiry and practic*e, pp. 172–189.
[55] Rahman, M. A. (1991:14) 'The theoretical standpoint of PAR', in *Action and Knowledge: Breaking the Monopoly with Participatory Action Research*. New York: The Apex Press and London: Intermediate Technology Publications, pp. 13–33.
[56] Gaventa, J. and Cornwall, A. (2001), Ibid; Miller, V. et al. (2006) 'Making change happen: power', *Just Associate*s, 3, pp. 1–22; Pettit, J. (2010), Ibid.
[57] Gaventa, J. (1980), Ibid; Edelman, M. J. (1985), Ibid.
[58] Freire, P. (1970) Cultural Action for Freedom. Penguin Books; Gaventa, J. (1980), Ibid.
[59] Gaventa, J. (1980:16), Ibid.
[60] Freire, P. (1970), Ibid.
[61] Freire, P. (1970), Ibid; Korpi, W. (1974) 'Conflict, Power and Relative Deprivation', *American Political Science Review*, 68, p. 1571.

definitions of political reality offered by the powerful and the institutions that support them[62]. This level of power shapes people's beliefs and sense of self, and leads to acceptance of the status quo, including their own sense of superiority or inferiority – 'processes of socialisation, culture and ideology perpetuate exclusion and inequality by defining what is normal, true, and acceptable'[63].

In addition, power is strengthened by the accumulative effect of another's powerlessness, and this sense of powerlessness, maintained non-participation and ambiguous consciousness are part of the indirect mechanisms of power's third dimension. As Gaventa says, 'once such power relationships are developed, their maintenance is self-propelled and attempts at their alteration are inevitably difficult… [the powerful] will continue to prevail simply through the inertia of the situation'[64].

Power within the Climate Negotiations

The UNFCCC climate negotiations offer an interesting terrain in which to observe some of these power dynamics. This paper will provide a brief analysis, offering some reflections on how the mechanisms of these three-dimensional views of power can be seen in real-time. This is by no means a comprehensive analysis of the complexity of power dynamics within the UNFCCC negotiation process, but rather an offering of ideas from which further research could be developed.

While appreciating that the current distinctions between 'developed' and 'developing' countries do accurately reflect the complexity of development nationally or internationally, for the purposes of this paper, there is a clear distinction of power: developed countries from the global North who have historically been the largest greenhouse gas (GHG) emitters and with advanced economies, vs developing countries from the global South, who are facing the greatest impacts of climate change despite their weaker economies and limited contribution to GHG emissions. The current global economic paradigm of infinite growth is based on using up a finite amount of resources, such as fossil fuels. Those in power have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo – shifting away from a fossil fuel-based economy could negatively impact their economic stability, upset strong relationships with industry, and overall compromise their political dominance. Using Lukes' theory of power, we can observe how those in power use different mechanisms within the negotiations to maintain the status quo, thus reinforcing their own political dominance.

The first-dimensional view of power essentially focuses on observable decisions and actions surrounding the source and domain of resources. This can be seen within the climate negotiations in two specific ways: blocking advancement of negotiations on key issues such as climate science, and the failure of developed countries to reduce their GHG emissions and meet their climate finance commitments.

In terms of negotiations, developed nations have the ability to shape and frame the discourse in a way that aligns with their interests. For example, at the Katowice Climate Change Conference in 2018, discussions

[62] Freire, P. (1970), Ibid; Mueller, C. (1973) *The Politics of Communication: A Study in the Political Sociology of Language, Socialization and Legitimation*. New York: Oxford University Press.
[63] Miller et al, (2006:41), Ibid.
[64] Gaventa, J. (1980:23), Ibid.

ground to a halt after a group of oil-producing countries refused to welcome the findings of the IPCC's Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5ºC. Saudi Arabia, the United States, Russia and Kuwait objected to 'welcoming' the findings, instead insisting to simply 'take note of'[65]. This subtle word change essentially meant that the science was rejected: those in power 'baulked at the political implications' that accepting the science would mean, and used their power to block further discussions. The same block of countries continued to refuse to engage in substantive discussions over how the findings could be used to inform policies on increasing the pace and scale of decarbonisation at the Bonn Climate Conference in 2019[66].

Powerful countries have used similar tactics to water down negotiating text. At the Glasgow Climate Change Conference in 2021, one of the main disagreements in the final hours was over the wording of an intention to abandon coal. The plan to approve the text was thrown off track when India and China objected to the phrase of "phase out" of unabated coal power, and compromise was eventually reached by countries instead agreeing to "phase down". Many vulnerable and small island nations objected to the weaker language saying it would imperil their future by resulting in greater emissions, but accepted the change with the "greatest reluctance" because there were critical elements of the 26th Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC (COP 26) package that were needed[67]. This tactic points to elements of coercion, a key mechanism of the first-dimensional view of power.

The first-dimensional view of power can also be observed in the refusal of developed countries to meet their mitigation and finance targets. Central to the achievement of the Paris Agreement is the reduction of GHG emissions and the provision of financial resources to increase the ability of countries to deal with the impacts of climate change[68]. Despite the adoption of the Paris Agreement and the commitment from developed countries, they have failed to meet these two essential goals.

While the rate of growth in GHG emissions in the past decade has slowed compared to the previous decade, average GHG emissions in the last decade were the highest on record[69]. With the current nationally determined contributions (NDC) and policies in place, global warming is currently expected to increase by 2.4-2.6ºC. Global GHG emissions must be reduced by 30-45% to limit global warming to well below 2ºC, yet current NDCs will only reduce emissions by 5-10%, assuming they are fully implemented. In 2023, GHG

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[65] McGrath, M. (2018) 'Climate change: COP24 fails to adopt key scientific report,' *BBC News*, 8 December 2028, https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-46496967.

[66] Farand, C. (2019) 'UN report on 1.5C blocked from climate talks after Saudi Arabia disputes science,*' Climate Home News*, 27 June 2019, https://www.climatechangenews.com/2019/06/27/un-report-1-5c-blocked-climate-talks-saudi-arabia-disputes-science/.

[67] Hook, L., Hodgson, C., and Pickard, J. (2021) 'COP26 agrees new climate rules but India and China weaken coal pledge,' *Financial Times*, 14 November 2021, https://www.ft.com/content/c891d4af-f80b-48f0-8b6f-a8763655c936; Harvey, F., Carrington, D., and Brooks, L. (2021) 'COP26 ends in climate agreement despite India watering down coal resolution,' *The Guardian*, 13 November 2021, https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/nov/13/cop26-countries-agree-to-accept-imperfect-climate-agreement.

[68] UNFCCC (2016) Key aspects of the Paris Agreement, https://unfccc.int/most-requested/key-aspects-of-the-paris-agreement.

[69] UN Environment Programme (UNEP) (2022) *Emissions Gap Report 2022: The Closing Window - Climate Crisis Calls for Rapid Transformation of Societies*, Nairobi. https://www.unep.org/emissions-gap-report-2022

emissions reached an 'all-time high'[70], which is perceived to be a 'testimony to inaction on the global climate crisis'[71].

This 'testimony of inaction' can also be seen in climate finance - the commitment to deliver $100 billion a year by 2020 has been missed. Based on the current accounting and reporting practices applied by climate finance contributors, total climate finance was reported as $83.3bn in 2020[72]. While this is a sizeable amount, it falls significantly short of the promise made in 2009, and it is based on accounting practices that do not reflect the actual level of support provided. For example, concessional loans to finance a project can be the right choice under the right circumstances, such as when a return on investment within the project's scope can be expected. But current rules and practices for reporting climate finance allow for reporting of loans and other non-grant instruments at face value. This does not reflect the effort of contributors, nor the financial benefit for recipient countries. Instead, contributors take credit for providing climate finance that developing countries will have to pay back. It is estimated that only $21 to $24.5bn of current contributions can be considered as real support. Three major economies — the United States, Australia, and Canada — provided less than half their share of the financial effort in 2018, based on objective indicators such as the size of their economies and their GHG emissions[73].

The failure to reach both our GHG targets and climate finance goals is a clear demonstration of the first dimensional view of power - the countries who control the allocation and distribution of resources have strategically delayed or reneged on their commitments, safeguarding their economic interests while projecting the image of cooperation. The first-dimensional view of power highlights the importance of overt actions, revealing how influential countries manipulate their pledges to maintain their dominant positions and this can be seen in the climate negotiations, leading to further inaction on the climate crisis.

The second-dimensional view of power, influencing the decision-making processes and shaping the terms of debate, can also be seen within the climate negotiations, most clearly through the setting of the agenda and mobilising bias.

One of the key tenements of the Paris Agreement is loss and damage (L&D) – the recognition that many climate impacts are now unavoidable, inevitably leading to significant loss and damage. Despite this issue being central to vulnerable countries, particularly LDCs and SIDS, the global North has blocked discussions for decades, refusing to put loss and damage on the agenda. First raised as an issue by UNFCCC in 1991, developed nations obstructed discussions for 30 years until COP27. Despite its high emissions, the US blocked L&D talks at COP26 in 2021, at the IPCC meeting in March 2022, and at the Bonn Intersessional Climate Talks in 2023. The UK, EU and Australia followed suit. At COP26 alone, the US obstructed L&D talks six

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[70] Harvey, F. (2023) 'Global greenhouse gas emissions at all-time high, study finds,' *The Guardian*, 8 June 2023, https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/jun/08/global-greenhouse-gas-emissions-at-all-time-high-study-finds.
[71] UN Environment Programme (UNEP) (2022:1), Ibid.
[72] OECD (2022) *Climate Finance Provided and Mobilised by Developed Countries in 2016-2020: Insights from Disaggregated Analysis, Climate Finance and the USD 100 Billion Goal*, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/286dae5d-en
[73] Bos, J., Gonzalez, L, and Thwaites, J. (2021) 'Are Countries Providing Enough to the $100 Billion Climate Finance Goal?' *World Resources Institute*, https://www.wri.org/insights/developed-countries-contributions-climate-finance-goal.

times, and because COP conferences do not use a voting system and instead rely on consensus, this gives countries the power to block the agenda. L&D was finally discussed at COP27 after enormous pressure from civil society, where nearly 150 organisations called on the United States to commit to a L&D finance discussion, with additional pressure from the devastating floods in Pakistan that were a clear demonstration of L&D in action. While a L&D financial mechanism was agreed to at COP27, many fear it will suffer the same fate as the rest of climate finance[74]. This obstruction to the negotiating agenda is a clear demonstration of the second dimensional view of power; indeed, 'some issues are organised into politics while others are organised out'[75].

Another mechanism of the second dimensional view of power is the extent to which barriers and obstacles prevent issues or actors from participating fully, the 'rules of the game'[76] that not only control the agenda, but also who is at the decision-making table. To this end, it is evident that developed countries have a distinct advantage: larger delegation sizes. In large and complex multilateral negotiations such as climate change, delegation size can have a significant impact on negotiating power due to the multiple sessions that run in parallel and often continue into the night as final modifications are negotiated, a process known as 'negotiation by exhaustion'[77]. For example, at the Bonn Climate Change Conference in 2023, there were 20 mandated events requiring more than 70 three-hour slots, in addition to the negotiations themselves, with only 8 days allocated for meeting time[78]. For smaller delegations, this entails difficult trade-offs and missed opportunities to further their interests within the negotiations. Throughout most of the convention's history, low-income countries, LDCs and SIDS have had, on average, the smallest delegations, limiting their negotiating power and making their participation less effective than more developed countries. These 'rules of the game' that disadvantage developing nations in terms of equal participation at the negotiating table can be considered a mechanism of the second dimensional view of power[79].

The power mechanisms in the third-dimensional view of power are indeed harder to observe. Central to the notion of 'invisible' power is the idea of socialised consent, where culture, ideology, and repetitive social behaviour prevents people from questioning or envisioning possibilities of change and perpetuates power imbalances by defining what is normal and acceptable[80]. To this end, it is important to examine our

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[74] Donald, R. (2022) 'COP27: Climate Loss & Damage talks now on agenda, but U.S. resistance feared,' *Mongabay*, 8 November 2022, https://news.mongabay.com/2022/11/cop27-climate-loss-damage-talks-now-on-agenda-but-u-s-resistance-feared/

[75] Bachrach, P. and Baratz, M. S. (1970:642), Ibid.

[76] Bachrach, P. and Baratz, M. S. (1970:952), Ibid.

[77] Depledge, J. (2005) *The organization of global negotiations: constructing the climate change regime*. Earthscan. Retrieved from: https://books.google.dk/books/about/The_Organization_of_Global_Negotiations.html?id=E6P9GFU4gxAC&redir_esc=y [Google Scholar]

[78] Vreuls, H. and Munir, N. (2023) 'SB 58: Expectations and approach - Joint scenario note by the Chairs of the subsidiary bodies,' UNFCCC.

[79] Martinez, G. S., Hansen, J. I., Olsen, K. H., Ackom, E. K., Haselip, J. A., Bois von Kursk, O., & Bekker-Nielsen Dunbar, M. (2019) 'Delegation size and equity in climate negotiations: An exploration of key issues,' *Carbon Management*, 10(4), 431-435. https://doi.org/10.1080/17583004.2019.1630243.

[80] Acosta, A. M. and Pettit, J. (2013:14), Ibid.

relationship with fossil fuels and while these reflections are not necessarily specific to the climate negotiations alone, they do provide insights into the general rationale behind our decision-making within the process.

One of the key ways that those in power maintain their power is through creating a system of dependency, and we can clearly see this in our relationship to fossil fuels. Since the industrial revolution, the burning of fossil fuels has been a fundamental aspect of life, whether to cook food, heat homes, fuel cars, or more recently, produce the plastics that have become essential to our daily functioning. At the same time, those in power have harnessed various platforms, including social media and information streams, to cultivate consumerism, fostering a desire for endless material acquisition. Those in power, including the fossil fuel industry and governments, have manipulated narratives by downplaying the environmental costs of capitalist production to maintain public support. By controlling the flow of information, they have diverted attention away from the negative externalities of capitalism and consumerism, including their contribution to climate change. This manipulation has perpetuated an unsustainable model that prioritises economic growth over ecological well-being[81]. While many stakeholders, including non-governmental organisations (NGOs) corporations and individuals, have tried to resist, reducing reliance on capitalistic acquisition and finding alternatives to fossil fuels, those in power have largely maintained control, particularly regarding the means of production of those resources. This has led to a sense of powerlessness, an adaptive response to continual defeat[82] that has led to apathy about the situation. While people may want to change their relationship to fossil fuels, they are highly dependent on them and, powerless to change the means of production, this leads to internalised social compliance. Once such power relations are established, 'their maintenance is self-propelled and attempts at their alteration are inevitably difficult'[83]. In order to benefit from the inequalities, the powerful no longer need to act, they 'will continue to prevail simply through the inertia of the situation'[84].

This highlights how socialised consent prevents people from questioning, envisioning possibilities of change, or addressing injustices, and the 'processes of socialisation, culture and ideology perpetuate exclusion and inequality by defining what is normal and acceptable'[85]. Our relationship to fossil fuels is a clear example of the third dimensional view of power that argues power can influence, shape or determine our very wants. By using social myths, languages, symbols, and even the communication of information to shape or manipulate power[86], the powerful can get the powerless to believe and act in a manner that they would otherwise not, to their own detriment but to the advantage of others[87]. This draws a distinction between perceived interests and 'real' interests, and Lukes suggests that actions and inactions can influence the shaping of perceived interests and political preferences, even if these are contrary to their genuine interests[88].

[81] Klein, N. (2014) *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs the Climate*, New York: Simon and Schuster
[82] Gaventa, J. (1980), Ibid.
[83] Gaventa, J. (1980), Ibid.
[84] Gaventa, J. (1980:23), Ibid.
[85] VeneKlasen, L. and Miller, V. (2007), Ibid.
[86] Edelman, M. J. (1985), Ibid.
[87] Gaventa, J. (1980), Ibid.
[88] Lukes, S. (2005), Ibid.

By influencing public opinion through various means, those in power have ensured that capitalist ideology remains predominant, hindering alternative economic models that prioritise environmental sustainability and the protection of human rights. This constriction of choices stifles systemic change, reinforcing the status quo. The culmination of these power dynamics perpetuates capitalism's hold, accelerating climate change in the process. As social media channels normalise consumerism and downplay environmental concerns, individuals are swayed to embrace resource-intensive lifestyles, furthering the carbon-intensive economic activities that fuel climate change.

Power shifts necessary for change

By viewing the climate negotiations through the lens of the three-dimensional views of power, one thing becomes clear: the current system works in favour of maintaining the interests of those in power and in order to combat climate change, there fundamentally needs to be a shift in the power dynamics that underpin the global system. While offering recommendations on how to change global power dynamics clearly goes beyond the scope of this paper, there are some examples of this shift already happening within the global climate movement worth reflecting on.

First, it is clear that the existing structures and processes do not benefit the global South, particularly with regards to financial institutions and development support. Efforts to change this are underway, such as through the Bridgetown Initiative, an international coalition of private, public and philanthropic leaders seeking to reform the global financial architecture[89]. First proposed by Mia Mottley, Prime Minister of Barbados, at COP26, the core message of the Bridgetown Initiative is that lower-income countries need new ways to relieve debt and, in turn, invest in climate resilience and mitigation. The group wants the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and other multilateral financial institutions to take the lead in raising over US$1 trillion a year to support developing countries' sustainable development and climate goals as well as making up for loss and damage caused by extreme weather events[90].

While efforts like this help to shift the power dynamics at global levels, efforts are also needed at more local levels, and for this, the principles of locally led adaptation (LLA) offer significant opportunities. At its core, LLA is about local leadership, enabling local people to take the lead in decision-making by providing them with the information, capacity, and resources needed to deal with the challenge of climate change[91]. LLA focuses on devolving decision-making to the lowest level, addressing structural inequalities, providing access to funding, investing in local capabilities, building understanding, ensuring accountability, and building collaboration. By promoting these concepts through climate adaptation initiatives, LLA entails a more

[89] Milhorance, F. (2023) 'Barbados prime minister leads push to transform global finance,' *Dialogo Chino – Climate and Energy*, 13 April 2023, https://dialogochino.net/en/climate-energy/367248-barbados-prime-minister-leads-push-to-transform-global-finance/.
[90] Milhorance, F. (2023), Ibid; Farand, C. (2022) 'Mia Mottley builds global coalition to make financial system fit for climate action,' *Climate Home News*, 23 September 2023, https://www.climatechangenews.com/2022/09/23/mia-mottley-builds-global-coalition-to-make-financial-system-fit-for-climate-action/.
[91] Global Centre for Adaptation (GCA) (2022) *Stories of Resilience: Lessons from Local Adaptation Practice*, Global Centre for Adaptation, https://gca.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Stories-of-Resilience.pdf

equitable distribution of power and resources, and elevates local innovation and knowledge for more effective resilience-building. This, in turn helps to address historical imbalance of power and disproportionate vulnerabilities that climate change will otherwise deepen[92].

A third effort is the increasing acknowledgement of the need for a human rights approach in both policy negotiations and development implementation. The UN General Assembly recently declared access to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment a universal human right, which will fundamentally 'help reduce environmental injustices, close protection gaps and empower people, especially those that are in vulnerable situations'[93]. In addition, there is growing recognition for the need to protect human rights within negotiating text itself, with this being a central topic of discussion at COP27[94]. By focusing on human rights, we can begin to analyse inequalities at the heart of development challenges, and redress discriminatory practices and unjust distributions of power that impede development progress[95].

The challenge of addressing climate change is by no means insignificant, but at its heart lies the question of power. It has been demonstrated that power dynamics greatly influence and shape the progress made towards climate action and that those in power use different mechanisms and instruments to maintain this inaction. In this way, to make a positive transformation towards a more sustainable world, we must fundamentally address and shift the power dynamics that underpin the global system.

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[92] Global Centre for Adaptation (GCA) (2022), Ibid; Tye, S., Granderson, A., and Bodrud-Doza, Md. (2022) 'Locally Led Adaptation: From Principles to Practice,' *World Resources Institute*, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Md-Bodrud-Doza/publication/361600521_Locally_Led_Adaptation_From_Principles_to_Practice/links/638326d048124c2bc6773bc2/Locally-Led-Adaptation-From-Principles-to-Practice.pdf

[93] UN News (2022), 'UN General Assembly declares access to clean and healthy environment a universal human right,' *UN News*, 28 July 2022, https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/07/1123482

[94] Harvey, F. (2022) 'First draft of Cop27 text: what it says and what it means.' *The Guardian*, 17 November 2022, https://www.theguardian.com/environment/ng-interactive/2022/nov/17/first-draft-of-cop27-text-what-it-says-and-what-it-means

[95] UN Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) (2023), Human Rights-Based Approach, https://unsdg.un.org/2030-agenda/universal-values/human-rights-based-approach