

Climate blame is often allocated by looking at which countries emit the most. The question of whether richer, historically more polluting countries should take more responsibility for climate change compared to others has always been a sore point at international climate negotiations. This debate has been stimulated in large part by the Kyoto Protocol, which exempted developing nations such as China and India from the same emissions-reducing obligations as developed countries - a notion I sincerely support.

Some argue against it, stating that it was unknown that emitting greenhouse gasses caused climate change until the 1980s - over a century after the industrial revolution took place. Developed nations were not initially aware of the damage they were causing, therefore the harm was unintentional. Retrospectively punishing these nations for something that was unknown to be harmful when it took place is unfair. The responsibility should instead be based upon emissions from the period in which the damage caused was known and emissions could have been reduced. Furthermore, while developed countries are more capable of contributing to combating global warming, their obligation to do so does not increase. The ease with which a party can perform a task does not determine its responsibility to do so.

As a result, in the past, developed countries have been reluctant to commit increased funding, concerned it could lead to them being legally liable for the impacts of climate change. At the 2015 Paris climate summit, countries signed an agreement recognizing the need to address loss and damage. However, developed countries pushed to include language that specified it did not "provide a basis for any liability." This stems from fears that admitting responsibility for their share of heat-trapping pollution would expose them to paying developing nations every time a disaster hit. In their point of view, the issue is a Pandora's Box of limitless liability that they simply refuse to approach. Tensions rising from this disagreement materialized in the form of a bloc of 132 developing countries physically exiting UN Climate talks in Warsaw after rich nations repeatedly delayed discussions around climate change recompense, which is exactly why it is imperative to address this topic.

While I do concede that it is not fair or feasible for these developed countries to be legally liable to pay for disaster damage control, I do believe that although the richest, most developed countries in the world are overwhelmingly to blame for the calamity of global climate change, they are not the ones who will suffer the most from it. Who is? You guessed it: the poorest countries.

For more than a century, the largest emitters of greenhouse gasses, in total as well as per capita, have been the big developed nations, most notably the United States and countries in Europe, which grew their economies by burning fossil fuels and spewing carbon from their factories,

homes and cars. Despite China's rise in emissions over the past decade, emissions per person still sit at less than half those of the US, while the 1 billion people living in Sub-Saharan Africa each emit a twentieth of the average person in the US.

As I mentioned, even as the wealthy nations drive the world toward ecological disaster, it is clearly the poor countries that will face the gravest consequences and have the most difficulty coping. For instance, low-lying Bangladesh, already battered by increasingly powerful cyclones, could lose 10% of its territory to the ocean within a few decades, displacing 18 million people.

A recent study by Stanford University found that climate change is compounding global income inequality between wealthy nations in cooler regions, and poor nations in hotter parts of the world. This is due, at least in part, to the relative inability of poorer countries to pay for the projects necessary to mitigate the effects of climate change, including more extreme weather events and the deterioration of arable land in subsistence economies.

The responsibility for mitigating climate change belongs to all of us: a global problem demands a global solution. We must all work to change our individual behavior and national policies. But this effort must be led by the nations that have reaped so many of the benefits of economic development and increased wealth through industrialization for years. The poorer countries in the world need help to find the money, resources and technology to move toward a sustainable future without plunging themselves much further into crushing poverty and inequality. The richer countries, though they may incur enormous costs of their own, have a moral obligation to step up.

In conclusion, I believe addressing climate change certainly requires urgent action by all people including the rich and poor, but with wealthy countries taking the lead in the form of increased funding and initiatives. Climate change is affecting every country on every continent. It is disrupting national economies and affecting lives. Saving lives and livelihoods requires urgent action to address the climate emergency, as an attestation to our very definition of humanity as prioritizing each other over short-term profits.