

For COP26 Britain Must Host the Most Ambitious Climate Change Conference Ever

by Professor Philippe Cullet, SOAS (June 2021)

As the hosts of COP26, the Government must kick-start new thinking and ensure states **cooperate towards achieving our common climate change goals**. To do so, COP26 must move away from 'sustainable development' in favour of a new paradigm: **Harmony with Nature**. COP26 must:

- frame **adaptation as a matter of rights** for vulnerable people;
- acknowledge that **inequality has not abated and needs to be addressed more directly**; and
- steer member states towards **addressing climate change in a collective manner** rather than on the basis of their individual sovereign interests.

COP26 will happen in the shadow of the global Covid-19 pandemic. The internationalism required to address the pandemic makes this a perfect time for the international community to be much more ambitious, and **it is for the host country to lead the way** by reframing the four main objectives.

The first objective is to **secure global net zero by mid-century and keep 1.5 degrees within reach**. The reality is that existing [Nationally Determined Contributions \(NDCs\)](#) are not even enough to keep the world within the 2.0 degrees objective. Simply calling for stronger commitments is not going to save humanity from catastrophe. 'Sustainable' development has proved to be an insufficient paradigm to re-orient the world's economy. We urgently need a **complete change of tack which centres the UN's [Harmony with Nature](#) paradigm, recognising that the earth is our shared home and must be protected as such. Only by moving beyond seeing Nature as a commodity will we successfully alter the man-made drivers of climate change.**

The second objective is to **adapt to protect communities and natural habitats**. This is uncontroversial but nearly three decades after the [United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change \(UNFCCC\)](#) was adopted, the international community is still stuck in **traditional development aid, which lacks permanency. This leaves the most vulnerable at the mercy of policy and political whim. The world can and must do better. As well as being in Harmony with Nature, adaptation needs to be structured around rights of individuals and communities.**

The third objective is to **mobilise finance**. In this regard, the international community remains divided along deep fault lines. So while finance is necessary, it is also crucial to first understand and address the inequalities which necessitate it. Three decades since the first COP, the least developed countries have not caught up with countries with higher levels of human development, yet addressing this must be at the centre of the evolving climate change regime. **To tackle inequality, the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities needs to be put at the centre of debates.**

The final objective is to **work together**. In particular, rich nations like the UK must work with rather than dictating to poorer nations. This is imperative in a context where the USA has just re-joined the Paris Agreement. But this is not enough. Individual states need to shed their deep-seated habit of cooperating on global issues in terms of their individual interests, as this has and will continue to lead to the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) failing. **Our planet deserves more. It is up to the British Government who will be hosting COP26 to lead the way by framing the discussion around the correct aims. Our children will only have the opportunity to survive and flourish if United**

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Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) member states collectively get this right.

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