

Climate Justice: Who bears the burden and pays the price?

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Climate change is real, relentless, and transforming our world. The accelerating and deepening impacts of climate change will not be borne equally or fairly, with poor developing countries who have contributed little to global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions bearing the brunt of global climate change. The lack of bargaining power in international negotiations by developing countries has enabled developed countries to determine not only the amount of their climate finance contributions, but to frame climate finance not as compensation for historical emissions, which would establish responsibility and imply liability, but as a gesture of goodwill rather than as an obligation. Developing countries are facing a bleak future if current GHG emission trends continue. Without recognition of climate justice as an underlying principle for access to financial and technological resources, millions of the most vulnerable will be at climate risk with limited opportunities to build adaptive capacity and strengthen resilience.

KEY WORDS: climate change, climate justice, climate finance, climate risks, climate adaptation, Green Climate Fund, Adaptation Fund

Climate change is the ultimate injustice and this truth needs to be reflected in how we tackle it. Poor countries that have done little to cause the problem are suffering the most from it, while the countries that have got rich from a fossil powered development are better able to protect themselves.

Mohamed Adow, Christian Aid's International Climate Lead (CIDSE 2018).

Climate change is real, relentless, and transforming our world. While our knowledge and understanding continue to unfold, there is little doubt that the world of 2050, 2075 and 2100 will be different from the world of today (WMO 2020).

While the accelerating and deepening impacts of climate change will touch everyone and every place in some way, it will not be borne equally or fairly, between rich and poor countries, women and men, and older and younger generations. It is already affecting vulnerable countries and posing a major threat to food security (see Fig 1). The high agricultural dependence of many developing countries suggests that droughts, floods, and the related increase in pests and invasive species will disrupt farming and result in widespread reductions in income and high levels of food insecurity (Busby and von Uexkull 2018).

Figure 1 map was created by Eco Experts using research from the ND-GAIN Index. It shows the countries that

would cope the best – and the worst – with climate change. The ND-GAIN Index analyses 181 countries based on factors like physical vulnerability, healthcare, food supply and government stability, and ranks them on their ability to cope with the challenges posed by a warming planet. The map presents country-level data, not regional or city level. High income countries in general have more resources which shift them toward the top of the list while lower-income countries are shifted down.

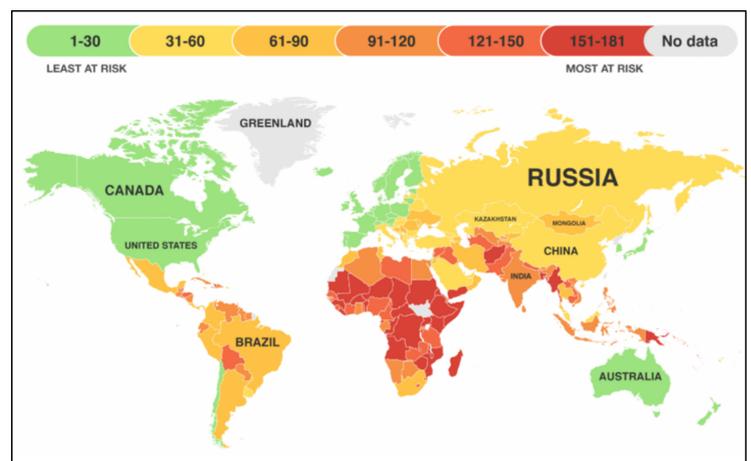


Fig 1. Countries Most at Risk from Climate Change (Wine Water Watch Org. 2018).

Despite contributing the least greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, no continent will be struck as severely by the impacts of climate change as Africa (Sy 2015;

Beavogui 2019). Given its geographical position, Africa is particularly vulnerable due to its considerably limited adaptive capacity, exacerbated by widespread poverty. Sub-Saharan Africa will be especially hard-hit with rising temperatures and rains that will be too little, too much, or too late. Over the past three decades, drought in Africa was the deadliest climate-related disaster in the world. More people died from droughts in Africa than all the climate-related deaths combined from the rest of the world. The development gains made by African countries will be undermined by the impact of climate change as countries fall back, or deeper into, poverty (Hallegatte et al. 2016). An analysis of the projected impact of climate change in Africa found that economic growth would be severely hindered with a rise in per capita income at a fraction of the potential during this century (see Fig 2).

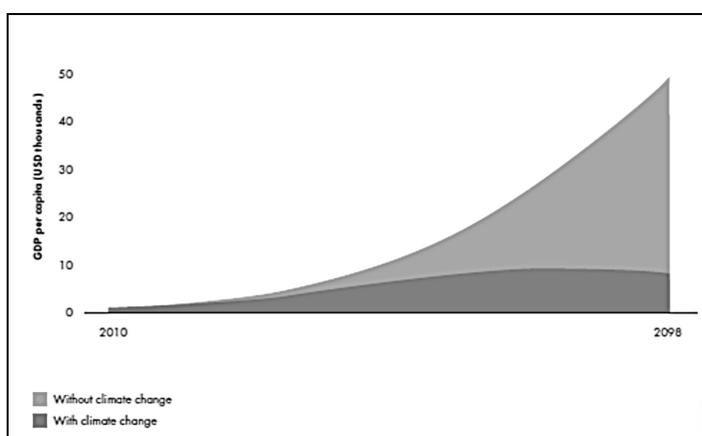


Fig 2. Projected effects on Sub-Saharan African countries' GDP per capita (by year 2098). <https://www.brookings.edu/multi-chapter-report/foresight-africa/>

For Sub-Saharan Africa, as well as other regions and countries facing high climate risk, the crucial issues are what can be done to build adaptive capacity and resilience, and how to pay for it.

Climate Justice: Who will pay the price of adaptation?

While the underlying issues of responsibility and adaptive capacity have been discussed at sessions of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) since the 1990s, the primary focus was to *lower GHG emissions* to reach agreement by industrialised countries to take (voluntary) domestic action.¹ Countries that will bear the brunt of global climate change, such as countries in Africa, have limited bargaining power in international negotiations (Sy 2015). This lack of negotiating power has resulted in the failure of the developed world to acknowledge that climate finance to developing countries is compensation for its historical emissions. This would establish responsibility and imply liability. Instead, climate finance is framed as reflecting the goodwill of developed countries to assist developing countries in mitigating and adapting to climate change by providing climate finance, capacity building and technology transfer.

The Paris Agreement (2015) was a remarkable achievement, with 175 countries proposing their Nationally Determined Commitments (NDC) for domestic (national) action to lower emissions. The Paris Agreement's central aim is to keep the global temperature rise below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase even further to 1.5°C. However, the commitments made by countries in the Paris Agreement will not result in a temperature increase below 2°C. Current projections are a far higher temperature increase of 2.6 to 3.2°C which is a catastrophic scenario (OECD n.d.; Nunn et al. 2019).²

There is a strong economic and political incentive for developed countries not to reduce their emissions: countries have to pay 100% of the costs in the short term, while only receiving a fraction of the benefits (global reduction in emissions) in the longer term. A common explanation by countries as to why they have failed to reduce emissions is the negative effects it would have on short term growth objectives (Napoli 2012).

Youth strikes and demonstrations notwithstanding, there are no consequences for a country if it fails to meet its Paris Agreement pledge and commitments. The NDCs countries submitted to the UNFCCC to lower GHG emissions are not legally binding; countries are only legally bound to have their progress *tracked* and to determine ways to strengthen *ambition*, for example setting more ambitious targets to lower emissions. Developing countries can do little when developed countries fail to act on the commitments and pledges they made.

While the purpose of the NDC is to provide GHG emissions targets, most developing countries, including all the African countries, took the initiative to also include adaptation actions in their NDCs. Unsurprisingly, given their agricultural dependency and concerns over food security, the sectors most frequently mentioned for climate adaptation actions are agriculture, water (frequently related to agriculture) and health (GIZ 2020). As for the ability to pay the costs for climate actions, the proposed NDCs of developing countries are designated as being conditional (contingent on external support in the form of finance, technology transfer and capacity building) or unconditional (country can implement with own resources); the majority of climate mitigation and adaptation actions are designated as conditional and requiring external support.

Where will the support come from?

In the Paris Agreement, the developed countries agreed to provide USD 100 billion a year from 2020-2025 for developing countries to adapt to climate impacts and

enable 'green growth', i.e. low-carbon development, with an expectation that after 2025 the funding would increase and include a broader range of contributors (Egli and Stunzi 2019; UNFCCC 2015). What continues to be missing from the climate finance agreements is the consideration of the needs and wellbeing of the most vulnerable countries and the most vulnerable communities who do not have the ability and resources to adapt to factors such as drought or flooding. Climate justice calls for the equitable distribution of resources to tackle climate change and for climate vulnerable countries and people to take part in the decisions about how the money is to be spent.

While USD 100 billion is a seemingly large pool of funds, it is far below the *additional* costs faced by countries for adaptation actions. Even if developing countries can commit to increase domestic sources of revenue, substantial international funding will be required to bridge the growing adaptation gap – a gap that will continue to increase as temperatures rise and the situation of many countries worsens.

Where are we now?

Mohamed Nasheed, head of Maldives negotiating delegation (2019) told the UN Climate talks in Katowice that 'Carbon emissions are rising, rising and rising and all we seem to be doing is talking, talking and talking.'

In 2020, countries are due to not only meet but strengthen their Paris Agreement pledges to lower GHG emissions and increase climate finance. However, GHG emissions continue to rise, reaching a record high in 2019. With the rise in emissions, aspirations for a 2°C global temperature increase are waning and the necessity for adaptation actions mounting. Climate finance is lagging with negotiations mired in defining financial structures (for example grants, loans, foreign direct investment), disbursement (e.g. what proportion will be directly received by countries, through development programs, and private sector investment), and tracking (persistent issue of double or even triple accounting of the same money provided through the UNFCCC and non-UNFCCC delivery channels) (Khan et al. 2019). Further, there is no guidance regarding the allocation of contributions or what is the 'fair share' to be paid by each developed country. The protocol is that each government determines what they consider to be their 'fair share' and the mechanisms for achieving it (e.g. integrate into development program or new and additional funding; public finance; and/or leveraged private finance).

Disappointment in the lack of progress in lowering GHG emissions galvanised over six million youths globally to participate in school strikes in September 2019,

calling for accountability and sharply criticising the lack of climate action by government and decision-makers. This sentiment was captured by Greta Thunberg in her declaration 'you are failing us, but the young people are starting to understand your betrayal' in her speech at the UN Climate Action Summit (Thunberg 2019). The largest demonstrations were by youths in high emission countries – Germany, UK, US, and Australia – but there were almost 100 smaller demonstrations in other countries, many with a focus on the environment: promoting clean air; cleaning of beaches and streets; and engaging with extinction rebellion (Taylor et al. 2019).

The strikes and ongoing youth coalitions are primarily focused on emissions reduction through switching to 100% clean energy and keeping fossil fuels in the ground, with calls for change often framed in terms of generational fairness. The Australian Youth Climate Coalition (AYCC)'s Climate Justice statement 'It's not fair that our generation and those to come are currently looking at a future vastly different from what we experience today' is indicative of what is being voiced by youth groups (AYCC 2020).

Current climate change policy is inherently unfair to future generations and to communities across the globe. While the youth movement has brought much needed attention to the lack of action to lower emissions in their own countries, there has not been comparable attention to the power chasm and the reluctance by wealthy high emission countries to be accountable for the current and future impact of climate change on developing countries. The demand for fairness is not only generational; it is unfair that countries and communities that have contributed the least GHG emissions are most at risk from the impacts of climate change and are the least able to adapt. It is unfair that when poor vulnerable countries ask the richer ones for help they do not receive the finance and technology they need (Shanahan et al. 2013). And it is unfair that many low-emitting countries are at high climate risk and will be further impoverished without the opportunity to experience the prosperity of high emission countries.

Household prosperity in many developing countries is strongly linked to agriculture. In their NDCs, many developing countries stressed that their primary concern was climate adaptation, not mitigation, with proposed adaptive actions for agriculture, water, and health. Climate change will alter conditions for agriculture and force an unprecedented dynamic adaptation of agricultural systems. Small-scale producers in developing countries will be among those facing the greatest challenge due to their vulnerability of random climatic conditions (Meridian Institute 2011). A recent analysis suggests a decline of 1.1% between 2011 and 2050 of the global average yield across all crops. However, there are significant regional

variations with a projected rise of crop yields due to climate change in countries such as Canada, some European countries, and Russia, but large declines in developing economies in parts of Africa (-12%), Southeast Asia (-5%), and India (-5%) (FAO 2018) (see Figure 3).

Modelling studies reported by the World Bank suggest even greater decline in yields, with global crop yield losses as large as 5% in 2030 and 30% in 2080, 'even accounting for adaptive behaviours such as change agricultural practices and crops, more irrigation, and innovation in higher yield crops.' The expected yield losses from climate change are likely to result in higher food prices which, even with expanded trade, will make it difficult for regions like Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia to attain and maintain food security (Hallegatte et al. 2016).

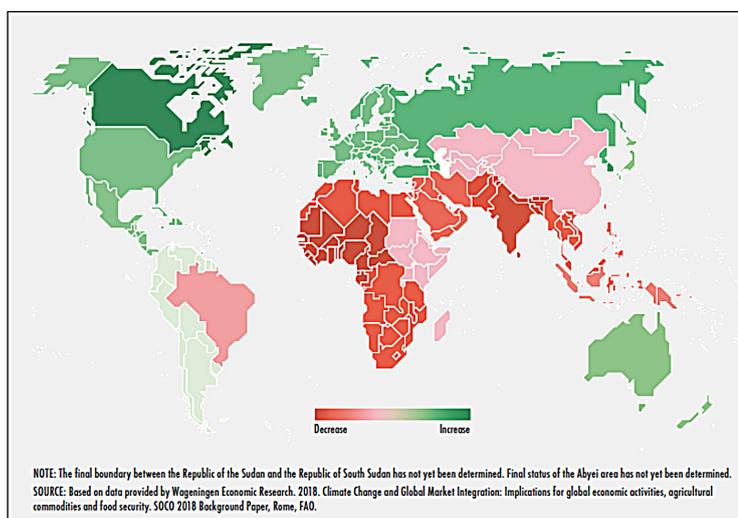


Fig 3. Changes in Agricultural Production in 2050 (FAO 2018)

The baseline scenario in Figure 3 reflects a continuation of current trends and is derived from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Shared Socio-economic pathway. The projection is based on a climate change scenario in which global GHG emissions are expected to be at an intermediate level with an increase of global mean surface temperature at the end of this century (2018-2100) relative to the beginning (1986-2005). This is expected to be in the range of 1.4 °C to 3.1 °C, with a mean of 2.2 °C.

What about the climate finance commitments?

It is doubtful that climate finance will provide the resources needed to assist countries in implementing crucial adaptation actions, especially in the priorities of agriculture and food security. Finance flowing toward adaptation and resilience fall far short of international needs and targets as specified in the Paris Agreement (Buchner et al. 2019). The target of USD 100 billion is far less than needed to meet the adaptation needs of developing countries, with estimates that Africa alone needs USD 50 billion a year, and increasing amounts if temperature increase exceeds

2°C. Further, the USD 100 billion target is likely not to be reached. A recent report by the OECD, which tracks official development assistance (ODA) from information provided by its developed country members, suggests that climate finance will only reach USD 66.8 million by 2020, far below the amount required (OECD 2018).

The continuing absence of a shared understanding of what climate finance is, and is not, has allowed developed countries to report unilaterally how they count 'new and additional' climate finance with a lack of comparability in accounting methodologies by finance providers. The most vulnerable countries have demanded adaptation funding in the form of grants to enhance their adaptive capacity and avoid yet more indebtedness. However, only about one third of bilateral climate finance and 10% of total multilateral funding is through grants (OECD 2018). Although there have been pledges to 'balance' mitigation and adaptation funding, only about one-fifth is for adaptation (Khan et al. 2019).

For climate finance, developing countries are encouraged to seek funding from the two UNFCCC climate funds. A review of the structure, procedures, and access of the Adaptation Fund and the Green Climate Fund, both specifically established to provide climate finance to developing countries, illustrates the challenges developing countries face when attempting to access funds for climate actions.

Adaptation Fund (AF). Initially established under the Kyoto Protocol of the UNFCCC in 2001, the AF, in 2019, was officially designated as servicing the Paris Agreement, allocating USD 720 million for adaptation in 100 projects. It awards grants to countries in accordance to priorities laid out in national strategies and plans or in the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC), for projects in one of the priority areas of the AF, such as agriculture, food security, rural development, water management, coastal zone management (AF 2019). AF grants are relatively small, with a cap of USD 10 million in resource allocation per country or USD 14 million for regions. The AF mandate is to finance 'concrete adaptation projects and programmes', with an 'aim at producing visible and tangible results on the ground by reducing vulnerability and increasing the adaptive capacity of human and natural systems to respond to the impacts of climate change, including climate variability with outcome(s) and output(s) that are measurable, monitorable, and verifiable'. However, many developing countries have already received their allocation and must now seek adaptation finance elsewhere.

Green Climate Fund (GCF). Set up by the UNFCCC in 2010, the GCF is the world's largest dedicated climate fund and top multilateral contributor to developing countries.

GCF's role in implementing the Paris Agreement is to support the goal of keeping average global temperature rise well below 2°C, an ambitious goal given its resources. The GCF's task is 'to promote a paradigm shift to low-emission and climate-resilient development'. Its priority countries are the small island states (SIDS), least developed countries (LDCs) and African countries. Climate finance is provided for mitigation and adaptation activities, with an aim of about 50:50 for each. Of the adaptation funding, 50% is intended for particularly vulnerable countries (African countries, SIDS, LDCs). If this is realised, about 25% of the GCF financing would be directed to adaptation climate actions in the most vulnerable countries. The GCF is financed by direct country commitments. Forty-nine countries made contribution pledges, including nine countries categorised as developing countries. The four countries making the largest contribution are Japan, United Kingdom, Germany and the United States – 57% of the total.

Of the initial pledges by countries of USD 10.3 billion, the GCF received USD 8.2 billion and as of March 2020 has made commitments for 129 projects totalling USD 5.6 billion (GCF 2020a). GCF began a replenishment drive in 2019 and has received pledges for USD 9.8 billion for 2020-2023 (GCF 2020b). Fewer countries have made pledges for replenishment than for the initial contribution. For example, Australia and the United States did not make pledges.

Accessing these climate funds is a challenge, so much so that the AF and GCF funds only provide 'readiness' funding for the preparation of proposals and putting administrative mechanisms in place. The overall process for accessing climate finance is similar: submission of a proposal by an accredited entity with country agreement, preparation for review of a concept paper followed by a full proposal, and board approval. For both, patience is the byword. Excluding the 'readiness' preparation, from concept to implementation with receipt of finance is a lengthy process, commonly taking two or more years.

Are the projects country-driven?

Often not. While a basic tenet of climate finance projects is that they are country-driven, reflecting a country's priorities and climate vulnerabilities, this infrequently means that the project is country-initiated, identified, designed and implemented by a country's ministries or agencies. For the GCF, it is only its partner organisations, referred to as accredited entities (AE), which can develop funding proposals for consideration by the GCF and then supervise, manage, and monitor the project. To become an AE is a demanding process requiring a significant allocation of human and financial resources; to address the complexity of the process, there is support from the GCF in 'becoming an AE'. In March 2020, of the

95 approved entities, 41% are national entities, rather than regional or international entities, most of which are banks and financial institutions rather than government agencies. During the accreditation process, the applicant's policies and procedures, track record, and demonstrated capacity to undertake projects or programs of different financial instruments and environmental and social risk categories are assessed against the standards of the Green Climate Fund.

The accreditation process by the GCF also establishes the size of the project which an entity can propose and manage, which range from micro (<USD 10 million) to large (>USD 250 million). Most of the national entities are only approved for micro and small projects. Only four national entities – all banks or financial institutions – compared to more than 20 international entities (e.g. Asian Development Bank, World Bank), are accredited for 'large' projects.

The country's Nationally Designated Authority (NDA)³ does not participate in the preparation of project; the NDA is only required to provide a 'no objection' for the proposed activity. Since the project does not have to be designed and developed by national agencies, international organisations, such as UNEP or IUCN, can develop and 'roll out' the same project model in multiple countries while large GCF global and regional private sector initiatives can be approved with only a sign off (no objection) by the countries.

While the AF only targets adaptation, mostly in small projects, the GCF approved 129 projects totalling USD 5.9 billion, with 26% of the funding for adaptation. This was below its aim of 50%. Ten adaptation projects totalling USD 157 million, a small portion of the adaptation funding, were proposed by national entities. There are also projects designated as cross-cutting, including both adaptation and mitigation benefits. National entities implement about 15% of GCF projects (adaptation and mitigation). Most of the adaptation funding was for projects by international partners, such as UNDP (which was awarded over 25% of the international entity projects), UNEP, World Food Program, and the MDBS (multilateral development banks – World Bank, Asian Development Bank).

Is the funding going to the country's adaptation priorities?

Rather than focusing on the adaptation priorities highlighted in the NDCs, adaptation finance of the GCF for international entity projects is more likely to focus on what it perceives as a priority, for example climate-proofing infrastructure, tree-based landscape restoration and management, energy for agricultural production and soil carbon. Part of their focus is driven by the emphasis in climate program reporting on the decrease in GHG

emissions and the number of project beneficiaries. Countries have limited input in the projects implemented by international entities, with the funding, reporting, and monitoring managed by the implementer. As an externally driven project, there is less attention given to building local adaptive capacity and more to reaching shorter term quantifiable project targets such as the number of trees planted.

So, to ask again, where are we now in support for adaptation?

Not very far, certainly not far enough. Since public sector climate financing is lagging, developing countries are being encouraged to look to the private sector. However, engagement by the private sector in climate adaptation has proven to be elusive. There are several reasons for the lack of interest in adaptation from private entities. Adaptation can be more difficult to monetise than mitigation projects. Adaptation projects are also still less understood by private actors than projects focused on mitigation (e.g. renewable energy, transport).

Looking to the future

The side-stepping of responsibility by developed countries (and emerging economies) does not bode well for the future. By putting aside the 'polluter pays' principle, climate finance is now officially couched as an 'obligation' by the wealthy nations as 'alms for the poor', rather than recognised as a right for people and countries affected by the high emissions of developed and emerging countries.

Developing countries at high climate risk face a bleak future if current emission trends and climate finance hurdles continue. Without the recognition of climate justice as an underlying principle for climate adaptation finance, available funding will be too little, too difficult to access, too expensive if it shifts to loans (and further indebtedness) rather than grants, and too often not aligned with a country's priorities. Millions more of the most vulnerable will be at climate risk without the financial and technological resources and information they need to build adaptive capacity and strengthen resilience.

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End Notes

1. *Common but differentiated responsibilities for climate change and differential adaptive capacities among nation states to respond to climate change.*
2. *Mitigation: Contributes to the objective of stabilisation of greenhouse gas (GHG) concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system by promoting efforts to reduce or limit GHG emissions or to enhance GHG sequestration.*

Adaptation: Intends to reduce the vulnerability of human or natural systems to the current and expected impacts of climate change, including climate variability, by maintaining or increasing resilience, through increased ability to adapt to, or absorb, climate change stresses, shocks and variability and/or helping reduce exposure to them.

Source: OECD DAC Rio Markers for Climate Handbook (n.d.) Definition of climate change adaptation and mitigation markers. https://www.oecd.org/dac/environment-development/Revised%20climate%20marker%20handbook_FINAL.pdf.

3. *To ensure that activities supported by the Fund align with strategic national objectives and priorities, and help advance ambitious action on adaptation and mitigation in line with national needs.*

Author

Dr Kadi Warner is a climate change and natural resource management specialist with over 35 years of experience in sustainable development, community-based resource management, policy and regulatory frameworks, rights and benefits with significant experience in the last 10 years on climate change adaptation and mitigation. Prior to transitioning to the Sunshine Coast in late 2017 where she has an adjunct position in the Sustainability Research Centre and is engaged in international consultancies, Kadi was the Regional Senior Expert, Climate Change and Environment at the World Resources Institute, seconded to the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs and based in the Netherlands Embassy in Kampala. She led the integration of climate change into the development programs of the Netherlands embassies in Sub-Saharan Africa and was a member of the Ministry's Climate Team. As a member of the Ministry's Climate Team she contributed to climate-related policy, position papers and reports, including the Netherlands climate finance report to the OECD and Parliament. Kadi has worked with governments, international agencies and organisations, and NGOs in Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Pacific. She has resided and worked in Asia (Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia, Philippines), Africa (Uganda, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Nigeria), the United States, New Zealand, Australia and Italy with additional professional working experience in Cambodia, Laos, China, Indonesia, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, Ethiopia, Mali, South Sudan, Mozambique, Russia and the Pacific Island Countries.

Distillation

In tenuous sunlight,
near a flicker of leaves,

I stand with my shadow,
my quiver of words emptied
into a passing breeze.

Lightness becomes me,
I think, as I start to rise.

DAVID ADÈS,
BEECROFT, NSW