

COP26 UNIVERSITIES NETWORK

Towards Glasgow: the UKRI Research Fellows COP26 Contribution

In just over two weeks time the UK will host the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) in Glasgow. The event will be the largest gathering of state leaders, international negotiators and climate experts since the Paris Agreement was signed in 2015 and for this year's conference 200 countries will be asked to pledge emission reductions to achieve net zero by 2050. While 1.5 degrees targets are still within reach, the focus of this COP will be around adaptation of local communities and natural habitats, mobilising climate finance and supporting the most inclusive negotiations yet.

This overview outlines how the COP26 UKRI Research Fellows are supporting these objectives through their research. Over the last 12 months they have explored issues of transparency in climate finance, youth participation and local delivery of energy justice, offering unique perspectives to aid the wider the negotiations and the wider intended outcomes of the COP.

Climate Finance:

At COP26, discussions around mobilising climate finance are likely to focus on increasing the \$100 billion commitment made by developed countries in 2015 and ensuring the adequate financing of global mitigation and adaptation solutions. However, in order to deliver these goals, more attention must be given to whether this funding is reaching the communities it aims to support and addresses the unique vulnerabilities of their local people.

Dr Jessica Omokuti, Making Money Go Further: Scaling Climate Finance through Local Delivery, has been researching the local delivery of climate finance, which provides a key entry point for negotiators to consider the current effectiveness of climate finance at the local level, providing not only a case for institutional transformation but an increased focus on its fundamental necessity. In order to reach this potential, the Global Climate Fund will have to address several insufficiencies:

- **Transparency and accountability:** The GCF has weak systems of transparency and accountability, particularly in relation to the allocation and spending of adaptation finance at the local level. This prevents adequate granularity in reporting mechanisms which obscure if, and how much money is allocated on local level spending.
- **Defining terms:** Although the GCF is committed to funding local adaptation, it lacks a consistent definition of 'local level.' This means that both the GCF and the partners implementing the projects it funds apply a diverse and subjective definition which is subject to the constantly changing needs of its benefactors. As a result, it is difficult to aggregate or compare local level spending across projects.

- **Capacity gaps:** Capacity gaps within GCF's accredited entities means that current approved projects are unable to meaningfully target the local level and deliver adaptation outcomes that are locally-led. They fail to build on the agency of local actors and instead adopt a top-down approach to adaptation.

Having identified these areas of concern, Jessica's work will now turn to implementable solutions, answering questions around the possibility of a consistent definition of climate finance delivery at the local level, how can greater transparency and accountability mechanisms be installed without burdening local actors and what capacity building in the GCF would look like to ensure a more grass-roots approach to project funding.

UK Delivery of Net Zero Strategy

Against the backdrop of securing global net zero by 2050 at COP26, there is an urgent requirement for the UK to decarbonise its energy systems. However, this transition has the potential to affect a wide range of stakeholders - business, industry, local cooperatives, councils, communities - and exacerbate pre-existing social and economic inequalities in society. While most are aware of the importance of energy justice and a just transition, **Dr Rebecca Ford's** research *Aligning Impacts for Getting to Net Zero (ALIGN)* has found that stakeholders have limited understanding of how to actually engage with these issues. To try and overcome this challenge, Dr Ford's work has focused on three key ideas:

- **Practical Solutions:** Academics and policymakers must move away from an abstract and conceptual translation of energy justice ideas, towards more practical solutions. governments and policy makers must seek to collaborate with sub-state and non-state actors to turn ideas into implementable frameworks and begin to articulate what justice within energy systems can, and should, look like on the ground.
- **Communication between Stakeholders:** There is a tension between the desire to align just transition narratives amongst stakeholders in order to create legislation that suits all parties and a fundamental difference in the organisational priorities of stakeholders. This creates a deeply interconnected yet distinctly separate series of motivators, strategies and desired outcomes for those working towards an equitable energy transition. If practitioners fail to address these tensions, then the nuances and diversity of a cross-sectoral transition will not be realised.
- **Implementable Frameworks:** In order to overcome these issues, Dr Ford has recently published a [POINTS paper](#) to provide decision makers with a guide to assist in the meaningful exploration of the wide-reaching energy justice implications of their net-zero visions, strategies, and policies.

In September, the ALIGN team actualised Dr Ford's findings convening key actors and facilitating conversation between stakeholders. Through the use of her framework, conversations began to address the importance of trying to work towards a holistic just transition and the importance of embedding justice into decarbonisation of energy systems for all.

Youth Engagement:

As the UNFCCC seeks to replace the Doha Work Programme at COP26, encouraging delegates to consider the importance of integrating participatory education and training into its mitigation and adaptation activities will be paramount to achieving the negotiations' net zero objectives.

Through the examination of Climate Change Education (CCE) in UK Higher Education Institutions, part of **Dr Harriet Thew's** fellowship, YES TO NET ZERO (Youth Education, Skills and Training to Operationalise Net Zero), has sought to ascertain whether current curriculums provide graduates with the skills necessary to obtain green jobs and highlight where further education and training is needed. Her preliminary findings are as follows:

- **Lack of research:** There is a distinct lack of peer reviewed published studies detailing how climate change education is being implemented in UK universities. Although some articles have been produced on Education for Sustainable Development, without a more substantive understanding of the taught skills specific to climate change in action integration into the Doha Work Programme's replacement will be difficult to achieve.
- **Lack of pedagogical interventions:** There are a variety of pedagogical approaches being used to deliver CCE, with strong evidence to suggest that practitioners are moving beyond traditional instructivist approaches to teaching towards more experiential learning. However, a lack of pedagogical interventions means it is difficult to determine effectiveness of these sessions and quantify their ability to aid the ability of young people to perform green jobs.
- **Barriers to implementation:** While CCE does aid the development of transferable skills such as citizenship, employability or critical thinking for young people, there are several barriers to implementing and mainstreaming it in UK Higher Education Institutions. These can include restrictive governance structures which prevent cross disciplinary teaching and working, as well as a lack of availability, expertise and training for staff.

Without adequate consideration of these findings and how global negotiations can support them, young people will not have the education, training or skills required to carry out the essential mitigation and adaptation commitments agreed at COP26.

Non-state actors engagement:

In recent years, one of the greatest innovations in climate governance is the growing role of cities, provinces, businesses, investors and civil society. While their importance as observers of intergovernmental negotiations has been recognised since Kyoto, the roles of these entities as *actors*, capable of working alongside and with national governments has, largely through **Dr. Thomas Hale's** work, only recently been examined. Building on the review of the Marrakech Partnership (MP) mandated at COP25, Dr Hale's Fellowship, Groundswell" to "All of Society": How local governments, businesses, and civil society can contribute to the implementation of phase of the Paris Agreement, has focused on how to promote greater cooperation between state and sub/non-state actors across the UNFCCC climate

regime, using sectoral climate action to harness the opportunity COP26 represents in advancing this goal.

- **Institutionalisation of climate arrangements:** As part of the negotiations this November, Dr Hale suggests it is essential that climate action arrangements are institutionalised within the MP. A collaborative approach to tackling issues of accountability and transparency need to be included within any future governance structures and their terms of reference.
- **Greater engagement of the global south:** The inclusion of governments and sub/non-state actors across the global south need substantive commitments from MP to avoid becoming detrimental to its effectiveness. A lack of representation not only as observers but *actors* in this space will hinder the COP Presidency's goal to urgently adapt to protect those communities and natural habitats most vulnerable to the impacts of the changing climate. Urgent plans need to be supported to ensure greater integration of developing countries into the MP's proposed revision. Without integrated mechanisms to include *all* cities, provinces, businesses, investors and civil society as actors in its governance structures, the Partnership will fail to have impact in the long term.

Moving into the final stages of his Fellowship, Thomas's work is focusing on increasing engagement and pledges of these actors through the UNFCCC's Race to Zero campaign, specifically ensuring robust governance mechanisms are implemented post COP26 and stakeholders continue to operationalise their commitments and create impact in the years to come.

Nationally Determined Contributions:

In November, COP26 will mark the first five-year review of progress in the implementation of the Paris Agreement. While globally the 2C—ideally 1.5C—by the end of the century targets will not be achieved, discussions between countries will primarily focus on increasing the level of ambition pledged through the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). **Dr Alina Averchenkova's** project, *Credibility of ambition: Strengthening national implementation of the Paris Agreement*, underpins three main debates:

- **Credibility of pledges:** Defined as the likelihood that policymakers will keep promises to implement their pledge, the credibility of pledges, attributed to individual countries, is paramount for COP26's long term success. By focusing on assessing the credibility of NDC's in the G20 countries, Dr. Averchenkova's work considers developments in national climate governance and performance in the first five years since the Paris agreement.
- **Strengthening national legal and institutional frameworks:** Without consideration of the practical ways to strengthen national legal and institutional frameworks for nationally determined contributions, the Paris Agreement will never be successfully implemented and it will be near impossible to develop analytical tools for identifying and addressing gaps in these pledges.
- **Greater ambition in national climate legislation:** Through rigorous engagement with policy makers, legislators and policy experts, a stronger case needs to be made for ambitious national climate legislation. Further work must be conducted to document the practical exchange of

experiences from around the world and how each country's unique experience of climate law can offer insight and potential solutions to others.

While much of COP26 will focus on ratcheting of ambitions by the world's biggest polluters and how these pledges compare to scenarios for limiting the increase of mean global temperatures, Dr. Averchenkova's project hopes to highlight that the ambition of these pledges is not the only consideration to successfully implementing the Paris agreement and beyond.

Next Steps for COP26:

As preparations for COP26 draw to a close, global leaders are offered an opportunity to unite the world to tackle climate change. While the outcome of the 'last attempt to stave off climate breakdown' has never had greater ecological importance, the negotiations' societal significance in 2021 is unparalleled. The research of the COP26 Fellows has highlighted in the post-pandemic world a need for a more inclusive, transparent and implementable set of solutions that at the very least include stakeholders from governments, business, civil society, sub-state and non-state actors and those at the very margins of our global community.