



Response to the outcomes of COP26

Dr Bethany Jackson¹ and the Rights Lab's Ecosystems team respond to the outcomes of the COP26 Glasgow Climate Pact, and what that means for social-ecological antislavery activities

COP26 has been marred by scepticism about if it achieved a real push for change to reduce emissions and tackle the climate crisis. Yet the conference did lead to some marginal improvements on the commitments outlined in the last major agreement from a COP, the Paris Agreement². The new Glasgow Climate Pact³ outlines the actions that need to be taken in order to limit global temperature increases to 1.5°C and minimize the social, economic, and environmental impacts of a rapidly changing world. Here we explore the Pact and assess the affect it may have on tackling the modern slavery-environmental degradation-climate change nexus.

Key Takeaways

The Glasgow Climate Pact draws upon the Paris Agreement but lacks ambition. Whilst there are a number of references to “social” outcomes, there is a lack of clarity.

The impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic have been included and whilst this is important, detail on how this may have affected communities and their vulnerabilities to either social risks or climate change are lacking.

Despite increasing evidence of the impact of climate change on communities and workers, much of the focus is on the movement away from fossil fuels, and limiting temperature increases. Whilst these are vital inclusions, we should be ambitious and include specific references to people within the aims of the agreements going forward since the opportunity has been missed in Glasgow.

The inclusion of a “just transition” (Point 36), focusing only on fossil fuels, and without really outlining the impacts upon communities – and specific groups, in varied sectors – nor defining a “just transition” within the Pact outlines that there is a long way to go in addressing climate change and its varied causes and impacts at an inter-governmental level.

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² UNFCCC. (2015). Paris Agreement. Available:

https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/english_paris_agreement.pdf

Why is this important?

The outcomes of COP26 are set to be the latest in a line of climate commitments, providing a framework for countries and companies can implement changes to reduce emissions. There is little overall onus on the protections of people. Thus, there is the potential for people to be lost amongst the emphasis on technology, temperature and fossil fuels.

In addressing the modern slavery-climate change nexus, it is important for the antislavery community to assess the limits and focus of the Pact; how the inclusions (and exclusions) may affect efforts to end modern slavery, limit environmental degradation and mitigate climate change impacts.

Responses to the Key Outcomes of Glasgow Climate Pact

Whilst it was not expected that modern slavery and its connection to environmental degradation and climate change would be included explicitly in the Glasgow Climate Pact, there are clearly areas that overlap with the antislavery sector's work on the climate change. Therefore, it is important to review the Glasgow Climate Pact using an antislavery lens.

Preamble

The climate change impacts upon indigenous peoples, migrants, children and people in vulnerable situations are noted. The inclusion of such individuals are important as they encompass a number of groups that are of a high-risk to trafficking and modern slavery. Whilst the risks of the nexus are not specifically included, it is encouraging to see the inclusion of these identifiers and acknowledgment that such communities are at risk from continued climate change.

Science and Urgency

Inclusion of the best available scientific data to support climate action and policy-making are noted (Article 1). As part of this, it is vital that research into the nexus between modern slavery and climate change are reviewed by the scientific community, and that intersecting social-ecological issues are considered on par with those addressing more traditional climate change impacts (e.g., temperature, CO₂ levels).

Work surrounding the carbon emission of modern slavery are one such development,⁴ but the innovation that can be co-designed to address modern slavery should be considered as part of this wider consideration of scientific sourced data for decision-making.

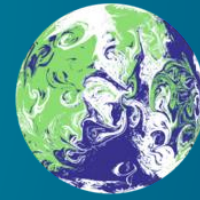
Adaptation

National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) (Article 8) should be expanded to incorporate risks and adaptive measures to support groups vulnerable to the effects of modern slavery.

³ UN. (2021). Glasgow Climate Pact. Available:

https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cma2021_L16_adv.pdf

⁴ Forthcoming from the Rights Lab Ecosystems Programme.



Previous critiques have noted that the implications of gender and age⁵ have not been included where worsening climate impacts have been linked to raised levels of forced marriage. Modern slavery should be included within such action plans alongside issues such as forced marriage to support individuals and communities who may be vulnerable.

Adaptation Finance

Article 19 calls for the mobilization of financial institutions to support action against climate change. Similar calls in the antislavery sector have noted that development finance can be used to support antislavery work.⁶ Combining efforts may improve efficiency where the modern slavery-environment nexus occurs; such suggestions have previously been made for the forestry sector.⁷

Mitigation

The transition to “clean power generation” (Article 36) calls for a “just transition” away from fossil fuels. However, there is nothing included in this article that points towards a socially “just transition”. One of the key risks associated with green technologies – in particular, those that rely on battery technologies for storage capacity – also contain risks along their supply chains. Labour exploitation has been noted in the natural extraction of materials such as cobalt,⁸ and there have been reports linking the production of solar panels for example to forced labour.⁹ It needs to be made explicitly clear that a “just transition” should include workers and local communities who have been adversely impacted by the presence of illegal resource extraction operations, and the global demand for resources.

Whilst there is a singular mention of “methane” (Article 37) in the Pact, there are no explicit references to sectors that have been connected to modern slavery, nor effect climate change. This is a huge oversight. Without acknowledgement that sectors such as agriculture, are linked to issues such as deforestation, emissions, and labour exploitation, the ability to implement climate mitigation actions are limited.

Finance, technology transfer and capacity building for mitigation and adaptation

The increased risk of indebtedness is acknowledged, but only on a country-scale; and it has additionally be linked with the financial impact of Covid-19 (Article 41). What is missing is an understanding that there is also a link between modern slavery and climate change, which can lead to increased

financial vulnerabilities. Economic and climate shocks combine to create a system that can push individuals into situations where they may become more vulnerable to modern slavery conditions. Rather than focusing solely on countrywide issues, support for communities should be a key focus of capacity building in nations.

Loss and Damage

This section is perhaps one of the more encouraging within the Glasgow Climate Pact. For example, Article 61 acknowledges that slow onset events and acute climate shocks lead to adverse social, economic and environmental threats. This is a gap that has previously been noted in modern slavery-climate nexus research¹⁰ and therefore the inclusion of such considerations in a wider context are welcomed and can be adapted to the antislavery sector.

Further, local community involvement (Article 62) in averting, minimizing and addressing the impacts of climate change is a positive inclusion. This encompasses groups working toward tackling intersectional issues such as those noted in the nexus. Being led by such local expertise is important and previously centring survivor voices have been called upon those antislavery groups working on the nexus.

Implementation

This is the only section that explicitly mentions “the creation of decent work and quality jobs” (Article 85), an oversight of the Pact. Temperature rises mean that heat stress is an increasing risk faced by workers in many sectors – for example, agriculture.¹¹ Further, climate shocks such as floods are likely to cause shifts in occupations, which have not yet been considered. Putting in place plans for future decent work would minimise some of the risks faced by individuals a result of the nexus.

Collaboration

As noted in Article 87, collaboration across all sectors of society are necessary to combat climate change. Such considerations have also been accepted when addressing the nexus. A more cooperative approach is necessary that draws together actors from across the antislavery and environmental sectors,¹¹ and being led by survivors and local community leader expertise in order to address the nexus.

⁵ Polack, E. (2010). Child rights and climate change adaptation: Voices from Kenya and Cambodia. *Children in a Changing Climate*; North, A. (2015). Drought, drop out and early marriage: feeling the effects of climate change in East Africa. *Equals*.

⁶ Cockayne, J. (2021). *Developing Freedom: The Sustainable Development Case for Ending Modern Slavery, Forced Labour and Human Trafficking*. UNU-CPR, New York.

⁷ Jackson *et al.* (2020). *Addressing modern slavery through climate change mitigation*. Rights Lab, University of Nottingham.

⁸ Brown *et al.* (2020). Investigating the potential of radar interferometry for monitoring rural artisanal cobalt mines in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. *Sustainability*, 12, 9834.

⁹ Cockayne *et al.* (2020). *Solar energy, modern slavery and the just transition*. British Academy Award, University of Nottingham.

¹⁰ Decker Sparks *et al.* (2021). Growing evidence of the interconnections between modern slavery, environmental degradation, and climate change. *One Earth*, 4(2), 181-191.

¹¹ Jackson *et al.* (2021). *Modern slavery, environmental degradation and climate change: present and future pathways for addressing the nexus*. Rights Lab, University of Nottingham.