**Forum:** Environment Commission

**Issue:** Examining the role of MEDCs in addressing climate justice

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Introduction

To this day, our world has experienced numerous environmental catastrophes, including global warming and climate change. It is essential to recognize that ecological disasters are detrimental to our society. Climate change, the main controversial complication we face nowadays, has presented different negative impacts on our globe. The 21st century has been the warmest on record. Since the 1980s, each decade has been warmer than the previous one. According to NOAA's 2021 Annual Climate Report, the temperature has increased at an average of 0.14 Fahrenheit per decade since 1880. The increase in global surface temperature led to an increase in the frequency of numerous complications, including individuals getting heat-related illnesses and climate changes, including wildfire, drought, and storms.

It is essential to act immediately on the main contributors or causes of climate change to prevent these brutal consequences from happening again. United Nations (UN) recognized the shared responsibility for climate change, but the responsibility skewed more toward the More Economically Developed Countries (MEDCs) to cut greenhouse gas emissions. As developed nations explore and utilize energy in their industrial activities, without a doubt, they emit the most carbon dioxide, leading to climate change. However, it should be considered that MEDCs also positively contribute the most to climate justice. As these countries possess more mature and stable economies, they can make significant changes to climate justice. Unlike Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs), MEDCs have approached broader and more extensive solutions to climate justice. In the United Nations Seventy-seventh Session of the General Assembly Second Committee, Bangladesh’s representative once stated that “We must overcome the vicious cycle where developed countries make commitments and break those in the subsequent period” (United Nations). The role of MEDC in climate change is detrimental but also essential. MEDCs could ensure a sustainable and resilient energy transition, including through climate finance and technology transfer and other essential methods to approach climate justice.

Definition of Key Terms

**MEDCs**

MEDCs stand for more economically developed countries. These countries have a high life expectancy, access to essential amenities, access to education, and high disposable income.

**LEDCs**

LEDCs stand for less economically developed countries. They have low incomes; the citizens have little access to health care and educational systems.

**Greenhouse Gas (GHG)/ Carbon Dioxide**

Gases that trap heat in the atmosphere have an influence on the earth’s energy balance, a major cause of global warming.

**Fossil Fuels**

Found in the Earth's crust and containing carbon and hydrogen, fossil fuels can be burned for energy. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has found that emissions from fossil fuels are the dominant cause of global warming. In 2018, 89% of global CO2 emissions came from fossil fuels and industry.

**Carbon Tax**

The government of the member states sets a price that CO2 emitters must pay for each ton of greenhouse gas emissions they emit. Carbon Tax can be an efficient method to alleviate greenhouse emissions.

**Carbon Credit**

A permit allowing a country or organization to emit a certain amount of carbon emissions, which can be traded if the full allowance is not used.

**Geoengineering**

The deliberate large-scale in the Earth’s natural system to alleviate and counteract climate change.

Background

Though over half of carbon emissions come from MEDCs, LEDCs continue to be more vulnerable to climate issues and suffer disproportional effects. Climate justice aims to recognize these differences in how LEDCs and MEDCs are impacted by climate change and reduce the inequitable social conditions it brings. That said, the role of MEDCs in addressing climate justice should be further examined, as support from MEDCs could be provided as a step closer to achieving climate justice.

**Climate justice; past and future**

Since pre-industrial times, global temperature has risen 1.1 degrees Celsius, largely due to the fact that carbon emissions have risen a staggering 90% since the 1970s. In addition, since 1880 temperatures have increased by 0.08 degrees Celsius per decade. The need for climate justice has been a pressing issue for centuries, though it was not until the past few decades that there have been solid actions to support it. Though the terms climate justice and environmental justice are often used interchangeably, they are not the same. According to The Solutions Project, the climate justice movement was born from the environmental justice movement, as environmental justice focuses on social justice through sustainability, whereas climate justice promotes solutions for people and countries affected by the urgent climate crisis. One of the first calls to climate justice action can be dated back to the early 1980s in the US when African Americans protested the dumping of garbage and even toxic waste in their communities. It was not until 2000 that a large-scale climate justice event was held. The first world Climate Justice Summit was held at The Hauge in 2000, coinciding with the Sixth of the Parties (COP6) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCC). The attendees at this Climate Justice Summit consisted of activists who believed the COP6 was the “wrong ideas being discussed by the wrong people”. It was believed that there were not enough voices from LEDC citizens present at the conference and that it should not be only MEDC’s opinions being considered. Actions following this summit were heavily publicized, which brought attention to the severity of climate injustice, and forced the UNFCC to reevaluate its approach to mitigating this issue. The perspective of approaches to this issue also shifted from not only mitigating our climate issues but also adapting to them. As a result of climate change, it is predicted that natural disasters will increase in frequency and severity which can displace more people. Furthermore, climate change is expected to decline food and water supplies, as it will become harder to grow to produce in fluctuating climates. Support from MEDCs is vital to the progressions in climate justice, however in the past, LEDC citizens were not accounted for in the movement. Therefore, it should be noted that MEDCs have the essential tools needed to combat this issue, and it is necessary for LEDCs to have a voice in the process to ensure that the solutions being implemented are the most effective.

**Climate justice issues and disproportional effects**

There are various climate justice issues impacting LEDCs, and the effects are further worsened by climate change. It is evident that LEDCs are disproportionally affected by environmental issues compared to MEDCs. These issues not only cause various problems instability, public health, and social economic issues but also threaten the future development of LEDCs. Seeing as it takes longer for economies to recover from post-natural disasters, economic instability from climate change can deeper plunge LEDCs into poverty. This causes millions of dollars of damage to property and debt, large sums of money that LEDCs either cannot afford to pay off or must do so over an extended period of time.

***Natural disasters***

Most LEDCs are located in geographically high-risk zones and are prone to natural disasters. In many incidents, LEDCs have suffered disproportional effects from climate change compared to MEDCs. This is because overall MEDCs have more resources to prepare for and prevent natural disasters. For example, LEDCs have limited access to advanced technologies such as complex monitoring devices that can alert citizens before predicted natural disasters, ensuring quicker response times and lessened impacts. Furthermore, most common infrastructures in LEDCs are unable to withstand natural disasters, which puts citizens at risk and more vulnerable. One instance of this was in 2010: a magnitude 7.2 earthquake that hit Haiti caused 1.5 million citizens to become homeless and it devastated the country for over a decade. On the other hand, in 2011 Japan was hit by a magnitude 9 earthquake, which caused 450,000 and 5 years in recovery, in which both statistics were lower than Haiti despite the earthquake being more severe. This is a direct example of how LEDCs are more vulnerable to climate change than MEDCs.

***Sanitation***

Another issue that LEDCs face regarding climate justice is sanitation and health. According to Water Aid, inadequate Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) are leading causes of poverty in LEDCs. This is because these issues cause high mortality rates, with around 1,800 child deaths per day. It is recognized that adequate WASH is an integral element of future and economic development, but it is something many LEDCs still do not have access to. For example, in Nigeria, open defecation is common in rural areas where citizens do not have access to toilets, not only could this cause diseases and health issues, but it can also introduce toxins and bacteria into the environment. Therefore, LEDCs require support in improving this issue in WASH.

Major Parties Involved

**Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)**

The OECD is an international organization that works with governments of 37 democracies with market-based economies to improve the standard of living. The majority of 37 democracies are considered developed countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, South Korea, etc. Targeting climate actions, OECD “supports and helps drive higher levels of ambition and tangible outcomes – on mitigation, adaptation and resilience, and financing – that better align with the collective goals of the Paris Agreement” (OECD).

**The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)**

The IPCC is the United Nations body, established in 1988 to provide policymakers with scientific assessments about the topic of climate change and options for adaptation and mitigation. The IPCC targets governments at all levels, no matter MEDCs or LEDCs, with information on climate change.

**United Nations Environment Program (UNEP)**

UNEP is the leading authority in the United Nations system that strengthens environmental standards. “UNEP works on delivering transformational change for people and nature by drilling down on the root causes of the three planetary crises of climate change, nature and biodiversity loss, and pollution and waste” (UNEP).

**LEDCs**

Less economically developed countries are severely impacted by climate change. “According to the World Bank, more than 140 million economically disadvantaged people […] will be forced to migrate internally due to climate change impacts including water shortages, decreasing agricultural productivity, and rising sea levels by 2050” (Brookings). Top LEDCs impacted by climate change include Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Chad, Haiti, Kenya, Malawi, Niger, Pakistan, Somalia, South Sudan, etc. It is essential to resolve climate change in both MEDCs and LEDCs. Without support from MEDCs, the situation caused by climate changes in LEDCs would be aggravated.

**People’s Republic of China:**

Measured in millions of tons of carbon dioxide in 2019, the People's Republic of China was the leading carbon dioxide emitter, with more than 10,065 million tons of carbon dioxide released. With China's tremendous urbanization expansion, China's infrastructure growth produced significant amounts of carbon dioxide. Though China has negatively impacted climate change, "Out of the unprecedented $755 billion spent globally in 2021 on low-carbon technologies (including both public and private investment), China accounted for $266 billion, or 35 percent" (greenbiz).

**United States**

 The United States is the second leading carbon dioxide emitter, with more than 5,416 million tons of carbon dioxide emitted. The largest source of greenhouse gas emissions from human activities in the United States is burning fossil fuels for electricity, heat, and transportation. However, the United States made significant contributions to climate change as one of the most developed countries. “The Inflation Reduction Act, signed by President Joe Biden on Aug. 16, provides over $300 billion in incentives to support clean energy, electric vehicles, and other green technologies” (greenbiz).

Timeline of Events

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| --- | --- |
| Date | Description of event |
| **1958** | Dr. Charles David Keeling provides evidence that increased use of fossil fuel causes an increase in C02 in the atmosphere |
| **September 30th, 1961** | The OCED is founded for the purpose of creating sustainable economic growth  |
| **October 21st, 1991** | The First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit is held in Washing D.C |
| **June 1992** | The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is adopted at the UN conference on the Environment and Development (UNCED)  |
| **November 2000** |  The first climate justice summit is held at the Hauge, around the same time as COP6 on the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change  |
| **2015** | In 2015, the global temperature was 1.33 degrees Celsius above the 20th-century average, which becomes the largest increase in annual global temperatures  |
|  **November 2015** | COP21 is held in Paris, producing The Paris Agreement  |
|  **November 2022** | COP26 is held in Glasgow, resulting in the signing of the Glasgow Climate Pact  |

Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

The previous attempts to resolve this issue listed below are approaches to mitigate climate issues in general, yet include some ways that climate justice will be included as well.

***UNFCCC***

 The UNFCCC is an environmental treaty aimed to combat climate issues by stabilizing greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere. Over the years, the approaches to the UNFCCC have evolved, and in ways such as directing funds on climate change activities in LEDCs. Furthermore, this convention places more responsibility on MEDCs, seeing as they are the largest producers of greenhouse gases. MEDC climate change measures and policies are also monitored to ensure they are making efforts to reduce emissions. Each year there is a Conference of the Parties to review the terms of the UNFCCC. Although the UNFCCC has been successful in drawing attention to pressing climate issues, overall, this treaty is thought to be a failure. This is because the treaty’s main purpose is to track and evaluate information regarding carbon emissions, yet is not focused on a specific plan as to how these emission numbers can be lowered.

***Paris Agreement***

 The Paris Agreement was a result of COP21, with the goal of limiting global warming to around 1.5 or 2 degrees Celsius compared to pre-industrial levels. This agreement aimed to do so by having a 5-year cycle of climate action plans to be carried out by countries, which are known as nationally determined contributions (NDCs). Although the Paris Agreement had a feasible approach to combat this issue, the US, one of the largest contributors to global warming, later withdrew from the agreement after signing it. The Paris Agreement has seen significant results, such as lowered global temperatures, however, certain countries withdrawing from the agreement as well as not following their submitted action plans is a major setback. Therefore, the Paris Agreement has been useful, though it requires better cooperation from MEDCs.

***Glasgow climate pact***

As a result of COP26, the Glasgow Climate Pact was signed by almost 200 nations. Their goals were similar to The Paris Agreement, in this case, the US as well as China, both of which are major carbon emitters, signed this pact. One considerable issue that is still present in this climate pact is accountability. Countries that pledge to reduce emissions, and fail to do so, are not met with many consequences. As main contributors to rising global temperature, MEDC’s role in addressing climate issues, and in turn, climate justice, must be greatly enforced. It is essential that MEDCs are cooperating with such agreements or pacts as stated before, as they have the technology and resources necessary to do so, as well as give their support to LEDCs.

* E/RES/2021/19
* E/RES/2022/19

Possible Solutions

Though LEDCs are, to some extent, contributors to climate justice, one thing to keep in mind is that the question of examining the role of MEDCs in addressing climate justice explicitly targets MEDCs. This demonstrates that the resolution should mainly focus on utilizing the economic benefit possessed by MEDCs.

To MEDCs, economic investment is not a complication. Hence, one of the solutions for climate justice can be an investment in scientific areas, including geoengineering. Possible geoengineering investments would be solar radiation management and carbon dioxide reduction technologies. In climate change, the greenhouse effect increases the amount of sunlight the Earth absorbs, essentially increasing the temperature of the Earth. Solar geoengineering releases tiny atmospheric particles called sulfates aerosols to reflect away sunlight. Harvard compliments that “The main advantages of this method are speed, reversibility, and relative cost-effectiveness, as it is estimated to cost $2.5 billion per year” (Harvard). Moreover, the technique of direct carbon dioxide capture can also be invested. As one of the main causes of climate change is the release of greenhouse gas, the development of technologies to extract greenhouse gases from the atmosphere and store them would be effective. Harvard states that “Carbon capture methods have facilitated the growth of a market for carbon trading” (Harvard). Furthermore, member states can encourage MEDCs to invest in renewable energy, which would replace fossil fuels. Unlike fossil fuels, renewable energy produces no greenhouse gases. To LEDCs, lack of access to sustainable finance makes the costly upfront investments in renewable energy unaffordable. However, to MEDCs, with no concern for an unstable economy, investment in renewable energy can be effective. As an additional note, delegates can consider using organizations, including IPCC, to provide scientific research about these investments that would be helpful in the investment in techniques from MEDCs.

Additionally, Carbon trade allows for the sale of the right to emit CO2, resulting in decarbonization. The trades work by establishing a cap –limit– on the number of carbon emissions. Working with the Carbon tax, Carbon trading aims to put a price on CO2 following the principle of caps and trade. In the Carbon trade, greenhouse gas emitters must submit allowances equal to their emissions. Carbon trade has essential advantages, including “biodiversity protection, pollution prevention, [and] public-health improvements” (McKinsey).

In addition, another possible approach involves making sanctions on countries that create a burden of more than a certain amount of carbon emission. As MEDCs are major carbon emitters, negatively contributing the most to climate change, a certain restriction is required. Similar to the Carbon tax, organizations, including the United Nations, can make sanctions or punishments to major carbon emitter countries. This would effectively force MEDCs to limit their carbon emission as they would not want any negative consequences for their country.

In brief conclusion, delegates must use relevant sources and methods to derive solutions that effectively target the question of examining the role of MEDCs in addressing climate justice. The delegate must keep in mind that MEDCs are the major carbon emitters and also the major economic contributors to solving climate change. The solutions should be feasible, reasonable, and detailed.

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