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# The Quest for Cosmopolitan Justice in the Energy Transition in Caribbean Small Island Developing States

*Alicia Phillips*

**Abstract** The challenges we face now with climate change are universal and are inextricably linked to the call for cosmopolitan justice in the energy transition to renewables. The theory of cosmopolitan justice is based on the outlook that we are all citizens of the world and our moral obligations do not just halt at our borders but extend beyond. As oil-dependent Caribbean Small Island Developing States (SIDS) attempt to make the change to renewables they grapple with their umbilical dependence on the oil and gas economy. In some, it has been their sole source of revenue to fund national development and economic independence. In others, newfound discoveries of oil have occurred just as the world is weaning itself from fossil fuels, providing them with the economic-climate justice dilemma. This concept of cosmopolitan justice is therefore a two-edged sword for Caribbean SIDS. On one end, it serves as a

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benefit as their climate change vulnerabilities are now starkly recognised with funding being channelled into mitigation, adaptation and as we look towards COP28, loss and damage funding. In contrast, net zero emission targets and the shift to renewables prove difficult due to the sole economic dependence placed on this industry. The careful balance of abiding by their international commitments to reduce emissions and incorporating renewables into their economies is at the heart of the new social contract which is also based on future accountability.

**Keywords** Energy justice · Cosmopolitan justice · Energy transition · Caribbean small island developing states · Climate change

## 21.1 INTRODUCTION

It is no secret that Caribbean SIDS (‘SIDS’) are experiencing the realities of climate change based on their location, geographical nature, limited economic base and dependency on natural resources.<sup>1</sup> They have contributed least to the problem but this does not negate their need to commit to global decarbonisation and the shift towards renewables. When the energy justice lens is applied to the energy transition, it compliments “... society’s aim to achieve its environmental and climate change goals”.<sup>2</sup> While the various forms of energy justice are present as oil-dependent SIDS make the shift to renewable energy (‘RE’), the focus of this chapter will be to apply the lens of cosmopolitan justice. This form of justice suggests that we have a wider responsibility to ensure the well-being of not just ourselves but everyone else.

My focus on this form of justice was chosen particularly since humanity was urged to cooperate or perish<sup>3</sup> in November 2022 and again in March

<sup>1</sup> United Nations Conference on Trade and Development-Climate Change Impacts on Coastal Transport Infrastructure in the Caribbean: Enhancing the adaptive capacity of Small Island Developing States (SIDS): Jamaica: A case study. 2018. Available at: [https://www.preventionweb.net/files/77843\\_enhancingtheadaptivecapacityofsmall.pdf](https://www.preventionweb.net/files/77843_enhancingtheadaptivecapacityofsmall.pdf). Accessed on: 14 May 2023.

<sup>2</sup> Heffron, R. 2022. Applying energy justice into the energy transition. *Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews*, 156.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations-Climate and Environment. 7 November 2022. Cooperate or perish: At COP27 UN chief calls for Climate Solidarity Pact, urges tax on oil companies

2023<sup>4</sup> when a climate change time bomb was declared by the UN. Section Two examines the historical economic challenge of dependency SIDS have towards the oil and gas industry and the progress some SIDS have made thus far in making the change to renewables. In Section Three, by highlighting the need for cosmopolitan justice in these societies, if they are to collectively strengthen their capacity towards the transition as well as a brief mention of the key policies they have in place. Finally, in my conclusion, I note that though SIDS are making climate change efforts as their commitment to cosmopolitan justice, more can be done swiftly at the policy level to introduce renewables, especially in light of the obvious climate change catastrophes they face.

## 21.2 THE CHALLENGE IN THE SHIFT TOWARDS RENEWABLE ENERGY

Is it a blessing to be oil rich or a curse? This is now the quandary some SIDS face as they must now balance equity and justice with economic well-being while developing their natural resources amidst the push to switch to renewables.<sup>5</sup> For instance, the historical economic reliance on the oil and gas industry is deeply rooted in the development of Trinidad and Tobago (T&T), a country which has been involved in the petroleum sector for over 100 years. As one of the largest oil and natural gas producers in the Caribbean, the energy sector accounts for around 34.9% of the country's GDP and contributes significantly to Government's revenue.<sup>6</sup>

to finance loss and damage. Available at: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/11/1130247>. Accessed on: 8 May 2023.

<sup>4</sup> United Nations-Press Release. 20 March 2023. Secretary-General calls on States to tackle Climate change 'Time Bomb' through New Solidarity Pact, Acceleration Agenda, at launch of Intergovernmental Panel Report. Available at: <https://press.un.org/en/2023/sgsm21730.doc.htm>. Accessed on: 8 May 2023.

<sup>5</sup> The Guyana Chronicle. Caribbean leaders highlight continued role for oil and gas in regional economies. 27 February 2022. Available at: <https://guyanachronicle.com/2022/02/27/caribbean-leaders-highlight-continued-role-for-oil-and-gas-in-regional-economics/>. Accessed on: 14 May 2023.

<sup>6</sup> The Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago-The Ministry of Energy & Energy Industries-Oil and Gas industry. Available at: <https://www.energy.gov.tt/our-business/oil-and-gas-industry/> Accessed on: 14 May 2023.

Hence, while Trinidad and Tobago is a signatory to the Paris Agreement, and is committed to a 15% reduction of emissions by 2030 whereby they have started some RE projects,<sup>7</sup> concerns still exist that they continue to be umbilically attached to the oil and gas sector.<sup>8</sup> Further, in contrast to Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana and Suriname (G&S) have emerged as potential new oil powers with lucrative recent discoveries<sup>9</sup> just when the world is trying to shift away from fossil fuels. To manage this dilemma as a tool to economic development, G&S both possess relatively untouched forests which they intend to use for carbon credits and carbon sinks.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> BP Trinidad and Tobago. bp and Shell break ground on Solar plant. 12 April 2023. Available at: [https://www.bp.com/en\\_tt/trinidad-and-tobago/home/news/press-releases/solar-brechin-castle-sod.html](https://www.bp.com/en_tt/trinidad-and-tobago/home/news/press-releases/solar-brechin-castle-sod.html) Accessed on: 14 May 2023. | Williams, C. The Trinidad Express. 'PTSC to buy 240 electric buses.' 4 April 2023. Available at: [https://trinidadexpress.com/business/local/ptsc-to-buy-240-electric-buses/article\\_0a0a6e58-d349-11ed-b45a-0b0458abe1db.html](https://trinidadexpress.com/business/local/ptsc-to-buy-240-electric-buses/article_0a0a6e58-d349-11ed-b45a-0b0458abe1db.html). Accessed on: 14 May 2023.

<sup>8</sup> Doodnath, A. Loop TT News. Young: 'don't listen to old talk on stopping oil and gas in T&T.' 23 November 2022. Available at: <https://tt.loopnews.com/content/young-dont-listen-old-talk-stopping-tt-oil-and-gas>. Accessed on: 14 May 2023. | Spetalnick, M. Reuters. 'Exclusive: U.S. issues license to Trinidad and Tobago to develop Venezuela offshore gas field.' 25 January 2023. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/us-grants-license-trinidad-tobago-develop-venezuela-offshore-gas-field-2023-01-24/#:~:text=WASHINGTON%2FPORT%20OF%20SPAIN%2C%20Jan,of%20some%20sanctions%20on%20Venezuela>. Accessed on: 14 May 2023.

<sup>9</sup> France 24. 'Black gold' for Guyana and Suriname, a blessing or curse? 17 October 2022. Available at: <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20221017-black-gold-for-guyana-and-suriname-a-blessing-or-curse> Accessed on: 14 May 2023.

<sup>10</sup> Loonely, R. World Politics Review. 'Guyana and Suriname Might be able to balance oil revenues and climate goals.' 19 January 2022. Available at: <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/to-develop-oil-guyana-and-suriname-could-set-back-climate-goals/?one-time-read-code=54604168407718776676>. Accessed on: 14 May 2023.

### 21.3 THE IMPORTANCE AND THE ROLE OF COSMOPOLITAN JUSTICE AND THE POLICIES OF SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES

At the very crux of cosmopolitan justice is that “... our duties to others do not cease at borders”.<sup>11</sup> A view epitomised by the Chair of a Special Meeting of the Council for Trade and Economic Development (COTED) on Energy,<sup>12</sup> urging that the attainment of these (RE) milestones can only happen if we are resilient collectively, not separately. Of course, the same concept applies to net zero emission target commitments at the global stage which can be found in their Nationally Determined Contributions.<sup>13</sup> Further, despite the slow distribution of climate finance aid, SIDS stamped their commitment, through agreements<sup>14</sup> and the creation of centres to name a few.<sup>15</sup> In essence these are linked to the concepts of applying energy justice through a new social contract and future proofing. At the heart of these three concepts are delivering just outcomes through improved accountability,<sup>16</sup> especially for possible future effects.

<sup>11</sup> Doğan, A. *Cosmopolitan principles of distributive justice* 2010. Available at: <https://hrcak.srce.hr/file/91381>. Accessed on: 15 May 2023.

<sup>12</sup> CARICOM Today. 25 April 2023. CARICOM SIDS must further intensify drive towards energy security. Available at: <https://today.caricom.org/2023/04/20/caricom-sids-must-further-intensify-drive-towards-energy-security-coted-chair/>. Accessed on: 15 May 2023.

<sup>13</sup> United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change-Nationally Determined Contributions Registry. Available at: <https://unfccc.int/NDCREG>. Accessed on: 15 May 2023.

<sup>14</sup> Dominica News Online. 27 April 2023. ‘Dominica signs Framework Agreement for Caribbean’s first industrial scale green hydrogen geothermal development’. Available at: <https://dominicanewsonline.com/news/governance/dominica-signs-framework-agreement-for-caribbeans-first-industrial-scale-green-hydrogen-geothermal-development/>. Accessed on: 15 May 2023.

<sup>15</sup> Caribbean Centre for Renewable Energy & Energy Efficiency-History of the CCREEE. Available at: <https://www.ccreee.org/about-us/>. Accessed on: 15 May 2023.

<sup>16</sup> Heffron, Raphael & De Fontenelle, Louis. (2023) Implementing energy justice through a new social contract, *Journal of Energy & Natural Resources Law*, Vol 41, No 2, 141–155.

## 21.4 CONCLUSION AND THE WAY FORWARD

While SIDS have contributed to climate change efforts by attempting to meet their obligations under the UNFCCC, arguably, more can be done swiftly at the policy level while balancing energy security through the full commitment and introduction of renewables. Furthermore, SIDS are indeed aptly placed to theoretically shift to or incorporate a complete renewable energy mix, whether it be solar, water or wind given their geographical location, but these are currently underexploited. Overall, there continues to be a dependency on a diminishing resource for so much of economic growth and livelihood which beckons a change in focus, especially when the future of these countries is at stake from this reliance.

Now, in essence, while the issues facing SIDS around the world are global challenges and deemed ‘our collective responsibility’,<sup>17</sup> the acceptance of this collective responsibility is also needed at the national levels of SIDS, as part of this push to cosmopolitan justice. This collective responsibility indeed heralds all SIDS doing their part as SIDS, and not just placing dependence on developed nations solely to do theirs. Cosmopolitan energy justice accountability is indeed needed, even at the SIDS level. While the establishment of the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre in 2002,<sup>18</sup> the Caribbean Centre for Renewable

<sup>17</sup> Pasifika Environews. ‘Its our collective responsibility’-Pacific Researchers urge world leaders to help the islands fight climate change. 8 March 2022. Available at: <https://pasifika.news/2022/03/its-our-collective-responsibility-pacific-researchers-urge-world-leaders-to-help-the-islands-fight-climate-change/>. Accessed on: 29 May 2023.

<sup>18</sup> CARICOM Caribbean Community: Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre. Available at: <https://caricom.org/institutions/caribbean-community-climate-change-centre-ccccc/>. Accessed on: 30 May 2023.

Energy and Energy Efficiency (CCREE)<sup>19</sup> in 2018 and the Commonwealth Sustainable Energy Transition Agenda in 2009,<sup>20</sup> epitomise or manifest the functioning and push of cosmopolitan justice in SIDS, many appear divided on the commitment.

It appears that the full commitment to renewable energy is still being balanced with the need for fossil fuel to be used in adaptation and mitigation efforts.<sup>21</sup> Sadly, among Caribbean SIDS, the general consensus is that Caribbean countries should be allowed to produce these resources because they have long practised environmental stewardship,<sup>22</sup> in comparison with developed nations. Energy policies change societies and this fundamentally should be based on a cosmopolitan energy justice perspective of collective responsibility and accountability even at the SIDS level. The hope remains, that this global perspective will be captured or infused with collective accountability soon in SIDS.

<sup>19</sup> Caribbean Centre for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency. Available at: <https://www.ccreee.org/about-us/objectives-and-mandate/>. Accessed on: 30 May 2023.

<sup>20</sup> The Commonwealth- Commonwealth Sustainable Energy Transition Agenda. Available at: <https://thecommonwealth.org/our-work/commonwealth-sustainable-energy-transition-agenda>. Accessed on: 30 May 2023.

<sup>21</sup> Sobers, L. 'Transforming Guyana Episode X: Unlocking the potential of Guyana's Oil and Gas Economy'. Caribbean Policy Consortium. 6 March 2023. Available at: <https://cpccaribbean.org/transforming-guyana-episode-x-unlocking-the-potential-of-guyanas-oil-and-gas-economy/>. Accessed on: 31 May 2023.

<sup>22</sup> Ragoobeer, V. 'The Caribbean supporting regional oil production?' The Guyana Chronicle. 10 July 2022. Available at: <https://guyanachronicle.com/2022/07/10/the-caribbean-supporting-regional-oil-production/>. Accessed on: 31 May 2023.



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