

Lessons learnt: COVID-19 and the climate crisis in South Africa

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TIPS FORUM 2021

RECONSTRUCTION AND RECOVERY: RETHINKING INCLUSIVE INDUSTRIALISATION IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19

Institute for Economic Justice (IEJ)

- Aims to provide rigorous economic analysis to address poverty, under-development and inequality
- Designed to equip policy-makers, progressive social forces and the public with policy alternatives
- Conduct work on feminist economics, macro and budgetary policy, climate justice and workers' rights and social security

This paper arises out of climate justice work and contains some initial thoughts on COVID-19 and climate change – we welcome any feedback.

Introduction



- COVID-19 is an unprecedented shock
- The health crisis has tested the resilience, fairness, and relevance of our current economic systems
- Questions arising of what will be retained in a return to 'normality'

AIM OF THIS PAPER:

Examine the lessons learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic that can be applied to the climate crisis in the South African context

COVID-19 & Climate Change

Similarities

- Global in nature
- Experience time lags between onset and worst effects
- Rely on scientific guidance
- Exacerbate existing inequalities

AND, climate change increases likelihood of pandemics

Differences

- Different policies required to address
- Different timescales
- Relationship between individual actions and positive outcomes
- Varies in impact between countries

LESSON 1: Adequate and accessible social protection is required to protect the most vulnerable

- Right to social security and an adequate standard of living
- Social grants proved essential but inadequate
 - Ended prematurely
 - Too little (less than the food poverty line)
 - Women insufficiently covered
- Worsened by ongoing austerity affecting service provision
- Climate change also affects the most vulnerable the worst
- Social protection an essential component of resilience
- Necessity of a UBIG



LESSON 2: Care work must be appropriately valued

- Attending to the “physical, psychological, emotional and developmental needs of one or more other people” (European Institute For Gender Equality, 2021)
- Currently in a crisis of care – borne mostly by women
- Crises, including climate change, increase care requirements
- Requires policies which value care appropriately, and recognise it as low-carbon work:
 - Improved pay
 - Public investment
 - Legislation to redistribute unpaid care in the household



LESSON 3: A capable, trustworthy and strong state is essential

- COVID-19 has re-emphasised the role of the state
- The most successful responses to COVID have seen:
 - Early action
 - Decisive, communicative and responsive leadership
 - National research, innovation and manufacturing capacity
 - Extensive social relief and support
- An expansion of these principles must be applied to the climate crisis
- This requires a shift away from neoliberalism

LESSON 4: Localisation of industrial processes is required to build resilient economies

- MEC has stunted industrialisation in SA
- This has reduced diversification, particularly in manufacturing
- SA is vulnerable to global supply chain disruptions e.g. medical equipment during COVID—19
- Increasing localisation can help increase resilience
- Similarly applies to renewable energy technologies
- Essential for job creation



LESSON 5: International cooperation is vital to success

- Both are global problems, whose spread is assisted by globalisation
- International responses have largely failed
 - Paris Agreement has not reduced GHG emissions
 - Principle of common but differentiated responsibility has not been applied in practice
 - Vaccine nationalism and IP rules have allowed for inadequate supply and distribution
- Therefore, need to demand climate, social and economic justice internationally

LESSON 6: Crises worsen inequality, especially gender inequalities

- Women, children, Black people, informal workers and low-income workers hardest hit by the pandemic
- These groups have experienced: systemic racism and oppression, workplace insecurity and casualisation, low wages and wage growth and little scope for social mobility
- Highest income groups and wealthiest have experienced little impact – increasing inequality
- Likely to be similar with climate change
- Requires a just response to address: procedural, restorative and distributive justice

Conclusion

- Climate change will continue to worsen poverty and inequality in South Africa
- This is fundamentally an injustice – hence, the importance of a **just** transition
- This approach embeds this understanding into a coordinated and holistic, economy-wide response that directly addresses some of these underlying problems
- Without it, we will be left as unprepared and ill-equipped as we were for the pandemic



Thoughts for further development...

- Expand on a theory and role of the state, particularly in reference to the South African state
- Integrate an understanding of society-nature relations, and their relationship to crises

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