



# CLIMATE CHANGE INEQUALITY IN THE COMMONWEALTH:

How the UK, Canada and Australia are  
endangering Africa

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# INTRODUCTION

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Within the purview of global governance, there are many distinct membership formations and clubs of all type and characterisation. Some of the notable ones include G7, G20, G77, OECD, NATO, and the Commonwealth, among others.

The Commonwealth of Nations is a group of 54 countries that are nearly all former colonies of the British Empire with a Secretariat within its institutional arrangements and has the Queen as the figure head. Within the realm of climate diplomacy, the global footprint of the Commonwealth becomes an essential building block in delivering solutions to some of the most pressing global sustainable development challenges of our time. The leaders the UK, Australia and Canada are very quick to laud the merits of the Commonwealth, describing it as a family of allies, with shared values and close ties. An alliance where members look out for each other.

And yet, when it comes to climate change, the biggest long-term threat to the prosperity of the majority of Commonwealth citizens, these warm words ring hollow. There is a chasm between the emissions of the wealthy, global North members and Commonwealth countries from the global South that are the most affected by the impacts of climate change.

There is also a chasm between the warm words of solidarity the likes of Boris Johnson, Scott Morrison and Justin Trudeau have said for their Commonwealth partners and their actions to reduce emissions. In this report, we examine how their massive post-Covid economic recovery plans are pumping billions of dollars into dirty fossil fuel industries, effectively rebooting some of the richest economies on the backs of Commonwealth citizens in climate vulnerable countries.



The effects of climate change are destroying lives and livelihoods, especially in Africa. Climate change is causing unprecedented misery across the Commonwealth. In the 2019 Climate Risk Index, which ranks countries that are most affected by extreme weather over a 12-month period, 6 of the top 10 nations, were in the Commonwealth: India, Sri Lanka, Kenya, Rwanda, Canada and Fiji. In the accompanying 20-year study covering 1999 to 2018, a further three Commonwealth countries were in the top 10: Pakistan, Bangladesh and Dominica.

Whether it is droughts and desertification in Sub-Saharan Africa, the prolonged and acute shortage of water in Cape Town, floodwaters in Bangladesh and India or rising sea levels threatening the future of the Pacific Islands, more than ever, it's now clear that the Commonwealth's poorest citizens are already bearing the brunt of climate change. The compelling question is, what can we do about it?

Regrettably, it is the disproportionate climate pollution from their Commonwealth 'allies' who are in large part responsible for driving this climate catastrophe. The UK, host of next year's crucial COP26 climate summit emits more carbon dioxide per person than 18 Commonwealth countries combined. Canada emits more carbon dioxide than 27 Commonwealth nations and topping the list is Australia, where the average Australian emits more than the combined CO<sup>2</sup> output of the average person in 28 Commonwealth countries.

It should become imperative for the Commonwealth leadership to urgently address this glaring climate change inequality among its members to safeguard inclusive prosperity and sustainable development for all. And now we have an opportunity within which national leaders can address this through their Covid-19 economic stimulus packages, which need to be deployed to accelerate the transition to a low carbon society. It should not be used to prop up the fossil fuel industry, subsequently exacerbating the climate crisis and storing up devastating consequences for all Commonwealth citizens.

As the future head of the Commonwealth, Prince Charles, said during the opening session of Climate Week in September 2020: "[Climate change] is now rapidly becoming a comprehensive catastrophe that will dwarf the impact of the coronavirus pandemic."



# COMMONWEALTH CLIMATE INEQUITY

	Commonwealth Country	C02 per capita 2019 (tonnes)	Cumulative (tonnes)
1	Malawi	0.08	
2	Rwanda	0.09	
3	Tuvalu	0.1	
4	Uganda	0.1	
5	Sierra Leone	0.2	
6	Solomon Islands	0.2	
7	Tanzania	0.2	
8	Kiribati	0.3	
9	Lesotho	0.3	
10	Mozambique	0.3	
11	The Gambia	0.3	
12	Vanuatu	0.3	
13	Cameroon	0.4	
14	Kenya	0.4	
15	Zambia	0.4	
16	Nigeria	0.5	
17	Papua New Guinea	0.5	
18	Ghana	0.6	5.27
19	Bangladesh	0.7	
20	Samoa	0.7	
21	Eswatini	0.8	
22	Pakistan	1.1	
23	Tonga	1.2	
24	Dominica	1.3	
25	Sri Lanka	1.3	
26	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	1.3	
27	Fiji	1.5	15.17
28	Saint Lucia	1.6	16.77
	UK	5.5	
	Canada	15.7	
	Australia	17.3	

Source: [EDGAR](#)

This table shows the C02 per capita figures for 28 Commonwealth countries and those of the UK, Canada and Australia.

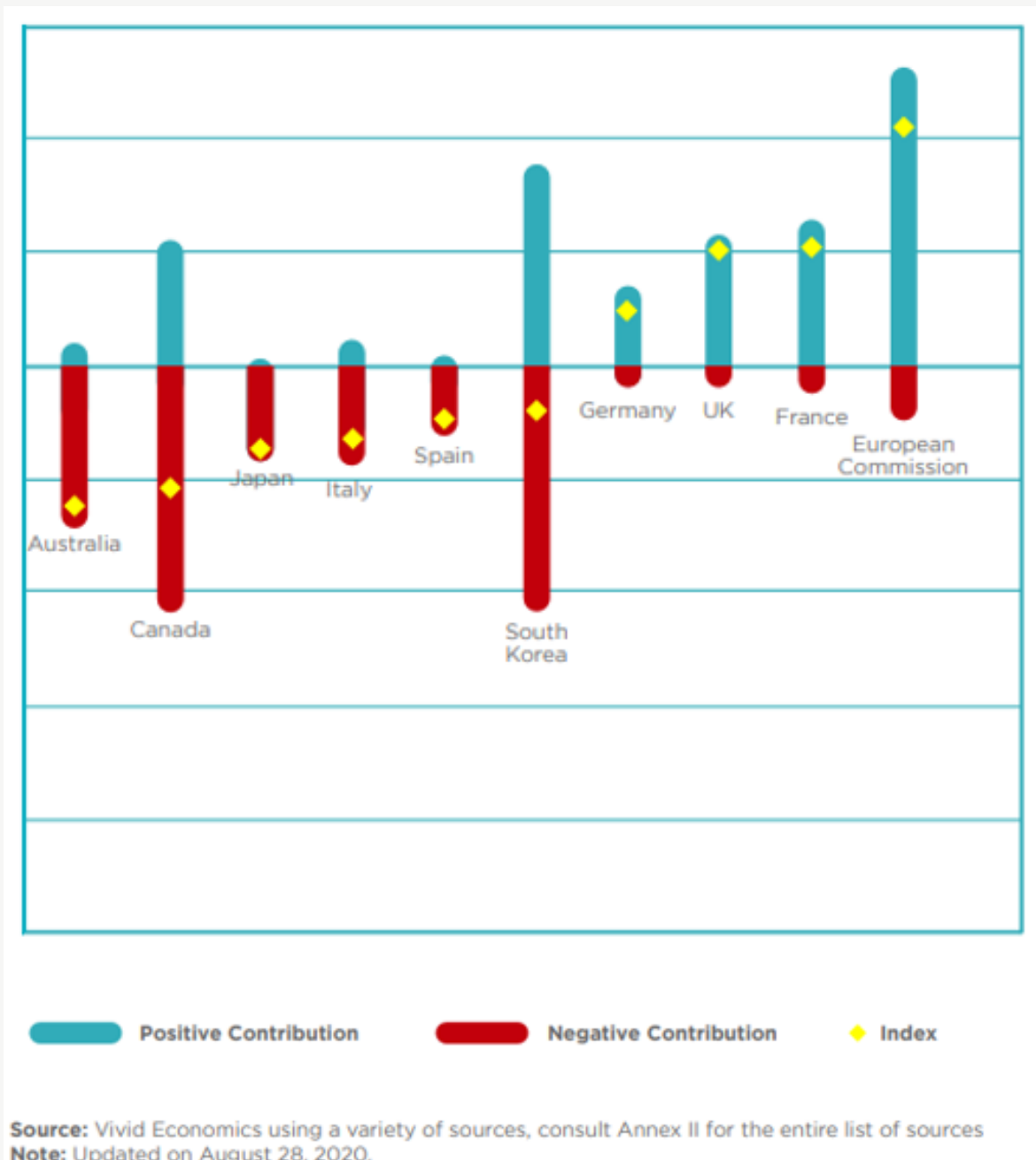
Source: EDGAR<sup>1</sup>

# GREEN RECOVERY?

The Green Stimulus Index by Vivid Economics shows that Canada and Australia are especially compounding their high per capita emissions by ploughing economic stimulus into polluting industries which would further harm the environment and accelerate the heating of the climate.

The index was created using a range of sources, weighing packages by their monetary size and expert judgements of the “green” versus “brown” nature of the national policy context, the recipient sectors and the individual measures.

Source: Vivid Economics using a variety of sources, consult Annex it for the entire list of courses  
Note: Updated on August 28.2020



# BIG COMMONWEALTH POLLUTERS

## AUSTRALIA

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The Australian Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, already has a dubious track record of gushing about his country's close relationship with other Commonwealth nations and yet undermines them when it comes to concrete action on climate change.

Despite describing Australia's neighbouring Pacific Island nations as 'family' at the 2019 Pacific Islands Forum, where the region's leaders met, Morrison succeeded in watering down the communique to remove references to coal and commitments to reduce emissions. Many Pacific Islanders fear they will lose their homes to rising sea levels within their lifetime and yet the region's major economic power, rather than offering solidarity and protection, questions authentic climate science and pushes for the expansion of global coal burning.

The Chair of that gathering, the former Prime Minister of Tuvalu, Enele Sopoaga, said he was stunned by Morrison's behaviour which communicated the view that Pacific leaders should "take the money and then shut up about climate change". This interpretation was given greater credence by the words of Morrison's deputy, Michael McCormack, who at the time said he was "annoyed" at the Pacific Islanders "pointing the finger at Australia" over the climate crisis and that islanders would survive "because many of their workers come here to pick our fruit".<sup>2</sup>

*Scott Morrison with leaders of Pacific nations in Tuvalu Photo: Pacific Islands Forum*



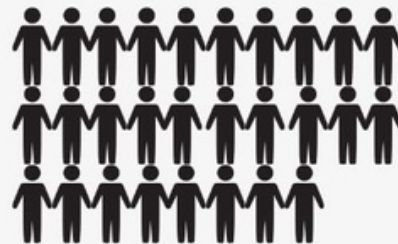
## A Brown Recovery

Despite having some of the most climate vulnerable people on their doorstep, and a part of their 'family' no less, Australia's utter disregard for their climate plight appears undimmed. At the 2020 UN General Assembly, more than 60 world leaders, including many from Africa and other poorer Commonwealth nations, signed a 10-point pledge to put climate and the environment at the heart of their Covid-19 recovery plans. Australia, was noticeably absent from the list of signatories.

An analysis of how green the national recovery plans are, shows that Australia deserves the badge of pariah status. Among the specific anti-climate measures taken include:

- A \$437 million USD bail out in loans and tax deferrals of Australian airlines and airports without ring-fencing any green conditions to tilt the industry towards decarbonising as undertaken by other countries.
- In South Australia, the government suspended exploration and licence fees for mining, oil and gas sectors. This relief will extend the licence fee deadline to 31 December, 2020.
- The opening up of 7000 square kms of land for coal and gas exploration and the introduction of exploration grants, both in Queensland, as well as the development of the onshore gas industry in the Northern Territory is not good news for the climate.
- Renewable energy investments have dropped to 2017 levels due to lack of government policy direction with no new renewable energy target after 2020<sup>3</sup>

**Per person, Australia burns more carbon dioxide than 28 Commonwealth countries combined**



# CANADA

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The Canadian Prime Minister has also been quick to wrap himself in the “shared values” of the Commonwealth club, yet his country’s record on climate change suggests that his actions don’t match his rhetoric. In March 2020 he said that he “celebrated” the Commonwealth’s “strong bonds of cooperation and friendship that unite us all” and that Canada would “continue to work with other Commonwealth members to advance our shared priorities” such as “environmental protection and sustainable development.”<sup>4</sup>

Unlike his American counterpart to the south, Donald Trump, Trudeau claims to be a climate leader. He met school striker Greta Thunberg, who then told a group of indigenous leaders that he wasn’t doing enough, something he said he agreed with “completely”. In September 2019 during his re-election campaign he promised Thunberg that Canada would plant 2 billion trees in the next decade, a commitment which equates to 547,945 trees each day or 200 million a year. A year later none have been planted. Trudeau is so keen to be seen as a green champion he even went as far as joining a climate march of Canadian school strikers in September 2019, ironically demanding greater action from the Government he himself leads.

*Canadian tarsands at a processing plant in Texas*





However, Canada emits more carbon emissions per person than 27 Commonwealth nations combined, and when given the unique opportunity of the Covid-19 economic stimulus Trudeau has chosen to prop up Canada's hugely polluting fossil fuel industry. As environmental campaigner and founder of 350.org, Bill McKibben, recently put it, Canada, which is 0.5% of the planet's population, plans to use up nearly a third of the planet's remaining carbon budget. Trudeau's true colours when it comes to climate change may have been revealed a few years ago when he said to a group of cheering Texas oilmen: "No country would find 173 billion barrels of oil in the ground and leave them there."<sup>5</sup>

## **Is Canada pursuing green recovery or it is the world's biggest climate hypocrite?**

Canada's stimulus measures have been more of a mixed bag than Australia's. There have been some positive steps, including \$530million for the installation of methane monitoring in the oil and gas sector, as well as \$1.2 billion for cleaning up abandoned and unused oil well sites. However, campaigners have warned that by handing the money over to lax regional governments it could end up being just another major subsidy to Canada's already wealthy fossil fuel industry.<sup>6</sup>

For such a climate concerned Prime Minister, one might have thought that Canada would have used the economic stimulus to reduce that eye-watering per capita emissions number and deliver on some of its climate promises. However, Canada has:

- Extended tax relief to the oil & gas sector in Alberta
- Expanded export credit capacity in the Export Development Canada and Business Development Bank which will benefit the oil and gas sector, without conditions for better environmental performance.
- Suspended airline docking fees and ground lease rents to large port cities, providing economic assistance to polluting aviation and shipping without conditions to reduce emissions.
- Provided loans to the fishing and agricultural industry without conditions for improvement in environmental performance.
- Deferred carbon tax payments and loosened enforcement of oil and gas regulations in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Quebec, British Columbia and Nova Scotia.
- Canada's fossil fuel industries have also received a stimulus bump. Both Alberta and Quebec have poured money into their gas industries, with each province spending more than US\$50 million. This has been coupled with specific rollbacks in fossil fuel regulation, such as relaxing of oil exploration rules in Newfoundland and Labrador and coal pit protections in Alberta.

# UNITED KINGDOM

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As hosts of the crucial 2021 COP26 climate summit in Glasgow and the mastermind of the Commonwealth of Nations, no one is better suited to fuse climate leadership with Commonwealth solidarity as the UK. Yet regarding its per capita footprint, it emits more carbon dioxide than 18 Commonwealth nations combined and despite the rhetoric of 'Global Britain' from Boris Johnson, his actions belie his warm words.

Johnson may have talked up his love of Africa at the recent Africa Investment Summit held in London, but then he also went on to close the world leading Department for International Development, right in the middle of a global pandemic. DFID's work has long made a significant and positive impact through addressing some of the most pressing challenges faced by African countries over the years.

Johnson's true feelings towards Africa may have in fact been revealed before he took on the responsibilities and self-interest of diplomacy, when he wrote in 2002 that: "the best fate for Africa would be if the old colonial powers, or their citizens, scrambled once again in her direction; on the understanding that this time they will not be asked to feel guilty."<sup>7</sup>

"The continent may be a blot, but it is not a blot upon our conscience," he continued. "The problem is not that we were once in charge, but that we are not in charge anymore."

Such offensive, colonial views underline a worrying attitude towards Commonwealth countries and may explain his disregard for the Department for International Development and suggests that he has work to do to show his credentials as a global statesman, with the responsibility for overseeing a successful COP26 summit.

*Boris Johnson opening the UK-Africa summit*



## Is 'Global Britain' only a PR slogan?

For a country about to host the biggest climate summit in the world and that claims to be an international climate leader, you would expect the UK's recovery package to be brimming with pro-climate initiatives that will accelerate the transition to a low carbon economy.

However, while there is more to celebrate than the decidedly dirty offerings from Australia and Canada, the UK is still doing much less than other countries.

Specifically, the UK's recovery plan is not nearly as impressive as its EU neighbours. Boris Johnson proudly talks about the UK being the first major economy to set its 2050 net zero target, having beaten France by a few days.

However, when it comes to concrete actions, EU nations are doing far more than the UK to ensure that their recovery plans are green.

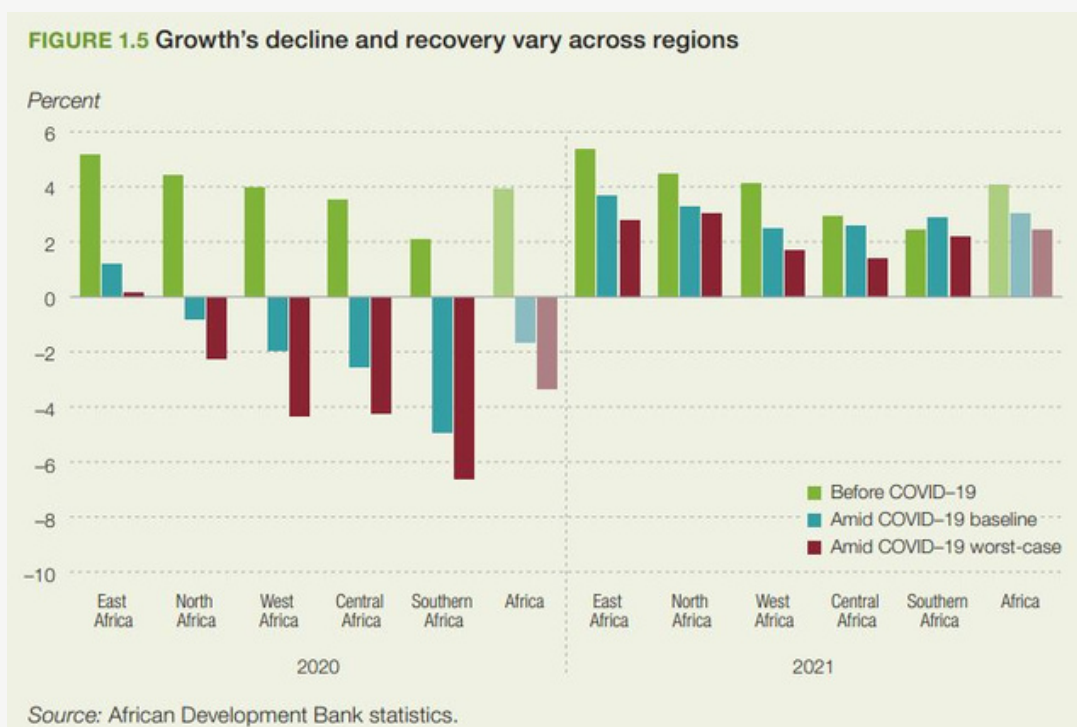
The Prime Minister is keen to sell Brexit as an embrace of 'Global Britain' and not an inward retreat fuelled by hostile attitudes to people in and from other countries. But for it to be more than just a marketing slogan, Johnson needs to show true leadership on the climate change, the most important 'global' development challenge we face.

Although the UK has announced plans to improve energy efficiency and incentivise green research and development, the Government has also announced a number of polluting subsidies. These include:

- A total of US\$2.2 billion has been provided in bailouts to airlines Easyjet, Ryanair, British Airways and Wizz Air. Airbus, Honda and Nissan have also received support from the COVID Corporate Financing Facility without any green conditions meaning that this is just a direct hand out to climate harming industries.
- The UK Government also continues to fund the exploration and burning of fossil fuels overseas through its UK Export Finance scheme which helps UK businesses entrench fossil fuels around the world. Setting a net zero target for the UK to make it cleaner and greener, while profiting from poorer nations being shackled to dirty energy infrastructure is a not a credible position from an incoming COP26 host.

# GREEN RECOVERY IN AFRICA

Covid-19 has had a mixed bag of effects for most African Commonwealth members. From Nigeria to Kenya, Egypt to Botswana, the continent has, so far, been spared the grave and devastating breakdown in terms of infections and fatalities compared to other regions such as the EU and the Americas. But while the number of positive Covid-19 cases is relatively low in the continent, it has negatively impacted on the efforts to reduce mass poverty thus further throwing the region into playing catch-up. From indications of official data beginning to stream in, different regions of the continent have varying degrees of negative growth. As the chart shows below, the continent's growth decline and recovery vary across regions.



The chart shows Africa's growth decline and recovery which vary across the continent's regions through 2020 to 2021

Environmental challenges and climate inequality have hit most African communities in their locale as they significantly depend on agriculture to support over 65% supply for income and livelihoods.

According to the World Food Programme (WFP), Covid-19 is likely to double the number of people going hungry in 2020 to around 265 million and a large proportion of these are in Africa.<sup>8</sup>

The only urgent question is – how can African leadership effectively respond to change this tide? It is projected that the number of people going hungry has increased by 50 per cent since March alone in Burkina Faso. It is further anticipated that the number of food insecure people in East Africa could increase by 73 per cent to more than 41 million people in 2020 alone. The loss of income is the main driver of this insecurity in the region. The strategic management of development financing becomes a major concern to mitigate the negative effects of Covid-19 on humanitarian resilience, biodiversity protection and green recovery.

Covid-19 has deepened a broader economic crisis, debt driven mega infrastructure development that African countries are currently going through and is steadily leading to not only the loss of livelihoods that cause a raise in poverty and hunger levels but also aggravates external debt distress. According to the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), poor people rely on up to 70 per cent of their incomes for food and in South Africa, the richest African country, half of the respondents to a national survey said they ran out of money to buy food in recent months.

If we are to achieve economic stability, address vulnerabilities and risks during the post Covid-19 recovery period and deliver green growth in Africa in a manner that can withstand disruptive shocks like Covid-19, not to mention climate change, the main strategic pillar should be raising incomes and livelihood security for those at the bottom of the pyramid. The stimulus push needs to target mechanisms for raising incomes across both less affluent income groups as well as mid-level income groups. For people to fully buy-in, a green recovery needs to help address people's immediate needs as well as helping to reduce emissions and protect them from climate change.

Solidarity economics within the Commonwealth club will play a vital role especially for the African group of its membership. Africa is facing its first recession in a quarter of a century with its GDP forecast to contract by -3.3% thereby risking millions of jobs and businesses.<sup>9</sup>

Major development financing gaps remain and as the Addis Ababa Action Agenda recognized, on the one hand we need to mobilize domestic public resources and on the other put together domestic and international private business and finance to support the implementation of the SDGs. Within this scope of resource mobilization, most African countries have taken huge debt to finance development.

The debt burden is now threatening the stability of entire regions and countries. With significant losses to Africa's GDP of between \$22.1 billion and \$88.3 billion in 2020 due to Covid-19 which will furthermore squeeze fiscal space thus increasing the development financing gap by an additional \$110 to \$154 billion. The AfDB estimates that "Africa's total public debt could increase, in the best-case scenario, from \$1.86 trillion at the end of 2019 to over \$2 trillion in 2020, compared to \$1.9 trillion projected in a 'no pandemic' scenario. According to a March 2020 AfDB report, these figures could reach \$2.1 trillion in 2020 in the worst-case scenario".

Africa is one of the most vulnerable regions that is severely exposed to climate risk, which in turn amplifies the effects of other environmental and social challenges, including the current Covid-19 pandemic. As a result, there is an evident need to quickly consider transitioning the economy to one that is green, low-carbon, socially inclusive, and more resilient to external shocks. Doing so will bring its own challenges in terms of ensuring a just transition for all sectors of society in a region with very high inequality.

Across the region, the primary challenge is defining what projects and sectors qualify as green, sustainable, and inclusive for investments.

Two case studies which demonstrate some of the leading recovery measures in the region are Kenya and South Africa.

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# KENYA

Some of the measures taken by Kenya include:

- Kenya's Ministry of Environment and Forestry has had cabinet approval to lead the country in the planting and growing of 2 billion trees with a budget of Ksh. 48 billion (Kenyan Shilling). The Department of Environment has already received Ksh. 1 billion for planning purposes.
- The Kenya National Treasury's economic stimulus package for local response to Covid-19 is carbon neutral.
- The National Treasury allocated Ksh. 40.3 billion to mitigate the impact of Covid-19, comprising Ksh. 33.4 billion to be applied towards recurrent expenditure, such as hiring additional health workers and purchasing relief food, and Ksh. 6.9 billion to be applied towards capital expenditure.
- To mitigate the impact of deforestation and climate change and to enhance the provision of water, the stimulus plan will rehabilitate wells, water pans and underground tanks in the arid and semi-arid areas. For this purpose, the government has set aside Ksh850 million. Additionally, a further Ksh1 billion has been set aside for flood control measures and Sh540 million for the Greening Kenya Campaign.<sup>10</sup>
- The President directed that all verified Value-Added Tax (VAT) refunds be paid by 15 April 2020 by the Kenya Revenue Authority (KRA) or approval be granted for companies to offset the refunds against withholding VAT due.
- The President also directed all ministries and departments to make payments of at least Ksh.13 billion owed to government suppliers.
- One of the purposes of the Covid-19 Emergency Response Fund is to support and stimulate micro, small and medium enterprises rendered vulnerable by the pandemic. The monies received may also be used for the payment of salaries. However, there is currently no requirement for the fund to cater specifically for green recovery efforts through the SMEs in Kenya.
- The economy contracted -5.7 during Q2 of 2020 which has both short and long-term implications for growth and recovery efforts across all the sectors. Tourism is the hardest hit sector with 83.3% decline



Kenyan GDP has fallen 5.7% in 2020



As can be seen in the below graph, Kenya’s external debt has been growing more rapidly but also more erratically. In addition to the borrowing shifting from multilateral to commercial sources. The composition of Kenya’s debt has significantly changed through increased borrowing from external commercial sources such as Eurobonds and, more recently, from taking on syndicated loans from commercial banks. Therefore, in the period of analysis between 2012 and 2019, the share of debt from external commercial sources to the total debt grew from 3 percentage points to 18 percentage points, the highest growth among all the debt sources. During this same period debt from multilateral donors dropped by 10 percentage points.<sup>11</sup>



What has this got to do with climate change, sustainable and just development financing? When it comes to approving loans, market based commercial funding predominantly does not focus on such important aspects as climate and development gains, but simply on a country’s ability to repay. In the long term, this does not bode well with aspirations for green growth and climate embedded sustainability in our development efforts especially in the post Covid-19 recovery period.

# SOUTH AFRICA

South Africa's Green stimulus is the key to fast-tracking job creation, improving liquidity, and to putting the country on a path to sustainable economic recovery without compromising long-term competitiveness and green growth. It provides four strategic advantages to South Africa:

1. Up to \$83bn additional funding available for local investments.
2. Access to cheaper funding that provides bonds which are up to 18 basis points cheaper.
3. Positive job impact of up to 500 thousand direct jobs unlocked in green investments in the country and region.
4. Economic prosperity in the long term which mitigates up to 1.8 trillion Rand in transition risks and enhancing competitiveness in a post Covid-19 recovery period.

As part of a climate action plan, the Mayor of Durban, Mxolisi Kaunda, announced that the city was divesting from fossil fuels and would use the funds freed up would be used to help small and medium sized businesses, social enterprises and co-operatives to participate in the green economy.

12

Other countries such as Ethiopia are also showing the way. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, has called on African leaders to emulate Ethiopia's focus on climate change mitigation, through planting of trees and investing in renewable energy sources, as they try to revive growth. "A green recovery can also be a jobs-rich recovery," he said.

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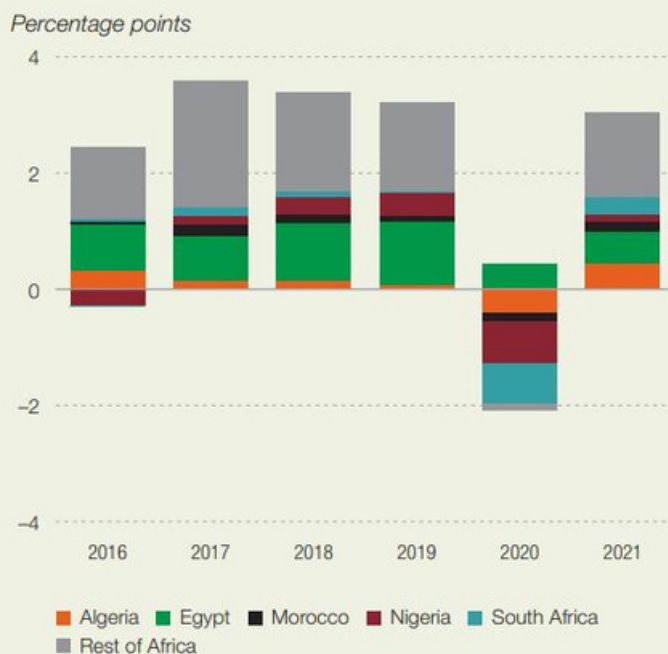
*The city of Durban is to divest from fossil fuels*



# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Global and continental growth contraction does not bode well for financing the Sustainable Development Goals. The depth of the crisis on development financing is further compounded by a drop in diaspora remittances. Both public and private funds that are necessary to spur local growth have contracted. On the overall footing, five African countries are leading in this contraction – that is Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Nigeria and

**FIGURE 1.6** Growth's contraction is primarily driven by the five largest economies



Source: African Development Bank statistics.

South Africa. These are also the leading economies by GDP on the continent with significant implications on the pace of post Covid-19 recovery. The Commonwealth countries in Africa will have to do more in lobbying and advocacy for debt relief and reasonable reparations. This is the opportune time.

As we head towards COP 26 in the UK next year, the Commonwealth offers a perfect opportunity to demonstrate how countries from the global North and South can collaborate on sustainable climate action. But at the moment it's largely warm words and hot air from the leaders of the big Commonwealth emitters, something that must change if those leaders are not to be exposed as hypocrites. With plenty of economic stimulus still to be spent by these countries there is time for them to clean up their act and get the green recovery back on track. If they fail to do so, then they will not only betray their Commonwealth 'family' but also turn it into an irrelevant 'club' on climate action at a most critical period.

The policy and politics of climate change are a stark reminder that going forward, we cannot act normally – we must build back better in a way which reflects the ideals of Commonwealth solidarity.

# End notes

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