9 CONCLUSION: IT IS NOT TOO LATE

When a story is so long it goes on into the next morning when the early sun is already rising from the east while the moon has not yet set in the west. In Chinese, if you put '日(the sun)' and '月(the moon)' together, it is a new character明 that means 'bright' and 'tomorrow'. A story is always meant for tomorrow's generation, isn't it?

From 'Full Moon', Tom Wang[1]

In La Guajira, on the Caribbean coast of Colombia, young indigenous leader Sixto Andrés Ávila Iguarán reflects on an increasingly turbulent horizon. 'The Westerner does not have that appreciation of loving the land, of loving nature, of loving Mother Earth who gives sustenance for each of the beings that inhabit the planet,' he laments. 'Listen to Indigenous peoples, who have respect for the land, who have respect for Mother Earth – that is the best message we can give, in order to mitigate this situation of climate change.'

Rather than viewing his community, the Wayuu people, as victims, he wants their strength and knowledge to be recognised and learned from. 'We as communities respect our Mother Nature, our Mother Earth, and we know that what human beings are generating is causing these strong climate changes like the high tides, the storms, the hurricanes . . . For this reason, all this evil that people do to our Mother Earth, all that people do to our Mother Nature, is what is generating the strong climate change that is hitting the whole world . . . because we respect nature, we know how far we have been allowed to go and how far nature can contribute to us, and how we can contribute to it.' This, he says, must be the

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 09:39:17, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms.
https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009605960.010

essence of climate adaptation – being attuned to nature and working with it, not against it. As Evelyne Ninsiima in East Africa also puts it, 'observing someone with limited resources conserving the environment is a significant lesson to learn.'

The UN's Sustainable Development Goals explicitly identify the need to support marginalised people if we are to build climate resilience and reduce vulnerability. Indigenous communities tend to live in geographically isolated areas where they have retained much of their traditional land management practice. According to an article by Maori author Merica Abbott (*Ngāti Kahungunu and Ngāi Tahu*), 'Indigenous peoples are more likely to be impacted negatively by market-based, neo-colonial mechanisms, particularly related to climate change mitigation and/or carbon-trading. It is crucial then that nature-based solutions centre Indigenous knowledge within a context of Indigenous leadership, self-determination, and access to financial resources.'[2] Research by Vogel et al. also finds that despite constituting only 5% of the global population and stewarding between 13% and 20% of global lands, Indigenous-held territories contain an estimated 80% of globally remaining biodiversity: 'Indigenous peoples and communities are well-positioned and currently have and will continue to play important roles in the protection, conservation management, and restoration of lands and waters'.[3] New Zealand, for example, has committed to recognising and integrating iwi/Māori perspectives and *tīkanga* (customs) in its emergency management systems, improving the country's resilience to disasters including wildfires.[4] Australia has now integrated First Nations knowledge into environmental reporting standards and is funding Indigenous-led cultural fire and land management practices, while in the Philippines, the EU-funded Governance in Justice Programme is providing marginalized Indigenous communities with better access to services.[5]

Indigenous peoples are 'very closely connected with their environment and are acutely dependent on stable environmental conditions,' explains Marina Romanello, Health Editor of

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 09:39:17, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms.
https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009605960.010

The Monitor. 'Their traditional knowledge, built over centuries, is much more affected by environmental changes. But they also have an enormous amount of knowledge that could help us out of this mess.'

'Wealthy economies have a ton of catch up to do,' argues International Policy Advisor to the CVF Secretary-General based in the Philippines, Renato Redentor Constantino. 'They should thank vulnerable countries who've advanced this knowledge only because they've received the gross brunt of impacts rich nations are largely responsible for fomenting.' He recalls the global reporting of the catastrophic flooding in Germany, July 2021, with a woman on a German news channel expressing surprise that such events 'could happen in developed countries'. That climate change was somehow a 'third world' problem that the rest could ignore. 'It highlighted to me a lack of awareness about adaptation worldwide,' he says. 'Vulnerable countries are often far ahead in this aspect'.

The Climate Prosperity Plans from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Ghana, and those soon forthcoming from the other CVF countries, show not just awareness but preparedness – as experts in the understanding of climate resilience and adaptation. As such, they are attracting international investors. As H. E. Mohamed Nasheed, Secretary-General of the CVF, writes in the Foreword of Sri Lanka's CPP: 'We [Sri Lanka and Maldives] are both highly climate-vulnerable, but we also believe we can achieve prosperity by going quickly to net zero, with clean technology and a low-carbon future. We wish to be the victors of the future, not the victims. I hope this Climate Prosperity Plan can be the start of that important effort.'[6]

The CVF has a phrase, which bears repeating whenever possible: 'the fate of the most vulnerable will be the fate of the world.' It should not be misunderstood as a warning. Instead, it should be considered a positive call for action: vulnerable countries, including small island nations, are the

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 09:39:17, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009605960.010

experts in climate change adaptation but simply lack the funding. Their fate isn't yet sealed. The global community can still ensure that the fate of the most vulnerable is a greener, more prosperous future; and in so doing ensure that for the world at large. Investing now means investing in a more climate-resilient future for all. As Sivapuram Venkata Rama Krishna Prabhakar at the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES) also writes, climate adaptation 'should not be considered just from the point of view of the national security of the countries in the region but more importantly, it should be understood and addressed from the transboundary perspective as well as the global security perspective. That's why understanding the climate vulnerability of [a] region as a whole gains significance.'[7]

When Nakeeyat Dramani Sam addressed COP27 in Sharm El-Sheikh as the CVF Thematic Ambassador for Youth, aged just 10, she implored: 'Please do not come back next year, to yet another COP, empty handed. Decide now, again, if you are rich and powerful nations, to provide funds to help the ones who suffer most from ongoing climate disasters that we did not cause. Please do not leave our communities exposed, hurt and out of pocket while holding more and more of these COPs. Show us your courage. Be our heroes instead.' A year later, she reconsiders the message. Ghana, the former CVF-V20 Presidency and the home to the CVF Headquarters, isn't only a victim that needs helping; it is a resilient nation that has much to teach the world. It is both. 'Maybe someone reading this in the USA is not facing the kind of problems faced by us vulnerable nations yet,' continues Nakeeyat, 'but it may be their fate 30 years from now. So, they need to plant that seed, and inculcate in other children, their colleagues, their siblings, the importance of the ecosystem we live in. Because when the last tree dies, the last man dies.'

For small island nations such as Saint Lucia, there's a fear that expensive adaptation projects can still be wiped out by the next hurricane. Jevanic Henry warns that a short-term

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 09:39:17, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms.
https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009605960.010

clean-up-and-rebuild approach comes with a 'risk of maladaptation ... We don't want to be adapted for just 2025, but for 20 or 50 years down the line. For example, when building bridges, we must consider potential conditions in 2050. Adaptation finance becomes more attractive to donors this way too.' Too often, Henry gets the sense that Western perception is that small islands are 'just dots on the map. If we disappear, it's not really an issue. But when you speak about the fate of the world, it reminds them that the climate crisis is a threat to global peace and security. During COVID, we said if one of us is not protected, we all are at risk. The same applies to the climate crisis ... If the vulnerability of our small developing states in the Caribbean or Pacific isn't addressed, where would they have to go? There are implications for immigration and resource scarcity, which can be a threat to global peace and stability. Addressing our vulnerability is not just for us but for global peace and stability. While the focus now might be on military peace and security, the climate crisis can be an even greater threat. It affects not just one island or country but entire regions.'

Once again, the 'no-one is spared' message from Chapter 5 resurfaces like an iceberg in our path. Yes, vulnerable and developing countries have been uniquely and unfairly damaged by the twin effects of an economic system designed by, and rigged in favour of, already wealthy nations – and an imbalanced climate system, again caused entirely by wealthy nations. But climate change – if we don't implement the necessary resilience and adaptation measures – is set to rip a hole in the hull of even those wealthy nations too. A recent paper in *European Journal of Operational Research*, for example, studied the impacts of extreme weather events on mortgages in Florida, USA. Analysing a large dataset of over 69,000 loans and more than 3.7 million monthly observations, the authors revealed that the intensity of climate shocks has a substantial and non-linear effect on the likelihood of mortgage defaults. In simple terms, they found that as the severity

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 09:39:17, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms.
https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009605960.010

of climate shocks increase, so the probability of people defaulting on their mortgages increases – and not marginally, but significantly. This held true for hurricanes and extreme rainfall alike. The study shows how the potential for increased defaults and financial instability will occur even in the world's wealthiest areas, without the necessary adaptation measures.[8]

At finres, Florent Baarsch agrees that developed nations are playing catch-up when it comes to understanding climate adaptation: 'we in Europe are gradually realising that we face severe droughts followed by floods and must grapple with the consequences ... We're still at the early stages of adapting to climate change in developed countries, and there's a short window of opportunity for vulnerable nations to receive the necessary financial support and expertise. We must ensure that this support continues and doesn't diminish once developed nations start focusing more on their own challenges.' The field of adaptation requires significant transformation, argues Baarsch. 'Currently, it relies heavily on qualitative approaches, and despite substantial investments, the impact is limited. Perhaps it's better for us [i.e. Western development consultants] to stay home and let vulnerable countries lead the way. They have valuable lessons to teach us, not just about adaptation but also about resource management. African farmers, for example, are incredibly mindful of their water usage due to limited resources, and we have a lot to learn from them.' Ultimately, says Baarsch, viewing this issue as 'the "environment" won't cut it; we need the economic and political sectors to be actively engaged. Climate adaptation should be a topic discussed at the highest levels of government ... We need to move quickly and make wise investment decisions to address the climate crisis effectively. Time is running out, and we can't afford to waste it.'

Sara Ahmed calls for 'a mindset shift'. While environment ministries are crucial for project implementation, she says, 'risk management and long-term investment fall within the

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 09:39:17, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms.
https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009605960.010

purview of finance ministries. Finance ministries decide on budgets, trade-offs, and fiscal priorities, making them essential in addressing climate challenges effectively. Public budgets are approved by finance ministries, and they are best positioned to access multilateral development banks. While development aid is important, climate finance requires an approach focused on investments and trade.' We speak just days before Ahmed heads to Dubai for COP28 – it remains a crucial forum for debate and diplomacy, she says. 'COPs provide a platform for diverse stakeholders, including civil society and indigenous populations, to engage in climate discussions. However, they are primarily talk shops. The real action and decisions happen in high-level forums like the G20 and with institutions like the World Bank and IMF.' While in Dubai, Ahmed and the CVF-V20's aim was 'to use it as a space for deal-making. We'll have leaders' sessions on financial architecture reform and climate vulnerability monitoring. This is an opportunity to present critical data and seek partnerships. We hope to secure agreements with private sector players and influential countries like China, as well as develop relationships with investment banks for project preparation.' Protecting the Paris Agreement's 1.5 degrees Celcius target remains a priority, while progress is still to be made on innovative solutions, such as carbon markets. 'COPs are essential for raising awareness and engaging various stakeholders,' she says. 'But the real solutions and actions will be determined and implemented elsewhere.'

*

On 10 November 2023, the BBC ran the headline 'Australia offers climate refuge to Tuvalu citizens'. Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese described it as a 'groundbreaking' achievement and 'a significant day in which Australia acknowledged that we are part of the Pacific family, and with that comes the responsibility to act'. Tuvalu Prime Minister Kausea Natano called it 'a beacon of hope'.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 09:39:17, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009605960.010

But is the Australian offer to Tuvalu a positive step in the right direction? Or is it a fig leaf that allows a major mining nation to continue emitting?[a] Enele Sopoaga, prime minister of Tuvalu from 2013 to 2019, clearly agrees, describing the Australia–Tuvalu treaty as 'bullish and most alarming' with the clandestine aim to 'buy Tuvalu's silence over Australia's coal exports which will contribute to Tuvalu's demise as a nation. It is a very high cost to pay.' He likened it to admitting 'defeat to climate change and sea level rise by choosing the option for Tuvalu's sovereignty to be re-colonized by a major GHG [greenhouse gas] carbon emitter, Australia.'[9] Taukiei Kitara, a Tuvaluan and adjunct research fellow at the Griffith Centre for Social and Cultural Research, Australia, also argues that the treaty 'does not deliver climate justice. We believe that the way the migration pathway is being constructed primarily as a climate solution is injurious to the Tuvaluan people who have long rejected labels such as "climate migrant" or "climate refugee".' In recent years, he writes, 'activists from Tuvalu and their low-lying neighbours in the Pacific have been calling for their sovereignty to be protected, not eroded, in a changing climate.'[10]

And yet we have, says Kumar, 'reached that point of no return' for some states and regions. While it may seem a simple solution for a large land-mass country such as Australia to offer climate refuge to South Pacific Islanders, it is anything but. Romanello questions whether 'climate migration will be a programmed relocation, taking into account the needs and culture of local communities, or will it be forced displacement, leading to a huge refugee crisis? Then there's

[a] Many observers also made the link between Australia's decision and China's security agreement with the Solomon Islands in 2022. The 'Falepili Union Treaty' with Tuvalu, Article 4(4), states that: 'Tuvalu shall mutually agree with Australia any partnership, arrangement or engagement with any other State or entity on security and defence-related matters. Such matters include but are not limited to defence . . . and energy infrastructure.' https://www.ejiltalk.org/the-australia-tuvalu-falepili-union-treaty-security-in-the-face-of-climate-change-and-china/

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 09:39:17, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009605960.010

the problem of people who can't move because it's expensive and not an option for many. So, what will happen to these stranded and immobile populations? Quantifying the extent to which climate change is driving people to move, and understanding the tipping point to avoid the need for relocation, is complex and urgent.'

Political calls to 'stop migration' completely should also be recognised for what they are: disingenuous and unrealistic. Disingenuous, because many Northern Hemisphere nations in which such messaging is promoted are in fact growing old and in desperate need of migrants for their health and social care, and the entry-level skills needed to maintain their economies. And unrealistic, not simply because migration has been a human constant throughout our entire history as a species, but also because of climate change – the cause of so many historic large-scale migrations, including the past Ice Age. Parts of our world will become less habitable for large populations, either via sea-level rise or extreme heat and crop failure. Some people *will* move. 'It's not about "stopping" migration,' argues Romanello. 'There's a lot of wealth to migration. I'm a migrant myself. It's about people not needing to migrate but being able to choose to migrate if they want to. So, the choice of migration should always be there. But you should always have the choice to stay living healthy lives in the place you were born in or are living in, instead of having to leave because it became too harsh.'

For Víctor Yalanda, indigenous community leader on Colombia's Pacific Coast, the best solution is the obvious one. Put a stop to the cause of the problem: global emissions. Adaptation initiatives may help to 'minimize impacts,' he says, 'but I insist, the impact is at a global level. That is, intense summers or heavy rains are caused in such a way that they generate damages across large areas. So, it is difficult to really think of an initiative, a project, a concrete action to be able to minimize these impacts, that has a significant effect for all the effects that climate changes are generating. So,

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 09:39:17, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms.
https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009605960.010

surely it could generate some positive impact if humanity abruptly stopped the systems of pollution … the engines, the machinery that is the basis of combustion. And if we stopped it massively and globally, *then* that could really generate some positive effect.' But, he adds, pragmatically, 'that implies decisive decisions, and abrupt decisions … adapting is possible, but it means accepting scarcity.'

Do we want to accept future climate disasters, merely to allow ourselves to keep polluting in the short-term? Surely not. The Lancet Countdown report itself stresses that 'With the world currently heading towards 3°C of heating, any further delays in climate change action will increasingly threaten the health and survival of billions of people alive today. If meaningful, the prioritisation of health in upcoming international climate change negotiations could offer an unprecedented opportunity to deliver health-promoting climate action and pave the way to a thriving future. However, delivering such an ambition will require confronting the economic interests of the fossil fuel and other health-harming industries, and delivering science-grounded, steadfast, meaningful, and sustained progress to shift away from fossil fuels, accelerate mitigation, and deliver adaptation for health.'

*

At the community-led mangrove plantation in the Tam Giang lagoon, Vietnam, Nguyen Thi Nhật Anh has seen several international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) come and go, helicoptering-in with their own 'big projects planting mangroves', only to fall at the same hurdle – they proceed 'without the participation of community'. She argues for a new approach. 'My observation is, the local NGO always gets a smaller amount of the budget. However, we have a deeper connection with the community.' It is time to listen to and trust local NGOs to deliver where INGOs have traditionally ruled the roost. Just as it is time to listen to and work with vulnerable countries.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 09:39:17, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009605960.010

It need not be one or the other, however. Through genuine partnership, countries, governments, and NGOs, from north and south, can work together. Jwala Rambarran, Policy Advisor at the Caribbean Policy Development Centre (CPDC) and senior advisor to the CVF Managing Director, for example, writes, 'Now is an ideal opportunity for the CPDC and other civil society organisations across the Caribbean to work collaboratively with international partner organisations to build a global campaign for debt relief and climate justice . . . The Jubilee 2000 debt campaign provides valuable lessons for crafting an advocacy framework for the Caribbean Emancipation 2030 sovereign debt and climate justice campaign.' Jubilee 2000 was a London-based global campaign in the late 1990s that sought to eliminate the external debt of the world's poorest countries in time for the new millennium. The campaign was endorsed by a diverse group of leaders such as the Pope, Bono (Irish singer songwriter for U2, then the biggest rock band in the world), and economist Jeffrey Sachs. It also earned the support of strong political allies in the UK and US governments, making it harder for other official creditors such as Japan, France, and Germany to oppose. Jubilee 2000 gathered support from 21 million people around the world, most of whom had never previously had an interest in the issue of debt relief. It ultimately led to the cancellation of more than US$100 billion of debt owed by 35 of the poorest countries, and became one of the most successful international, non-governmental movements in history. A resurgent 'Caribbean Emancipation 2030' movement could 'benefit from a similar global campaign that has broad cultural appeal in key countries, credible messengers, an excellent inside political strategy, and a differentiated strategy for various national contexts,' writes Rambarran. 'A successful Caribbean Emancipation 2030 advocacy campaign would result in the cancellation of up to US$20 billion of debt owed by Caribbean SIDS [small island developing states].'

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 09:39:17, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009605960.010

As we've seen throughout this book, debt cancellation is only one of many levers available to be pulled. India supports populations displaced by coastal and river erosion through its National Disaster Risk Management Fund. Countries like Belize, with its debt-for-nature swap, and Fiji developing parametric insurance for government and environmental sectors, are paving the way for innovative strategies by debt-heavy nations to address loss and damage. The African Risk Capacity (ARC) drought coverage in Mali, and the World Food Programme's rapid liquidity mechanisms for humanitarian responses, offer early recovery and emergency finance options.[11]

The financing mechanisms themselves, however, are arguably less important than the political will. When the will is there, as evidenced by Jubilee 2000, so is the money. Rindra Hasimbelo Rabarinirinarison, Minister of Economy and Finance, Madagascar, also points to the fact that 'The multilateral financing system [is] willing to give $16 billion and $21 billion to Ukraine because they are at war – but we are also at war with the climate disaster. So, why don't we deserve the same treatment? We have to remember that those climate disasters are the consequences of rich countries' actions, but low-income countries like Madagascar are the victims.'

When COP15 in 2009 committed to fund vulnerable countries $100 billion a year in climate finance by 2020, the agreement was the easy part; the will to 'cough up' the money proved far harder. By 2020, the fund fell more than $16 billion short. Political will only comes with self-interest; and, as this book has shown in some detail, the developed nations who partner on vulnerable country climate adaptation projects will find themselves at a distinct advantage when climate change and climate migrants come knocking at their door. As Marina Romanello says: 'People need good mental well-being and economic well-being to be able to have healthy lives. People need solid infrastructure, because we depend on our roads and our hospitals to live healthy lives.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 09:39:17, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009605960.010

We want to protect the environment, obviously, because we care deeply about it. But if we don't, the impact is directly on us. This is not about polar bears in the year 2100. This is about us, today.'

Climate change impacts occurring today will get worse before things become better. This message isn't doom-mongering or apathy-inducing. If we allow indifference to dominate our lives and if we are paralysed over fears of what the future might bring, we face a far grimmer future. 'Certainties held for a long time by humans – that we can live excessively, in perpetuity, without any consequences – this thinking is our enemy,' argues Constantino. 'Tomorrow remains hidden in the shadows, which is good. Uncertainty is something we need to learn to embrace, because it means profiteers and fossil interests have not won. Yet. We still have a future to win.'

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 09:39:17, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009605960.010