

Far Beyond Carbon: COP30 and the New Climate Architectures

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Climate negotiations are increasingly about the resources, technologies, and rules that will define the 21st century, rather than cutting carbon emissions. World development, its capital accumulation, and countries' economic growth have been based on a battle against nature. This logic assigned distinct roles to countries, with a social division of labor that produced equally distinct functions. In the Global North, this was achieved essentially through the capacity to transform raw materials through technology. For the countries of what is now called the Global South, occupying a less privileged position and lacking such technology, the role was to support the power project of the former, through the supply of commodities and labor.

It was against this divisive backdrop that climate negotiations began, following the scientific consensus on the link between global warming and the burning of fossil fuels. Since then, the world's capacity to find paths and solutions to shared dilemmas—from climate to international trade—gave us hope that not only was the trajectory one-way, but it would also be guided essentially by a progressive awareness, in the case of climate, of the potential damages of carbon accumulation

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in the atmosphere, with extreme weather events serving an educational role as a disciplining force for human behavior.

The Paris Agreement, established in 2015 and a key element of the global climate regime, set a safe planetary temperature increase target of 1.5 °C and called on everyone to keep it below 2 °C, compared to pre-industrial levels. Ten years later, science already knows that the 1.5 °C threshold will be exceeded, with its intensity and duration remaining unclear, depending basically on our capacity to remove carbon from the atmosphere. This realization, however, should not minimize the Agreement's impact and importance: the scenario would be much worse without the actions it spurred, with an estimated temperature increase of 3 °C without it. In this sense, two characteristics were essential for its achievement: the recognition that, regardless of the past or future, all signatories had a legally binding responsibility regarding the problem, and, furthermore, that they *trusted* their peers would make regular, periodic contributions to its mitigation.

Ten years later, everything has changed. On the one hand, international trust has deteriorated, reflected in the weakening of democracies, paralysis in trade decisions, the emergence of tariff and non-tariff barriers, and the growth of conflicts and wars for which the international community has been unable to provide answers.

Additionally, the West faces the end of its hegemony, the war in Ukraine has collapsed the vision of a post-Cold War unipolar world, and a new division of the world among the United States, China, Russia, India, and the European Union is underway. This fragmentation has given way to new alliances and coalitions, with countries grouping around shared interests.

Simultaneously, the conversation about energy transition, which conveniently masks the extent of oil dependency in energy production, has shifted from the

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environment to national security, with the exposure of Germany's economy to dependence on Russian gas as an indicator of this shift.

In turn, the architecture of the international climate regime now appears insufficient. Emissions compensation mechanisms, such as carbon sequestration, designed to give countries time to arrange their respective economic transitions, were successful. However, they were not accompanied by incentives capable of shifting the world's power structure, whose economy remains based on an extractive pattern incompatible with the planet's limits.

This logic ultimately generated a license to continue emitting, reinforcing the historical role of the known social division: developed countries continue transforming raw materials through labor at the expense of the climate and the planet, and developing countries reassume the role of providing political support for their ambitions and economies, being responsible for carbon sequestration at the cost of their own development, embodying a new kind of colonialism, now ostensibly green.

Furthermore, the regime ignores two realities. First, that a world with fewer greenhouse gas emissions can still be ecologically harmful. Biodiversity loss, ocean warming and acidification, and water crises should not be treated as minor problems compared to greenhouse gas emissions. Second, that the power struggle would produce new races and disputes, now for critical resources for the transition, thereby creating new dependencies. Today's climate solutions—from solar panels to electrification—are intensive in technology, natural resources, and new materials. A lower-carbon world is not necessarily a kinder world to nature, and there is nothing on the horizon indicating that, within it, nature will be an ally of development rather than an adversary to overcome.

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In light of this, two essential questions confront Brazil, especially in the year when the country hosts the 30th edition of the main Climate Conference (COP): What is to be done? And what role can we play in building new solutions and new cooperation arrangements? Here, we essentially see three leadership opportunities.

First, the formation of “new clubs,” seeking to attract countries with similar characteristics and convergent interests. These new alliances could be formed around

mega-biodiverse countries, united as a bloc to collectively negotiate rules for the nature-based economy and ecosystem services in areas such as trade and finance. If natural resources are fundamental to the world's economic transition, it is fair that the countries holding these assets are the leading representatives of how they wish to manage them, making decisions about their pace and prices.

Secondly, exercising leadership for the financialization of nature. If gold and the US dollar have underpinned economic transactions until now, a new economy requires new anchors, which could come from the monetization of nature and the valuation of natural capital, going beyond carbon and incorporating, among others, biodiversity, water availability, and benefits to populations.

Finally, given the strategic importance of agribusiness for the country and of tropical agriculture for global food security, proposing new methodologies and adapting the metrics that organize the climate regime to tropical realities, particularly for measuring methane emissions and carbon sequestration, would be an important step towards limiting the dominance of the ostensibly hegemonic view on what is sustainable.

In this issue of CEBRI-Journal, specially dedicated to the climate agenda and COP30, you will find different perspectives offering diagnoses and solutions for these and other challenges of the climate agenda, ranging from the transition away from fossil fuels to counter-publics demanding greater prominence in decision-making processes.

By highlighting the emerging global discussion on new materials and also proposing new concepts such as “land and resource transition”—similar to what the world coined for energy transition, now applied to the new disputes, the emerging dependencies, and the resources at the center of geopolitical power in the coming years—this issue closely dialogues with recent work developed by CEBRI's Climate and Sustainability Transition Program. For 2026, this work will centrally feature the launch of a global platform to bring together think tanks, philanthropy initiatives, the private sector, and researchers to imagine solutions and provide pathways related to climate and nature, expanding collaboration between the public and private sectors. These are, therefore, substantive contributions from CEBRI—a rethink tank—so that we can, together, rethink the world.

Enjoy the read. ☰

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