

The Net Zero Mirage: Is It Just Business as Usual at the Africa Climate Change Summit?

As global leaders descend upon Nairobi, Kenya, for the Africa Climate Change Summit, hopes are high for meaningful commitments and actionable plans to combat climate change. However, there is a growing concern that the buzzword of the moment "net zero emissions" may be masking business-as-usual pollution rather than driving genuine climate action.

In the wake of COP26, many governments and non-state actors have fervently championed "Net Zero" targets as a signal of their unwavering commitment to climate action. Banks, too, have jumped on the bandwagon, with numerous institutions pledging allegiance to the Glasgow Financial Alliance for Net Zero (GFANZ) and the Net Zero Banking Alliance (NZBA) and proclaiming lofty goals of achieving net zero emissions by 2050. On the surface, these commitments appear promising, but it's crucial to dissect what "net zero emissions" truly means and whether it aligns with the urgency of the climate crisis.

First and foremost, it's essential to clarify that "net zero emissions" are not synonymous with "zero emissions." The distinction lies in the term "net," which implies that emissions can still occur as long as they are offset by equivalent carbon removal or reduction efforts elsewhere. This nuance is where the skepticism creeps in. Are these commitments truly pushing for substantial reductions in emissions, or are they simply providing a veneer of climate credibility to businesses and governments maintaining their status quo of pollution?

The concern over "net zero emissions" arises from several critical factors:

Offsetting Emissions: To achieve net zero emissions, entities can buy carbon offsets or engage in carbon removal projects, such as reforestation or carbon capture and storage. While these initiatives can be valuable, they should not be used as a carte blanche to continue polluting at current levels. Some fear that reliance on offsets could perpetuate unsustainable practices.

Ambiguity in Targets: The specific pathways and actions needed to reach net zero emissions are often unclear. Vague or unenforceable targets can allow polluters to avoid taking real steps toward reducing emissions.

Greenwashing: Without stringent accountability and transparent reporting, the term "net zero" can become a greenwashing tool. Companies and governments may claim progress while failing to substantively address emissions.

Delayed Action: Setting a net zero target for 2050 may allow governments and businesses to defer immediate action, ignoring the urgency of the climate crisis.

To avoid these pitfalls and ensure that "net zero emissions" commitments are genuinely meaningful, several steps must be taken:

Transparent Reporting: Require entities to disclose their emissions data, reduction strategies, and offset mechanisms transparently, allowing for independent verification.

Strong Regulatory Frameworks: Implement clear and enforceable regulations that drive emissions reductions, with consequences for non-compliance.

Accelerated Emission Reductions: Encourage accelerated action rather than relying solely on long-term net zero targets. Immediate emissions reductions are vital to mitigate the worst impacts of climate change.

Prioritize Real Solutions: Emphasize emission reductions at the source rather than relying excessively on carbon offsets. Genuine climate action means minimizing emissions in the first place.

As global leaders gather in Nairobi, Kenya, for the Africa Climate Change Summit, it's crucial to scrutinize the pledges and commitments made. "Net zero emissions" must not become a hollow promise or a smokescreen for business-as-usual pollution. Instead, it should signal a genuine and transformative commitment to address the climate crisis head-on. The world is watching, and the time for meaningful action is now, not in 2050.

For God and My Country

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