

Whose descent? Whose design? – Authors' reply

In their letter, Jeadran N Malagón-Rojas¹ highlights many important issues of global justice: neocolonialism, unequal exchange, fiscal austerity imposed by institutions in the Global North, and the resulting underdevelopment and poverty entrenched in the Global South. We fully agree with the author's call to uncover and challenge these injustices.

However, we believe the characterisation of our work by Malagón-Rojas—as proposing that reductions in energy use are both possible and necessary for all countries—reflects a severe misinterpretation. As stated in the title of our study, we do not propose a universal reduction in consumption but rather compare where growth is needed and where such changes are happening.² We observed that half the countries in our dataset require growth in energy or material consumption, and in most of these, the rate of growth is insufficient. The possibility that such necessary growth could occur even while total global energy and material use declines emphasises the magnitude of global inequalities in consumption, and the magnitude of excess consumption in rich economies.

Malagón-Rojas highlights the unacceptable and stagnant levels of energy poverty in Peru and Colombia. We also recognise this issue. Indeed, our results show that, to ensure decent living standards for all, energy use in these countries would need to double under conditions of existing within-country inequality or increase by approximately 25% under a scenario of reduced inequalities. Notably, our results are based on energy and material footprints, which reflect the systemic extraction of resources flowing from the South to the North owing to unequal exchange.³

Finally, we agree that the capacity to guide and shape development should reside within the countries where such development is needed. Development

should be a sovereign process, informed by local needs. Our use of an existing and widely utilized wellbeing framework⁴ as a benchmark to measure trends in energy and material consumption in no way contradicts this. There are legitimate debates to be had about this framework and, more broadly, the limitations of modelling approaches. A global modelling exercise such as ours inevitably adopts standardized metrics, but the aim is clearly not to dictate development pathways for specific Global South countries without their consent. On the contrary, the intention is to highlight global injustices and historical exploitation that continue to influence patterns of resource use and responsibility for ecological crises, while outlining the contours of alternative futures.

We declare no competing interests.

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