

Foreword

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It is exciting to see a home-grown South African book, such as this, emerging to influence the debate and future course of individual and societal action on climate change. It attests to the gratifying increase in interest and concern on this issue. In this country, world-class research has moved rapidly from the academic arena to that of policy influence – and a book like this injects the findings and ideas that have resulted into the sphere of public response and involvement even more forcefully. I am proud that our government, business and civil society response has placed South Africa amongst the leading voices in the international debate on climate change – *Bending the Curve* will help to raise our response even further.

Whether it is natural disasters, which happen with increasing frequency and severity around the globe, or human conflict arising over the competition for resources, the impacts of climate change are global phenomena that continue to make world headlines. Africa will come under particular pressure due to rising temperatures and shifting weather patterns. But it is sometimes difficult for South Africans to relate these alarming projections to their own lives, and to know what effective options may be available to them.

Let us not delude ourselves. Climate change is here and poses a very real threat to the development of our societies – we know with certainty that this and future generations will live in circumstances dictated by actions taken now. The effects do not respect national boundaries, reminding us that we are part of a global community that must work together to resolve the predicament brought on by two centuries of escalating atmospheric pollution.

Some global leaders have dithered over this issue, while a number of corporate and political voices have downplayed its severity until recently. We now find ourselves with no time to spare. The most recent research available tells us that the “carbon space” is finite. A total of 70% of this has already been used up – largely by developed countries. The dispensation for equitably sharing the remaining 30% of the available “safe” carbon space must recognise historical responsibility for the problem, and the growth imperatives and development aspirations of developing countries.

Climate change with inadequate action would mean a world with increasing flooding, drought, heatwaves, famine and disease. Human suffering, worsening poverty,



and even political and economic instability would affect all global citizens. These effects would be exacerbated in South Africa and the rest of Africa, where many people live in informal settlements, on subsistence agricultural land and on the edge of the formal economy. The changes would certainly harm most those who are least able to adapt and least able to afford the impacts. The wealthy no longer have the luxury of closing their minds to the devastating impact of what is happening in the fragile atmosphere that envelops our planet.

We all therefore have a moral obligation to act now to prevent this climate crisis from becoming unmanageable. The science is clear. Global emissions must peak and decline within the next 10 to 15 years. In order to achieve this, each and every one of us will have to make a contribution.

As formidable as the climate crisis is, it presents us with a tremendous opportunity. It gives us the chance now to make a choice to live in greater harmony with our planet and to strive to create a more balanced society. Economic growth and development is not incompatible with ambitious climate policy. There are many opportunities in the emerging carbon-constrained economy to build new industries that turn our comparative advantages into competitive advantages, to create new jobs and new incomes. I encourage South Africans to read this book and to take its recommendations to heart, as its pages are bursting with suggestions about how we can overcome this problem as part of a pro-growth, pro-jobs and pro-development climate policy.

Our government has already committed to putting in place fiscal, regulatory and legislative policies and measures that will pave the way towards a low-carbon economy and society. Corporations must transform their practices and build new climate-friendly industries. Individuals must reduce their carbon footprints and lobby for change.

I appeal to all of you to assist us in our efforts to reduce the emissions caused by ceaseless consumption, flying, driving and use of inefficient electrical appliances. Let us also ensure that we take responsibility for the members of our society who are least to blame for this problem and are ill-equipped to cope with the impending changes – they are the innocent bystanders.

Let us work towards the greater good of all global citizens and our planet.

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