



NGO NEWS

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Glasgow Climate Pact: COP26

1.5 degrees Celsius kept alive or on life support?

Last month's [COP26 climate summit](#) was considered the last hope for the world to take more ambitious and bold climate pledges to reduce global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius. Pope Francis and numerous faith leaders, people of faith, and climate activists appealed to the world leaders to have the courage and political will to deliver on their promises. For vulnerable people and nations experiencing frequent natural disasters and climate emergency, the summit was going to be a make-or-break event. They expected the developed, wealthier countries, who account for 80 percent of global emissions, would step up to take responsibility to reduce emissions and provide the finances they committed to in 2009 for developing countries for mitigation, adaptation and loss and damage.

The road from the [Paris Agreement](#) in 2015 to COP26 in Glasgow was promising. For six years, civil society organizations, youth climate activists, scientists, indigenous peoples, faith-based organizations, human rights defenders, women's groups, and other vulnerable communities kept up their relentless advocacy for transformative action plans to combat the climate crisis. During the climate summit, more than 100,000 people, led by climate youth activists from around the world, took to the streets of Glasgow on Nov. 6 to demand bold, ambitious and actionable commitments from the Conference of Parties for net zero emissions by 2030, and not by 2050, to keep global warming below 1.5 degrees Celsius. "Stop talking and start doing" was the message from Vinisha Umashankar, an Earthshot finalist from India, to the climate negotiators.

At the [closing plenary](#), Alok Sharma, the president of

COP26, said: "Today we can say with credibility that we have kept 1.5 degrees within reach. But its pulse is weak. And it will only survive if we keep our promises and translate commitments into rapid action." This COP missed the opportunity to change course for an ecosystem that protects human rights and dignity of all. Keeping 1.5 degrees alive is not enough for the fragile planet and vulnerable communities who face the impacts of climate change every day.

Global responses to the recently concluded COP26 are varied. Youth who led Fridays for Future called the summit "infuriating and disappointing." The UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, described it as "building blocks for progress." Calling it a failure or success is simplistic, for it is a step in the right direction, but not the bold, transformative action plans the world community wanted. In fact, during the final plenary meeting, COP26 President Alok Sharma apologized for "the way this process unfolded."

The outcome document, [Glasgow Climate Pact](#), did deliver on some of the promises, to accelerate action on climate this decade, but it was short on climate action. It failed to live up to the expectations of millions of people who are burdened by the slow onset of climate change causing unbearable heat, floods, droughts, wildfires and coastal erosion from rising sea level, leading to loss of lives, livelihoods and land, pushing them into poverty, hunger and homelessness. There is disappointment, anger, and a glimmer of hope. The Glasgow Climate Pact is the first global roadmap to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees. Right now we are on track for 2.4 degrees Celsius of warming. This will be catastrophic for poor countries that contributed the least to create global warming

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“Consign coal power to history” became a rallying point during climate talks. But it was ditched by a last-minute intervention by India and China, and support from South Africa, Bolivia and Iran weakened the language of the initial agreement – from “phase out coal” and phase out of “inefficient fossil fuel subsidies,” to “phase down coal.” Though weakened, it still sends the message that coal is on its way out. An opening to exit from fossil fuels was closed for the time being, a great setback for all developing countries, especially for the Small

Island Nations. The Glasgow accord has committed the 197 parties to the Paris Agreement to “accelerating efforts towards the phase down of unabated coal power and phase out of inefficient fossil fuel subsidies.”

For the first time, fossil fuels had been included in COP agreements. Absent from the agreement is any mention of oil and gas. Oil and gas producing countries, along with more than 500 fossil fuel lobbyists, managed to keep it out of the agreement. The world is not acting fast enough on fossil fuels. The gas industry focus on greed and profit over people and planet was on full display at the Summit. According to Corporate Accountability, the US, UK, EU and other rich countries helped to advance the agenda of Big Polluters on the one hand, while painting themselves as saviors of climate crisis. While the Global North and polluting corporations continued to weaken the outcome, the negotiators of Global South failed their people by not banding together to fight back. (Although India is credited with the language, “phasing down coal,” in fact, the US and China had used the same language earlier in their agreement to work closely on climate change.)

According to Antonio Guterres, the final agreement “reflects the interests, the conditions, the contradictions and the state of political will in the world today...unfortunately, the collective political will was not enough to overcome some deep contradictions.”

This is how the COP26 coalition responded to the Glasgow Climate Pact: “We needed rich countries to step up and finally do their fair share of climate action... Instead, the needs of poorer countries have been kicked to the curb, in favor of keeping the hugely over-represented fossil fuel lobbyists happy. Develop-



Photo credit: ukcop26.org

ing countries already overwhelmed by the COVID crisis, inequality, and a spiraling debt crisis desperately needed huge increases in financial support to deal with the impacts of climate change, and compensation for the damage already done. Yet rich flatly refused to put hard cash on the table offering a pitiful advice helpline instead. At COP26, the richest got what they came here for and poorest leave with nothing.”

Governments and businesses failed to meet their climate obligations. Time is running out, and it is left to the developing countries and climate activists, especially youth, to demand radical action before COP27, in Egypt to keep pressure on our governments and corporations to make sure their pledges to reduce emissions are kept and strengthened. Our advocacy should begin right now, to urge banks to divest from fossil fuels and invest in renewable energy. Demand our governments to shift to regenerative agriculture for healthy soils for future generations; phase out polluting fertilizers, pesticides; improve water quality and conservation; promote biodiversity, food security and support for rural farmers; pressure supermarkets to phase out HFC refrigerants which produce greenhouse gases up to 9,000 times more potent than carbon dioxide; etc. Do keep an eye on the carbon markets and greenwashing projects. Your voice and climate action matters. Perhaps the words of Patricia Espinosa, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework convention on Change: “Let Glasgow be the beginning of a new era of resiliency,” may help motivate everyone to keep the “cry of the earth and the cry of the poor” in focus.

Adaptation

As more and more people are living with devastating extreme weather because of climate change, adaptation is inevitable. Adaptation refers to actions that reduce the negative impact of climate change. It involves adjusting policies and actions to actual or expected future climate. The goal is to reduce vulnerability to the harmful impacts of climate change. It is the most vulnerable people who are at risk and they have contributed the least to cause it. Many countries and communities are taking adaptation measures. However, there is no one-size-fits-all solution. It can range from building flood defences, setting up early warning systems for cyclones, and planting drought-resistant crops, etc. Successful adaptation not only depends on governments but also on the active engagement of all stakeholders at local, national, and global levels. Adaptation is a major challenge faced by all, and requires a long-term global response to protect people, livelihoods and ecosystems. At the conference, “Parties acknowledged that adaptation action should follow a country-driven, gender-responsive, participatory and fully transparent approach, considering vulnerable groups, communities and ecosystems, and should be based on and guided by the best available science and, as appropriate, traditional knowledge, knowledge of indigenous peoples and local knowledge systems, with a view to integrating adaptation into relevant socio-economic and environmental policies and actions.”

Adaptation Finance was a major discussion issue for developing countries in Glasgow, for climate adaptation costs in developing countries had been increasing and current funding were insufficient. Almost 75 percent of the \$100 billion per year climate finance for developing countries is committed to mitigation efforts, and parties wanted a balance between mitigation and adaptation. The demand was that 50 percent of overall climate finance must be committed to adaptation. The Glasgow Climate Pact took steps to resolve this shortfall, by agreeing to double the funding for adaptation by 2025. The Pact has emphasized the urgency of scaling up action and support, including finance, capacity building and technology transfer to help developing countries to enhance their adaptive capacity to reduce their vulnerability to climate change. This is viewed as one of COP26’s successes.

There is a designated [Adaptation Fund](#), financed by rich donor countries. Since 2010, the Adaptation Fund has committed nearly \$878 million for climate change

adaptation and resilience projects and programs in most vulnerable communities in developing countries. Pre-COP estimates showed that annual climate adaptation costs in developing countries could reach \$300 billion by 2030. At the conference, the Fund raised \$356 million in new pledges; however, pledges have not matched the urgency to act.

Loss and Damage: Climate Change is Destroying People’s Lives and Livelihoods

“It is absolutely a make-or-break issue. We had drawn a red line for loss and damage. The story of this issue so far is about climate injustice,” said Sadie DeCoste of [Loss and Damage Youth Coalition](#). Currently, the national governments meet the burden of compensation and rehabilitation for the loss of lives and livelihoods due to human-induced climate change. Ahead of the COP26, civil society organizations and youth activists from the global south had issued an open letter signed by more than 300 groups to the COP26 President and other negotiators to take concrete measures on this issue.

The need to provide finance for loss and damage was first raised by the Alliance of Small Island States in 1991, urging the rich countries to equitably distribute the financial burden of loss and damage among them. Progress on this issue was very slow – the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage established in 2013 and the Santiago Network for loss and damage in 2019. There were setbacks also – in 2015, at the Paris Agreement negotiations, Article 8, which focuses on climate change-induced loss and damage was rewritten to say that it “does not involve or provide a basis for any liability or compensation.”

Hence, the demand for the establishment of a new loss and damage fund at COP26 was met with resistance from the United States, European Union, Australia and other rich countries. Saleemul Huq, director of the International Center for Climate Change and Development in Bangladesh, said the reason for this “taboo” and reluctance is apparent. “Everyone knows rich countries are afraid of making themselves open to liability and compensation. Even the term ‘loss and damage’ is, in fact, a euphemism for liabilities and compensation. They refuse to address this issue.” It is a failure on their part to take responsibility for the harm

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they have caused over the past 200 years and meet the needs of vulnerable people. It is restorative justice. This COP has recognized that “climate change has already caused and will increasingly cause loss and damage as temperatures rise, impacts from climate and weather extremes, as well as slow onset events...” The pact has agreed to fund Santiago Network to help countries with technical expertise and to move communities away from threatened shorelines. Mitigation efforts through net-zero goals will not address the needs of the world’s poorest people struggling to survive.

Participation

The UK government had promised to hold “the most inclusive COP ever” and offered vaccines to all delegates, observers and media. Many could not access them. Although over 40,000 (22,000 delegates, 14,000 observers, and 4000 journalists) people registered for COP26 in Glasgow, not all of them could be present in person. Travel restrictions, ever-changing quarantine rules, and the costs of travel and hotel accommodation forced many delegates from the global south to participate via video call. It is ironic that these people represent countries hit hardest by climate change. Normally these countries have small delegations, and when forced to reduce them further, means their voices are not heard or being considered.

Access to negotiations was off-limits to Civil Society members and observers. To enter the most inclusive and accessible COP venue created numerous hurdles; participants had to show daily negative lateral-flow COVID test results. They also found it very hard to participate in sessions described as open. To maintain social distancing, many sessions were ticketed, thus restricting in-person participation. Another issue was the lack of space in the venue to accommodate all accredited persons. NGO Representatives who traveled from New York and were planning to do advocacy with negotiators found it impossible to meet with any of them. Large climate networks with more than 1,500 civil society organizations received just two tickets for the first two days of the negotiations. COP26 placed undue restrictions on who could attend negotiations. Advocacy takes place in hallways and the corners of rooms. This COP did not live up to its promise to be inclusive. On the issue of diversity, media reports indicate that compared to previous conferences, this COP was one of the “whitest.”

Article 6 of the Paris Agreement: rules for Carbon trading

Countries came to an agreement on how countries and companies can trade carbon emissions credits across borders, including how to avoid double counting carbon reductions. This deal allows countries to partially meet their emission targets by buying offset credits representing emission cuts by others. It is supposed to unlock trillions of dollars for protecting forests, building renewable energy facilities and other projects to combat climate change. Countries with large forest cover and potential for wind and solar power could benefit from this. However, critics say, that offsetting would allow countries to continue emitting climate-warming gases and can result in greenwashing. Taxing carbon trade turned out to be contentious one – developing nations wanted a tax on carbon traded to support adaptation measures, but they had to give into the demands of the rich nations. Instead, a decision was taken that 5 percent of the proceeds will be collected to go toward the adaptation fund for developing countries.

Double counting: Who can take credit for the carbon offset? The country selling it or the country buying it? Under the new rule, the country that generates a credit will decide whether to authorize it for sale to other nations or to count it towards their climate targets. If authorized and sold, the seller country will add an emission unit to its national tally and the buyer country will deduct one, to ensure the emissions cut is counted only once between countries.

These details are to ensure that civil society will be



[Download/read](#) *the Glasgow Climate Pact (PDF)*

vigilant to make sure greenwashing will not be happening.

Mitigation

Mitigation: steps taken for reducing emissions and stabilizing the levels of heat-trapping greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

Parties have identified the gap in emissions and have collectively agreed to reduce the gap and strengthen their emissions reduction pledges to align with the Paris Agreement by 2022.

Climate Finance

The climate pact acknowledged “with deep regret that the goal of developed country parties to mobilize \$100 billion a year by 2020 in the context of meaningful mitigation actions and transparency on implementation has not yet been met...” The \$100 billion goal will now be met by 2023.

Net Zero Emissions

Net Zero Emissions means not adding to the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide are released when we burn oil, gas and coal for our homes, factories and transport. Methane is produced through farming and landfill. These gases cause global warming by trapping the sun’s energy. Net Zero Emissions refers to achieving an overall balance between greenhouse gas emissions produced and greenhouse gas emissions taken out of the atmosphere; which means no more greenhouse gas can be added to the atmosphere in any given year than is taken out. The end goal is to restore global climate to pre-climate change levels. To achieve this, we need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to zero and then get to work to repair the past harm by drawing down past emissions. Not all emissions can be reduced to zero, so those that remain have to be compensated for, or offset by planting more trees. Net zero for individuals means moving away from fossil fuels to renewable energy for power, buying electric vehicles, using heat pumps for central heating, flying far less in future and eating less red meat.

According to the UNFCCC, reducing emissions this decade is critical and any net zero target must be accompanied by a clear plan of immediate and lon-

ger term action, and must of not rely on offsetting – through carbon trade.

Indigenous Peoples and Climate Pact

Indigenous peoples went to COP26 to advocate for their own solutions, ones they have used successfully to manage land for a millennia, and a clear set of demands – inclusion of Indigenous and sovereignty rights in every single climate action decision. They wanted to ensure any climate agreements affecting them or their land would take place after a process of prior and informed consent. They wanted to secure mechanisms to receive funding directly and a recognition of both the material and cultural losses that climate change is already driving. Article 66 of the text: “Emphasizes the important role of indigenous peoples’ and local communities’ culture and knowledge in effective action on climate change, and urges parties to actively involve indigenous peoples and local communities in designing and implementing climate action...” It is uncertain how countries will bring these words into reality.

The biggest win was the explicit recognition of Indigenous rights in the text of Article 6, the article of the Paris Agreement that regulates carbon offsets markets. In the past, Indigenous people were afraid that carbon offset projects would displace them alter their ways of living without their consent. This inclusion lacks any legally binding responsibility to adhere to the language: “consultation in accordance with domestic arrangements” when designing activities in their lands. In countries where the rights of Indigenous peoples are not fully recognized, the projects can go on, even in violation of international human rights standards. Their ultimate goal is to have a seat at the negotiating table. Not having one is a failure of the UN to recognize Indigenous peoples’ rights.



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