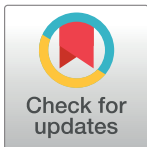


OPINION

COP27: One step on loss and damage for the most vulnerable countries, no step for the fight against climate change

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One year after the Glasgow Climate Pact, the expectations regarding COP27 were twofold: enhancing ambition on mitigation and keeping global warming below 1.5°C; and defining new instruments and funding for loss and damage. The first issue was particularly emphasised by the recent publication of the two latest IPCC reports from Working Groups II and III [1, 2], which emphasised the need for intense and immediate action to strengthen ambition. The latter issue is related to an important call from the most vulnerable and impacted developing countries, which was amplified by the catastrophic climate change impacts observed recently in particular in Pakistan.

Pledges on mitigation, decarbonisation and the question of monitoring

A few weeks before COP27, two countries announced the strengthening of their nationally determined contribution (NDC). India's new pledge committed to reducing its emission intensity per unit GDP to 45% below 2005 levels by 2030, instead of the 33–35% cited in its first NDC, complementing the country's 2070 net zero target announced in Glasgow. The newly elected Australian government also updated its target of reducing its emissions by 43% below 2005 levels by 2030. On 26th October 2022, the UNFCCC secretariat stated that these new commitments would still amount to a 10.6% increase in global emissions by 2030 (compared to 13.7% based on COP26 commitments); very far from the 43% to 60% emissions reductions by 2030 called for by the IPCC [2] in order to have a chance of staying below 1.5°C of warming. During COP27, scientists presented the results of the IPCC Working Groups II and III during the COP's 'Earth Day', showing that the 1.5°C window is rapidly closing and that ambition needs to be strengthened with no further delay. The World Leader Summit at the opening of the COP was full of declarations from heads of state calling to bridge the emissions gap. During the second week, Brazil's new president announced its will to accelerate its ambition on afforestation.

However, no tangible results materialised, and we instead observed in many venues a fight to keep the 1.5°C goal alive. At the beginning of the COP, the Environmental Integrity Group asked to include the 1.5°C goal as an agenda item for the coming negotiations, but this proposal was rejected. The Mitigation Work Programme launched in Glasgow turned out to be very procedural with no substantial ambition in the near term at this stage. During the

discussions to close the second periodic review of the Long Term Global Goal, countries such as Saudi Arabia or China attempted to remove a paragraph of the decision text reaffirming that “limiting global warming to 1.5°C requires rapid, deep and sustained reductions in global greenhouse gas emissions”. In the different versions of the COP cover decision some final drafts undermined the 1.5°C goal and it was only through pressure applied by parties such as the European Union that such an objective was not downplayed, but no progress was made compared to the language of the Glasgow Climate Pact.

Beyond the long term goal, there was intense debate on the issue of decarbonisation. In the cover decision, the idea of peaking emissions by 2025 was finally removed under pressure from emerging economies. Despite the proposal of India to call for phasing out not only coal but also all fossil fuel investments, this goal was not mutually agreed. Gas was presented as a bridge fuel by several developing countries, but also by the European Union, in order to support a gradual decarbonisation due to the current lack of technological capacity in many developing countries. Discussion of decarbonisation also reopened controversies over the potential of carbon capture and storage. Within the technical dialogue of the Global Stocktake, the Arab Group for instance insisted that technology for carbon capture and storage was absolutely necessary to stay below 1.5°C. Several NGOs and the European Union took the position that there are still important uncertainties and risks around such technologies, and that the IPCC reports clearly state that they cannot be used to postpone a rapid decrease in greenhouse gas emissions. Similarly, there were many exchanges concerning the potential of nature-based solutions and their potential synergies with climate-resilient development pathways, but also the need to carefully assess the impacts of those solutions on biodiversity and food systems.

Last but not least, despite the COP27 cover decision being called the “Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan”, few debates or signs of progress were observed on the implementation gap and pathways to achieve goals and pledges taken by parties. The technical dialogue of the global stocktake proposed several workshops on ways to enhance action and deliver shared concrete practices, but there is still so much to do to design pathways that are closer to regional- or sector-specific contexts to activate all the mitigation potential, which was clearly assessed in the IPCC Working Group III report [2].

Implementation of pledges also opened a rising debate on transparency and the way to monitor emissions. On the research and systematic observation (RSO) agenda item, there was debate on the creation of a Greenhouse Gas Monitoring Infrastructure Initiative on the need for transparent monitoring. Emerging economies initially saw this issue as a risk for interference in their own reporting activities, but an agreement was finally found on this key issue for the credibility of the pledge and review principle.

Recognising that loss and damage needs finance and support

There was a lot of expectation around COP27 in relation to funding for loss and damage. A new fund “for responding to loss and damage associated with the adverse effects of climate change, including a focus on addressing loss and damage” was created, which is a major step for the most vulnerable and least developed countries. Some countries already announced their willingness to contribute: the European Union announced such an intention at the end of the COP, as well as The Netherlands and Denmark. The Chinese special envoy also opened the door to a voluntary contribution. The UN General secretary Antonio Guterres proposed a special tax on fossil fuel industries to fund loss and damage but it was not an option agreed by parties and reflected in the COP decision. Lots of questions remain open and will be subject to further work and negotiation in the next sessions. Who are the donors? Do they include only industrialised countries or majors emitters and other parties in a position to do so? To which

countries will these funds be accessible—the most vulnerable ones? The least developed ones? Both? What kind of project and action would be funded and how does it articulate with other initiatives to support countries facing loss and damage, such as the Santiago Network? On finance and adaptation, some progress was made in discussion of the new quantitative goal on finance, but the final cover decision correctly recognises that climate funds are still not aligned with the \$100 billion goals and to the needs of finance for mitigation, adaptation and technology.

COP27 format, limits and outcomes

More generally, COP27 was strongly criticised on aspects of its format, including its huge size with very large delegations, numerous pavilions, most of them being highly energy-intensive, and a number of them clearly dedicated to promoting fossil fuels. There was a major contrast between human and gender issues promoted as a key concern in relation to climate change and the strong criticisms heard about the situation in the host country, and the weak voice and space left to civil society and NGOs. Nevertheless, important progress was made in the last paragraphs of the cover decision underlining the role of Indigenous peoples, local communities, cities and civil society, including youth and children, in addressing and responding to climate change.

To sum up, COP27 provided no result on the issue of mitigation and enhancing ambition to keep 1.5°C alive, but clearly highlighted the need to strongly take into consideration equity issues. During all debates on mitigation, adaptation, finance and means of implementation, a fault line kept on fracturing the debates between issues of ambition and equity, between developed and developing countries, raising the more and more difficult positions of emerging economies and major emitters. It opened a first step for funding loss and damage, with a lot of discussion still to come to define the concrete functioning of the fund and its aims. But the overall picture of COP27 will remain that the international community sketched some instruments to tackle loss and damage without making any progress on the pathways for an intense and deep reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

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