

TO: U.S. Department of State  
FROM: Malcolm Johnson, Analyst  
RE: COP27 Analysis - Was It a Success?  
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COP27 presented an opportunity for countries to reaffirm commitments to previously-set goals, and for strategizing ways to transition from planning to implementation. “Success” at this year’s COP from the United States foreign affairs perspective may be evaluated along the following criteria: 1) collective affirmation of emissions reduction commitments that align with Paris Agreement targets – particularly among high emitters, 2) fortified international commitments to climate justice, especially given the conference’s positioning as “Africa’s COP,” and 3) demonstrated leadership from U.S. representatives following recent reputational damage during the Trump administration. Varied levels of success and disappointment along each of these parameters aggregated in an overall, moderately successful COP27.

In this assessment, the principal criteria of success remain the negotiation’s service to global emissions reductions that align with IPCC-informed temperature warming limits: 1.5 - 2 degrees Celsius. COP27 participants oversaw the introduction and extension of several initiatives – including the Energy Transition Accelerator, the African Carbon Market Initiative, and the Global Methane Pledge – all signaling strong intention from a variety of actors to slow warming within the decade. Details were added to a carbon trading scheme that had been established in the Glasgow Summit, strengthening the foundation for international coordination and trust. Finally, incoming President Lula’s assurance of Brazil’s impending reforestation headlined other escalated commitments to nature-based climate solutions.

Although each of the outlined initiatives provide bases to accelerate future emissions reductions, they are only preliminary measures to necessary action; their “success” may not yet be fully evaluated. Confidence in the COP’s emissions-reduction effort is further dimmed by the agreement’s lack of terms to fortify funding for mitigation and adaptation in developing countries. Finally, were it not for promising U.S.-China G20 negotiations in the sidelines of COP27, China’s continued insistence upon “developing country” status at the COP may have weakened necessary trust between the world’s two largest CO<sub>2</sub> emitters – both currently and historically.

Beyond the strict consideration of emissions reductions, COP 27's international recognition as "Africa's COP" presented a unique opportunity for negotiators to prioritize the interests of developing countries. A "success" at this year's conference would therefore require that negotiators capitalized upon the window of opportunity for climate justice expansion. As a general consensus among negotiators and media outlets, the conference delivered massively in this area. The creation of a Loss and Damage Fund for developing countries' disproportionate and accumulating climate hardships has been widely lauded as the COP27's most significant outcome. This fund signals impending victory among the most vulnerable countries (low-lying islands, least developed nations) in their long fight for international recognition of "loss and damage."

Several considerations limit our ability to strictly label the loss and damage fund outcome an unequivocal success. For one, continual failure among developed nations to fulfill annual, equity-based mitigation pledges of \$100 billion diminishes confidence that an additional equity-driven fund will garner substantial contribution. Through the most pessimistic lens, the monumental loss and damage recognition signals subtle victory for the heavily-attendant oil lobbyists, as conversations of the fund "crowded out" – and likely substituted for action upon – currently sparse investment in every country's mitigation effort. Mitigation's "second stage" positioning during this year's COP, although formally expected, mounts pressure for negotiators to deliver big on this front during the Global Stocktake-centered COP28 [the Global Stocktake, which takes place between 2021 and 2023, is the first official checkup on implementing the Paris Agreement on climate change].

The final criteria of analysis – climate leadership optics – pertains most directly to immediate U.S. interests. The U.S. exhibited strong representative attendance – including President Biden and introductory speaker Al Gore. More significantly, the U.S. announced ambitious efforts to lead several new initiatives, and showcased plans to enact the nation's recent substantial emissions reduction legislation – the Inflation Reduction Act. Although climate policy's partisan status in the U.S. limits the nation's long-term agenda options, the combination of high-profile representative attendance and initiative spearheading at COP27 likely restored a moderate degree of international confidence in the U.S.'s role as a climate leader.

The United States should regard COP27 as a moderate success. A variety of caveats that accompanied the agreement's most promising components prevent declarations of unequivocal success. However, the nation's reassertion as a

dominant force in international climate diplomacy alongside parties' timely recognition of climate justice provide reason for optimism.