

Looking ahead: How COP28 can be successful

Introduction and Success Metrics

The 28th session of the Conference of Parties (COP28) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) will be held in Dubai in one year. Given that COP27 has just concluded, we are presented with the opportunity to assess what the climate diplomacy and action landscape currently looks like and, from this, extrapolate what it will take for COP28 to be deemed a success. In this essay, success will be looked at within the context of the three established pillars of COP: adaptation, mitigation, and loss and damages. Overall, to be deemed a success, actors within COP28 must take up action which will aspire to at least one of the following values:

- *Environmental Protection*: work to reduce emissions to maintain increases in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels;
- *Equity and Collaboration*: equitably spread the financial burden of climate change amongst all global actors; and
- *Transparency and Accountability*: offer an avenue for follow up on efforts.

COP27: The Current Climate Diplomacy Landscape

In order to talk about COP28, it is first critical to evaluate where COP27 has left the climate change intervention off. COP27 was set during one of the greatest energy crises because of the Russian-Ukrainian war, during one of the hottest years recorded in the past ten years, and when tensions between Global North and Global South countries are at an all-time high. Additionally, there were more than 600 fossil fuel lobbyists at the climate conference, which marks an increase for the past year's conference and represents the largest stakeholder group present. As a result of this backdrop, the topics of climate finance, mitigation, and loss and damage centered the stage and adaptation took a more secondary role. Regarding climate finance, the agreed upon 100 billion USD per year was not achieved prior to COP27. During COP27, many of the rich nations

apologized for not coming up with the full expected amount of money. Furthermore, the balance between grants vs loans as well as private vs public investments was up for debate. This was a recognition that investment numbers would need to shift to the trillions of dollars and a transformation of the financial system's processes, governance, and central and commercial banks.

The climate finance topic was heavily related to the issue of loss and damages. Loss and damages are the detrimental impacts of climate change that cannot be addressed through mitigation or adaptation. In the past, the US and other rich nations have been opposed to the term loss and damages given their concerns of universal liability for climate change damages. However, with growing pressure from developing countries – such as Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, the Maldives, and Nepal – who are experiencing worse and worse climate change effects, a funding arrangement for responding to loss and damage associated with the adverse effects of climate change, including a focus on addressing loss and damage was agreed to in COP27. This recognized funding to vulnerable countries marks a historic transition from the previous status quo. However, there was disagreement about funding arrangements and especially if nations like China would be allowed to tap into such a loss and damaged fund.

The last backdrop to COP27 regarding climate mitigation, where only 29 new or updates nationally determined efforts had been submitted prior to the COP. There were expectations that the G20 would make new announcements to reduce their emissions. G20 did launch a “just energy transition” partnership to mobilize 20 billion USD for the purposes of moving Indonesia away from coal. However, these were no significant systemic changes to mitigation efforts, meaning that the ratchet mechanism, used to reduce emission gap by having all countries increase their ambition by increasing the amount of emission reductions they're going to commit to through their NDCs, will be utilized next year. Though, the 1.5°C goal was maintained for global temperature increase limits. Of note on mitigation, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said, “we need to drastically reduce emissions now – and this is an issue this COP did not address.”

The most significant action that occurred regarding climate adaptation – outside of the loss and damages fund – was the urging of parties to scale up climate finance, technology transfer, and capacity-building for adaptation as a part of a global effort.

COP28: Success Ahead

In order to be a success, COP28 must examine the value of their processes and work to build upon the progress that COP27 has laid the groundwork for within each of the topics. The main action in the process that would help make COP28 a success is reducing and/or banning the fossil fuel lobby from COP conferences. Fossil fuel lobby presence presents a barrier to environmental protection efforts to reduce emissions and have such an outsized group that their presence calls COP's transparency and accountability into question. At the very least, big polluters should have a limited lobby size and in the best-case scenario be banned from participating as active delegates in COPs all together.

Regarding climate finance, the actors in COP28 must come together to find a way to agree upon a way to count the \$100 billion USD that has been previously agreed upon. This action would allow for a great deal of trust in accountability to be restored between developed and developing countries. If the members of COP28 wanted to take this action even further and push the success from merely a transparency and accountability rectification and more towards an equity and environmental protection victory, then the developed nations could agree to a figure as high as about \$4 trillion per year, which would aid in a renewable energy transition and adaptation goals of developing countries.

Turning towards loss and damages, participating nations in COP28 must ensure that the funding mechanisms of the new fund and the issue of wealthy developing countries like China participating in the fund are resolved. The fund as it stands is just an aspiration and not a true fund. By ensuring this fund is established, the environmental protection and equity and collaboration goals can be met. COP28 can ride on the coat tail of this major success of COP27 to coast to a truly historic event regarding loss and damages.

Looking at mitigation efforts, the nationally determined contributions for most countries to make their emissions targets more ambitious will be activated. It will be the responsibility of this COP to ensure that everyone follows through with increasing their nationally determined efforts or else utilize the ratchet mechanism. COP28 will need to conduct the Global Stocktake with the utmost care. These are especially important for members of COP to present as the Paris Agreement was initially created with the intention of limiting global warming. These mitigation efforts not only present a major environmental protection goal but are also a testament to whether COPs are an effective transparency, accountability, equity, and collaboration mechanism. The

whole fabric of the COP could disintegrate if any big polluters, such as the US or EU, fail to come up with more ambitious goals. Mitigation will need to take center stage in COP28.

Finally, examining adaptation goals, it is expected that the Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA) will be assessed in 2023 during the lead up to COP28. The GGA was established to drive and enhance global adaptation action through increasing the status of, and financial flows to, adaptation. COP28 should consider the findings of the GGA to see how it can best aid and operationalize any of its suggestions. Attention to the GGA could allow for this COP to better accomplish environmental protection goals.

Conclusion

COP27 has set the backdrop for an extremely successful COP28 in Dubai. Leaders of the next COP must continue the climate finance, adaptation, mitigation, and loss and damages work that has been started as well as ensure the integrity of the process of COP is maintained. However, it is not enough for the members of COP to continue to only talk about climate action. I would argue that the new loss and damages fund must be operationalized, and mitigation accountability must be prioritized. These two actions represent the most important for ensuring that COP28 is a success. The \$100 billion comes secondary and the kicking big polluters out coupled with the GGA as tertiary in terms of prioritization to the previous actions. This was determined on the basis that these actions can have the highest impact for environmental protection, transparency and accountability, and equity and collaboration than any of the others. Additionally, these are the most timely given the momentum from COP27 and requirements from the Paris Agreement. COP28 has the makings to be a truly impactful conference and member states should begin today to make it a success.