

The Conference of Parties (COP) 27 in Sharm El Sheik
The ‘Implementation’ COP, in a growing climate of accountability
6-20 November 2022

The COP27 in Sharm El Sheik was known as the ‘African COP’ and labelled the ‘implementation COP’. It was also a ‘new start’ COP, coming after a six-year period where countries (Parties) focused primarily on negotiating guidelines for implementation of the Paris Agreement. These negotiations had been slow, and not helped by the largest developed country greenhouse gas (GHG) emitter, the USA, initiating withdraw to the Paris Agreement and financial support to the UNFCCC. The Guidelines were effectively finalized at the COP26 in Glasgow allowing this new COP to focus on implementation progress.

Held in Africa, the COP27 and its Egyptian Presidency prioritized financial and practical challenges facing implementation of climate action, and on preparation for the 2023 Global Stocktake. Grounded in a more confident African voice, the COP27 was a chance to focus on genuine support to those most affected yet least responsible – whose lives and livelihoods are already devastated by human-accelerated climate change – known as Loss and Damage (L&D). Titled [Funding arrangements for responding to loss and damage associated with the adverse effects of climate change, including a focus on addressing loss and damage](#),¹ this historical commitment by Parties to ‘funding arrangements’ for L&D was a unique and powerful moral victory for a COP.

It was a decision that people attending COPs even only a year ago would have said was unlikely.

Why unique - background to Loss and Damage:

When loss and damage was first recognized under the Warsaw International Mechanism (WIM), in 2013, and later with its own paragraph in the Paris Agreement in 2015, developed countries compromised on the inclusion of an Article on Loss and Damage with the caveat that this ‘*does not involve or provide a basis for any liability or compensation*’.² Financial support was parked in discussions on insurance schemes that had no accountability connections, either to those activities continuing to drive climate change, or with countries historically responsible for the current GHG concentration levels. Reference to loss and damage in wider international documents had the USA, in particular, requesting lower case and in plural ‘losses and damages’ to create a general phase that avoided legal links to the Paris Agreement, financial, or historical responsibility.

Years pass, greenhouse gas emissions rise alongside the power of storms, droughts, weather instability, ecosystems burning, and lives lost.

At the COP26, a major civil society push, grounded in inter-faith advocacy as a moral call to conscience, surprised the climate negotiators who left the Glasgow venue each night to a massive light bulb LOSS AND DAMAGE sign, prayer vigils and protesters draped in funeral sheets.

Shift to Sharm El-Sheik, and loss and damage is not even on the agenda until, in the opening fights, it is. Two weeks later, despite or because of one of the toughest geo-political environments to date, some developed countries (particularly within the European Union) expressed openness to explore

¹ https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cma4_auv_8f.pdf

² https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/parisagreement_publication.pdf

options for L&D funding. Developing countries supporting Loss and Damage concerns, and led by island States (AOSIS), offered their options, and held a united ground with China (despite the latter now responsible for some 25% of current emissions). This developing country unity, and a growing group of engaged developed countries, isolated the most obstructive developed country voices. The final decision is a commitment to funding arrangements, while allowing a year to research the 'how.'

Why celebrate this, when greenhouse emissions continue to rise, nationally determined contributions (NDCs) commitments remain dangerously insufficient, and the COP27 often felt like a bazaar for technical fixes and market-based solutions to address symptoms rather than root causes? Because committing to financially recognize loss and damage is a commitment to accountability, something that is often lacking. If loss and damage financial support can be directly tied to the drivers of climate change, based on 'polluter's pay' principles as it should be, then we link accountability with responsibility for the consequences of our actions. The decision is a major step forward for justice.

A COP27 of ambition?

At the end of the COP, many developed countries expressed deep frustration on weak 'mitigation ambition' language in the text of the final [COP27 Decision Agreement](#). Western media described the hoped for 1.5C temperature rise limit as 'on life-support'. It is true that references to climate science and a 1.5C temperature rise limit, dangerously insufficient NDCs, and need for rapid reduction of GHG emissions were stronger overall in the [Glasgow COP decision](#). Yet while words are essential to legally bound documents, nature is reacting to actions, not words. For example, despite the previous COP26 having strong mitigation and climate science language, the UK government as COP President turned around after Christmas and granted new oil and gas drilling licenses in the North Sea (pre-Russian invasion), continued to refuse permissions for building onshore wind turbines in England (note, not Scotland), called solar panels in fields 'paraphernalia,' delayed delivery of promised finance to the Green Climate Fund, and increased prison sentences for citizens protesting over poor housing insulation and fossil fuel dependence.

The COP27 was humbling

The COP27 was different, human and for many, humbling. Its focus on implementation of climate action gave attention to the wider challenges hindering progress. Alongside cries over continued failure of developed countries to deliver the promised of 100 billion in climate finance per year (from 2020 on), COP27 engaged on reform of the multilateral financial institutions lending practices which hinder implementation. There was greater attention to the sovereign debt crisis, the need for grants rather than more loans to avoid escalating defaults, and the high level of a country's GDP servicing debt repayments rather than essential climate action. And while India fought to include language to reduce 'all fossil fuels' (not just coal as the COP26), a range of extraction wealthy countries, including those calling for greater 'ambition' language, declined support.

Our human family is on a tough journey. We have spent thousands of years developing political and economic systems dependent on extraction, exploitation, and accumulation through dispossession, on a planet with limited natural resources. Our fossil fuel dependence has defined foreign policy and reasons for war.

As a family, we have attained remarkable levels of intelligence. We know what is happening and why. We have identified the influence of our human activities on the climate, soils, waters and oceans, on the existential threat we create for our and other species, and the time limit to avoid catastrophic rates of collapse. We have published these findings, offered them to our leaders for

negotiation (of words), and return home with the information. Denial is out, awareness is in. More of us grasp how essential urgent, transformative action *now* is to the chance for a 'livable and sustainable future'³ for our children and next generations, how each 0.5C rise matters.

Yet we struggle with the how. Too few decision makers engage honestly with citizens on the root causes driving climate change. Most of our economic systems feed off the main drivers of climate change and environmental destruction, from fossil fuels extraction and burning, industrial agriculture, chemical pollution, mining, and unsustainable consumption and diets. Twice as many people on this planet are overweight or obese, than are undernourished⁴. Renewable energy ownership, sustainable agriculture and consumption, reformed taxation on assets, and an economic system of 'sufficiency' for all challenge current economic growth models.

The COP27 was a complex metaphor for this period. During the conference, fossil fuel extraction wealthy countries pressed narratives relabeling fossil fuels as 'fine', "*just use carbon capture storage (CCS) to pump the CO2 in the ground*". They pressed the narrative despite findings from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) that CCS is not-yet available to scale, is energy-intensive, expensive, emissions inefficient and passes challenges of limited storage, leakage, and delayed action onto our children. Yet even that slick attempt to relabel the main driver of GHG emissions did not manage to silence the obvious.

The COP27 was dysfunctional, disappointing, and chaotic like most COPs, with the added value of water and food scarcity in the venue. Yet it was also remarkable. Something shifted here, starting with the inability to continue avoiding moral responsibility for helping those most affected but least responsible. Moral outrage won at the COP27, and it must continue. Moral outrage over profits from activities that are destroying the future of our children and future generations.

And while words cannot ensure actions follow, they can give witness. And the words of the COP27 Sharm El Sheik decision included the obvious that the previous, 'ambitious' COP did not, the words of the words of the truth tellers:

Noting the importance of transition to sustainable lifestyles and sustainable patterns of consumption and production for efforts to address climate change,

Also noting the importance of pursuing an approach to education that promotes a shift in lifestyles while fostering patterns of development and sustainability based on care, community and cooperation⁵,

- Lindsey Fielder Cook
Representative for the Human Impacts of Climate Change, QUNO Geneva

³ https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_WGII_SummaryForPolicymakers.pdf p.33

⁴ https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/sites/4/2022/11/SRCCL_SPM.pdf p.7

⁵ https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cop27_auv_2_cover%20decision.pdf p.1

For further reading, Annex 1 below outlines next steps, which the QUNO Representative for the Human Impacts of Climate Change spoke before climate negotiators at the COP27.

Annex 1:

Lindsey Fielder Cook, QUNO Representative for the Human Impacts of Climate Change

Speaking to the COP27 Global Stocktake Technical Dialogues 2

Thursday, 10 November 2022 in Sharm El Sheik.

Negotiators from the following countries were in attendance:

Barbados, Belize, Brazil, Cameroon, Chile, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, EU (+27 countries), Germany, Ghana, Grenada, Guatemala, India, Iraq, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Korea, Liberia, Libya, Mexico, Mozambique, Namibia, New Zealand, Norway, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Russia, Senegal, Seychelles, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Sudan, Switzerland, Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, United States of America, Uruguay

Civil society representatives included RINGO, BINGO, ENGO, Women and Gender, and Indigenous Peoples.

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Thank you, Harald and Farhan, and thank you Secretariat team.

I will begin with my understanding of ‘holistic and integrated approaches’, offer several positive examples, and then challenge us with needed approaches that can strengthen the Global Stocktake and signal wider international cooperation.

And in this presentation, and our wider discussion, I encourage us to engage both from here (HEAD) and from here (HEART) –

In my experience, holistic and integrated refers to approaches which:

- Address the root causes driving climate change while also helping heal related planetary crises, including existential rates of species extinction, chemical pollution, soil erosion, and ocean acidification.
- And which prioritize people and protection of nature, over profit and power interests.

In the last year alone, we celebrated the following international cooperation on holistic and integrated approaches

1. **The UN General Assembly recognition of a human right to a clean, sustainable and healthy environment – an optimistic and hopeful vision**
2. **The BEYOND Oil and Gas Agreement – BOGA – a brave commitment and witness**
3. **And with ever-growing research that a ‘human rights-based approach’ results in more coherent, legitimate, and sustainable policy.**
 - a. **In sum, more successful policy**

- Human-rights based approaches, known as ‘rights based approaches’ in the IPCC 6th Assessment Report, embed human rights, including the rights of Indigenous Peoples;
- They embed meaningful public participation in decision making, access to information, and education;
- Gender equality;
- Just transition;
- Protection of biodiversity;
- Intergenerational equity and child rights;
- And cooperation as a human rights obligation.

I will now reflect on holistic, and integrated approaches that can dramatically scale up climate action, but need greater international cooperation that the GST engagement can signal.

- 1. To repeat, rights-based approaches can ground holistic and integrated action in the GST, while also guiding us toward policies which are experienced as fair - and more likely to be supported than rejected.**
 - a. for **without people’s support, we are lost.**
 - b. and without a healthy and fair vision, **our people are lost.**
- 2. The GST can emphasize the importance of truthful engagement with people about what is happening, why it is happening, and how they can help.**
 - a. Article 12 climate change education
 - b. Truthful engagement, for example, in high consumption, high emitting countries. Globally, households with income in the top 10% contribute about 36-45% of global GHG – those racing for more, when ‘enough’ would best protect their children.
 - c. Truthful engagement on diet - 1/5th of GHG emissions are linked to human diets, yet scientific findings on meat and dairy - the unsustainable production/consumption of which drives land degradation and species extinctions - are usually suppressed in intergovernmental negotiations.
- 3. The GST can highlight how sustainable and just economic systems, and sustainable agriculture transitions, are essential for a stable climate and environment.**
 - a. Both the IPCC AR5 and AR6 identify economic growth as the top driver of CO2 emissions.
 - b. And the Paris Agreement calls for *‘sustainable lifestyles and sustainable patterns of consumption and production, with developed country Parties taking the lead -*
 - c. The GST can integrate the IPCC definition of sustainable land management, and signal the need to include ‘environmental cost’ in our definition of ‘cost’.
 - d. The GST can break down silos and signal international cooperation to support accountability movements – the rights of nature, ecocide, ecological rights of children, a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty, an International Court of Justice advisory opinion on human rights obligations in the context of climate action, and dropping ‘limited’ from ‘limited liability’.
- 4. The GST can stress the effectiveness of community-based, bottom-up climate action, including examples of positive regulation to promote decentralized renewable energy ownership that has massive holistic and integrated benefits, including peacebuilding. For example:**

- a. **For example, positive regulation in the German example**, where cash poor people can own solar panels through the right to a state development bank loan, the right sell energy at a subsidized rate that directly repays the loan, leading to individual ownership and a helpful income.
 - b. **Negative** - in England (not Scotland or Wales), community-led sustainable energy groups struggle to get permission to build a community on-shore wind turbine. The will but not the way.
 - c. **Worldwide**, most solar panel ownership remains accessible only to the middle to upper class.
5. **The GST must keep focused on emissions reduction at source, or we will miss this brief window to influence our children’s chances – and their right to - a livable and sustainable planet.**
- a. Our human family now recognizes dangerous climate change is happening, but because many root causes offer lucrative financial profits, we stall. The safer IPCC temperature pathways reflect rapid reduction of fossil fuels, yet disturbingly we are seeing fossil fuels – the main driver of climate change – being reframed as okay – rely on carbon off-sets despite IPCC warnings that land can shift from sink to source, on geo-engineering such as Carbon Dioxide Removal - which threatens biodiversity and food security and which IPCC findings relate for ‘hard to abate’ emissions, not general mitigation. Or geo-engineering technologies like carbon capture storage which is not-yet available to scale, is energy-intensive, expensive, emissions inefficient and passes challenges of limited storage, leakage, and delayed action onto our children.
6. **The GST can emphasize how real human security is a livable and sustainable planet.**
- a. We humans currently spend over 2 trillion every year on military expenditure, explained as ‘security’.
 - b. The GST can signal the urgent need for proper rules in reporting military and conflict-related emissions, both under the Paris Agreement and in national inventory guidelines under the IPCC. (est. at 5% of global emissions)
 - c. The GST can highlight how climate finance can be raised through shifting military funding away from weapons that kill people, and toward climate action and loss and damage.
7. **The GST can signal the critical need for GRANTS rather than LOANS in a world facing a sovereign debt crisis.**
- a. To signal how DEBT RELIEF could benefit holistic and integrated policies in countries crippled by debt repayments intensified by COVID 19.
 - b. And raise climate finance through polluter pay taxation, such as taxing fossil fuels at extraction, international aviation, and financial transactions – creating revenue for integrated action, support to vulnerable communities, and loss and damage.
8. **The GST can signal the critical role of international cooperation to regulate banks’ investment in fossil fuel infrastructure, and to shift billions out of fossil fuel subsidies and into climate action.**

9. **The GST can embrace language of responsibility** - we are liberated when stop denying, stop avoiding. Historically responsible, extraction wealthy countries, **can do so much more.**

10. **Finally, signal the need for international cooperation to stop the arrest and killing of environmental defenders**
 - a. they are our prophets.
 - b. **Silence them, and we silence our future.**

Thank you