

Conference Reports...

Conference of the Parties (COP) Glasgow, 31 October-13 November 2021

A Win for SIDS?

The annually held Conference of the Parties (COP) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) took place on the 31st of October to the 13th November 2021, concluding 24 hours later than the scheduled closure. The COP Presidency, the United Kingdom, and Italy co-organized the COP in the city of Glasgow, attracting more than 20,000 people from all over the world; although, it was evident that some regions were poorly represented, and some countries not represented at all, bringing into question the issue of inclusion. This year's COP was held during the Covid-19 pandemic, and with cases of infection on the rise again. The health of the attendees and the urgent need to close the Paris Agreement Rulebook presented a delicate balance for the UK Presidency to deal with.

There were many elephants in the room. The UNFCCC's Secretariat shared a synthesis report clearly showing that the NDCs submitted thus far put the planet on a pathway to 2.7°C of warming and it was clear that the US\$ 100 billion climate finance goal had not been attained. With these realities looming, Small Island Developing States (SIDS) questioned whether 1.5°C was still in sight, along with the urgent strategies to keep 1.5 alive. The temperature goal and climate finance for adaptation and loss and damage were priorities for SIDS going into Glasgow. Here is a short summary of the achievements and losses following two weeks of intense negotiations.

1.5 to stay alive

According to the UNFCCC's synthesis report of the latest round of nationally determined contributions (NDCs), islands and their surrounding marine ecosystems are doomed. The synthesis report placed the planet on a trajectory of 2.7° C of warming. On the sidelines of negotiations, political leaders of SIDS shared one key message: the temperature goal remains the most important for SIDS; if we do not reach 1.5° C and we can no longer exist as a nation, then what good will the finance do for us? These political discussions have proven useful, and the COP decided to convene an annual, high-level, ministerial round table on pre-2030 ambition. In fact, the AOSIS declaration led to the inclusion of text concerning the call to parties for the 'phase out/down of inefficient fossil fuel subsidies', all whilst recognizing

national circumstances, different capabilities and the need for just transition. It was the first time that the cover text referenced fossil fuels.

It was, therefore, favourable, to an extent, that the COP requested parties to revisit and strengthen their NDCs by the end of 2022. This is an anomaly to the typical 5-year cycle prescribed by the Paris Agreement, but it was the only way to give 1.5° C a fighting chance. It is anticipated that the Secretariat would then update the synthesis report in 2023.

Loss and damage

SIDS and Least Developed Countries have been the most fervent advocates for the inclusion of loss and damage in the climate-change discussions. And whilst in Article 8 of the Paris Agreement it was recognized as a separate pillar, aside from mitigation and adaptation, it has not benefited from the urgent need for scaling up of action and support as it relates to finance, technology transfer, and capacity-building for implementing approaches to avert, minimize and address loss and damage associated with the adverse effects of climate change.

Therefore, SIDS, alongside other developing-country parties, the Group of 77, and China, called for dedicated financing for loss and damage on a cooperative and facilitative basis through the establishment of a stand-alone facility on loss and damage under the financial mechanisms of the Convention. Financing for loss and damage has always been a contentious issue in the negotiations, as making the payment to loss and damage is perceived by some parties as an acceptance of liability and any payments may be interpreted as compensation. This did not stop Ireland and Scotland from making announcements that they would make a payment towards loss and damage; but the COP fell short of actually establishing a facility to receive this funding. Even philanthropy stepped in to provide support in indicating that they would be willing to cover the set-up costs for this new facility.

Instead, the COP decided to establish a Glasgow Dialogue between parties and other stakeholders to discuss the arrangements for funding of activities to avert, minimize and address loss and damage associated with the adverse impacts of climate change. Unless a strategic and focused approach is taken, the usefulness of a dialogue may die at nascency. That said, the COP urged the developing-country parties and other organizations to provide enhanced and additional support for activities addressing loss and damage.

It was not all bad news for loss and damage. The Santiago Network is to promote and catalyze the technical assistance of relevant organizations, bodies, networks and experts for the implementation of relevant approaches for averting, minimizing and addressing loss and

damage at the local, national and regional level in developing countries that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change.

Access to finance

Although SIDS advocate for others to mitigate, its national needs are driven by the need to adapt and build resilience. This all comes at a cost that developing-country parties have to bear. New initiatives, like the Champions on Climate Finance for Adaptation committing to channeling more finance to climate adaptation, provided a glimmer of hope and the COP continued to urge developed-country parties to at least double their collective provision of climate finance for adaptation to developing-country parties from 2019 levels by 2025, in the context of achieving a balance between mitigation and adaptation as per the Paris Agreement.

The above makes the case for new and additional finance, but developing-country parties still found that access to finance was a significant challenge. The COP emphasized these challenges and encouraged efforts to enhance access to finance. They encouraged relevant providers of financial support to consider how vulnerability to the adverse effects of climate change could be reflected in the provision and mobilization of concessional financial resources, and to consider the simplification of processes; all enhancing access to finance.

What's next – research gaps

With the Paris Agreement Rule Book completed and the NDCs submitted, ambition must translate to action and accountability. In the Seychelles' NDC, it commits to increase research to better understand, plan for, and address the vulnerability of Seychelles' fisheries, tourism and health sectors. It is only through better understanding and filling of such research gaps that will we be in a position to engage in evidence-based decision-making. Inspired by the developments of COP26, SeyCCAT hosted a Science-Policy Virtual Round Table to better understand the interface between science, policy and politics so as to ensure that future research is useful to the development of policies and the implementation of plans. One such example of this interface is when Seychelles committed to integrate blue carbon into their NDCs. This was subsequently followed by a rigorous scientific process to map the seagrass meadows of the EEZ of Seychelles that will subsequently inform what policies should be put in place to protect these critical ecosystems and thereby combat the impacts of climate change.

A Blue COP in the text and at the margins

Another win for SIDS was the inclusion of the ocean in the cover text of the Glasgow Pact. This is the result of years of work to strengthen the ocean-climate nexus. Although not named a 'Blue COP', at the 2021 COP the ocean featured significantly in both the side events, physically and virtually, and the negotiations. Seychelles and the Seychelles' Conservation and Climate Adaptation Trust led and participated in a series of events to raise the awareness of nature-based solutions, in particular as they relate to blue carbon ecosystems and innovative financing. Virtually, we also, saw the University of Seychelles' *James Michel* Blue Economy Research Institute, a project partner on the UKRI GCRF One Ocean Hub, involved in initiatives to continue to give the ocean the prominence it deserves in a space where it has traditionally been absent.

For the Hub's reflections on COP, visit <https://oneoceanhub.org/cop26-what-news-for-the-ocean/> and <https://oneoceanhub.org/one-ocean-hubs-cop26-side-events-registration-now-open/> for a summary of key events.

Angelique Pouponneau

Former CEO Seychelles Conservation and Climate Adaptation Trust