

COP27 in Egypt: Stakes and Stances

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INTRODUCTION

On the topic of climate change, the Middle East and North Africa region is now at the center of the attention. We are more conscious about the adverse effects of climate change on the MENA region specifically, with the growing awareness that pursuing climate mitigation and adaptation measures is of vital importance. The region also welcomes the largest international climate events and negotiations for the next years: COP27 and COP28 that will take place in November 2022 and 2023, in Egypt and the UAE respectively. Egypt, which has always been a proactive regional actor in the climate fora¹, is now assuming its role as a key African player of climate diplomacy by leading

and chairing the negotiations. There are however many challenges ahead of the presidency, especially given that the event occurs in the context of a fragmented geopolitical landscape following the Russian invasion of Ukraine and an extremely turbulent climate-wise summer. Sharm El Sheikh must take over from Glasgow and move forwards by leaps and bounds on the topics of mitigation, adaptation, finance and loss and damage.

WHAT IS EXPECTED?

What did we achieve in Glasgow?

One of the main objectives of COP26 was to

heighten the international community's climate targets: in 2021, 152 countries submitted more ambitious carbon pledges, while 82 committed to carbon neutrality. 190 countries agreed to reduce coal power, more than 100 countries engaged to reverse deforestation by 2030. The international community also adopted the Glasgow Climate Pact, an array of decisions and regulations for climate action in the 2020s ². The document explicitly sets, according to the IPCC recommendations, that to remain under the threshold of +1.5°C carbon emissions must phase down 45% by 2030. It also establishes a work programme on mitigation ambitions and adaptation goals, to assess and measure progress made every year on those fronts, which is a major novelty in the history of the COPs³. Now that promises have been made last year, the main mission of COP27 is to build on the foundation stones laid by COP26 for the 2020s and to ensure engagements are turned into concrete actions.

What are the goals of Sharm-El-Sheik?

"What we want this COP to be about is moving from pledges to implementation. [...] we want this COP to be about the practicalities", Rania Al Mashat, Egyptian Minister for International Cooperation ⁴

The COP27 will take place between the 7th and the 17th of November, with an agenda divided by thematic and sectoral days - finance, science and youth, decarbonization, adaptation and agriculture, gender, water, air and energy, biodiversity - with the final day dedicated to solutions. The Egyptian presidency's vision is to endorse the transformation of Glasgow pledges into fulfillments and determines four goals during the negotiations: review and increase the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)

ambitions on mitigation, place adaptation at the forefront of climate action, improve clarity and commitments on green finance and finally facilitate agreements during the negotiations ⁵.

The IPCC Sixth Assignment Synthesis report is projected to be released in late 2022 or early 2023 - hopefully it will be published ahead of COP27 in November. It is aimed to synthesize for policymakers the three previous reports published between October 2021 and April 2022 on the physical science basis of climate change, adaptation and mitigation. This will provide scientific evidence and concrete recommendations, a necessary step to enhance global political commitment during international gatherings. IPCC reports and assessment provide expertise that concrete agreements can build on, as did the Glasgow Pact ⁶.

What is the primary concern of the Presidency?

One of the COP priorities given by the Egyptian presidency will be green finance. The Glasgow Climate Pact reaffirmed the commitment made by developed countries in Copenhagen in 2009 to provide 100 billion US\$ per year to developing countries for climate adaptation and mitigation, an engagement that has since largely failed. The amount of green finance provided reached up to 80 billion US\$ in 2019 and 83.3 in 2020 ⁷. At COP26, developed economies also committed to double their funds for climate adaptation in developing countries, which now represents only 25% of allocated green finance ⁸. This issue will therefore be at the core of the discussions, as well as the long-standing problem of debt burdens for poor countries, and initiatives to promote riskless and attractive private investments in the developing economies.

What will be the main challenge?

Implementing and raising climate ambitions in the contexts of the rise of global inflation, the food and energy crisis and the geopolitical fragmentation caused by the Russian-Ukrainian war, will be a political challenge⁹. Both advanced and developing economies are projected to enter a period of recessions, with the global growth decreasing from 6.1% in 2021 to 3.2% in 2022 and 2.9% in 2023, and global commodity prices to be well superior to the last five-year average¹⁰. The COP and Egyptian presidency's main task will be therefore to maintain climate action as a priority, not relegated to a second plan in the face of more economic short-term

difficulties¹¹. On the contrary, climate change adverse effects are also to be adding some additional financial charges in the near future without appropriate climate actions. The economic consequences of the Ukraine invasion are not the only driver of the surge of energy prices in Europe for instance. Extreme weather events caused by climate change - heat waves, fires, drought - that Europe has experienced this summer have also contributed to the increase of prices, by boosting the demand on electricity but also by disrupting some energy source, notably hydropower¹². One of the main challenges will also be to maintain the +1.5°C target as a reality, preventing countries from softening their efforts to focus on the +2°C target.



WHY TAKING CONCRETE ACTIONS MATTER?

The four goals of cooperation, mitigation, adaptation and finance established by the Egyptian presidency at the COP have not been randomly chosen. They deal with major problems of climate action, with large repercussions for Egypt and its neighbours. COP26 in Glasgow might have paved the way for more robust climate endeavours, but the road for a climate-proofed world still remains long.

Why is it urgent to mitigate?

*'At two degrees we see dramatic alterations to the ability of the Earth's system to maintain the conditions that allow for human life and indeed other species' life,' Maria Ivanova, professor of global governance at University of Massachusetts Boston*¹³

It has been assessed during COP26 that current countries' pledges to mitigate climate change are not ambitious enough to lower the temperature under +2°C: under those promises, the Earth will warm at +2.4°C by 2100. In addition, present vows to net-zero by the middle of the century will only contain the rise of temperature to +1.9°C. Because of the cumulative world's carbon emission, the threshold of +1.5°C will likely be reached around 2030, with some adverse effects becoming irreversible¹⁴. The more the earth's temperatures increase, the more the risk of having extreme weather events such as drought, coastline submersion, heatwaves, wildfires, erratic rains and floods rises as well - dramatic climatic events we have all experienced this summer around the world.



Regarding mitigation of climate change, there is a double challenge the COP must therefore address:

👉 increasing the world's ambitions and filling the gap between mitigation pledges and needs, as well as ensuring the implementation of concrete steps on the front of decarbonization, must happen immediately. This cannot wait for the next COPs and will require everyone on board.

What is the MENA countries' stance on mitigation?

In 2021 in Glasgow, most of the Middle Eastern and North African countries submitted or revised their NDC¹⁵ for more ambitious targets, but only few have pledged for carbon neutrality: Israel, Lebanon, Yemen and the UAE by 2050, Turkey by 2053 and Bahrain and Saudi Arabia by 2060.

Ahead of COP27, only Egypt has submitted a more robust NDC for now. Egypt now pledges

to reduce its GHG emissions by 25% by 2030¹⁶. It is the first time that it revises its climate promises since the Paris Agreements, which is a major step forward considering that there was no quantification made in its first NDC. Targets set by the new Egyptian NDC are however still analysed as highly insufficient by the Climate Action Tracker, which also criticises a lack of transparency of this new declaration¹⁷. The submission of renewed commitments by Egypt will hopefully create a precedent in the region and encourage other countries to raise their climate objectives.

Why is green finance a primary concern?

Enhancing greater ambitions around mitigation is not the only challenge of the Egyptian presidency, the issue of green finance is also a large piece. The amount of 100 billions of US\$ provided each year for international finance - even with a fulfilled promise - will barely provide what it is needed for developing countries to enhance mitigation, invest in adaptation and compensate loss and damages, it is now urgent to bridge the gap between the promises and

the reality¹⁸. The total amount estimated to overcome the climate crisis in Africa alone could be between 1.3 to 1.6 trillion of US\$ between 2022 and 2030¹⁹.



Re-structuring green finance is vital for developing countries to adapt to climate change but also to attain their mitigation pledges if we want to meet at least the +2 °C target.

Indeed, developing countries' mitigation targets are conditional to international financial aid: in the Tunisian NDC, out of the 45% of planned reduction of GHG in 2030, 17% is conditional to international finance, for instance. Iraq has conditioned 15% of its GHG reduction to climate aids, and will work to decrease 1 to 2% with its own financial means²⁰.

Another key topic the COP and the Egyptian presidency should address urgently is the fair distribution of green finance. Between 2016 and 2020, the Asian continent concentrated 42% of climate finance, followed by Africa (26%), the Americas (17%), Europe (5%) and Oceania (1%). Lower-middle-income countries and upper-middle-income countries received 70% of total climate finance, while low-income countries shared only 8% of the distribution²¹. When taking the ratio of fundings per inhabitant, green fundings allocated to extremely fragile countries is also considerably low: on average, climate finance represents 2.1\$ per capita in extremely fragile states, 10.8\$ in fragile countries and 161.7\$ per inhabitant in non-fragile nations²².

What we know for sure is that the most vulnerable countries are the least prepared and the least able to stomach a climate crisis,

especially low-income countries, and countries at war. According to the International Committee of the Red Cross, out of the 25 most vulnerable countries to climate change, 14 are mired in conflicts. Most are in Africa along with Yemen and Afghanistan and "are among those most neglected by climate action and finance"²³. Green finance allocated to the most fragile countries of the MENA region, in particular Lebanon, Libya, Syria, and Yemen, have even been lower than other countries at war such as Myanmar, Ukraine and Afghanistan²⁴. Guaranteeing that climate finance also benefits the most vulnerable countries, even when the obstacles for implementation are numerous, should be one of the major topics discussed during the COP27²⁵.

Why is it urgent to deal with adaptation and loss and damage?

Climate finance has less targeted adaptation than mitigation over the years. However, the IPCC ascertainment on climate impacts over the past decade is clear:



adaptation is key to enhance climate resilience and reduce vulnerability.

It evaluates that needs for adaptation will reach 127 billion US\$ by 2030 and 295 billion US\$ by 2050²⁶ but it is in some cases insufficient to cope with the advancement of climate change.

*"Across sectors and regions, the most vulnerable people and systems are observed to be disproportionately affected. The rise in weather and climate extremes has led to some irreversible impacts as natural and human systems are pushed beyond their ability to adapt."*²⁷

This phenomenon is called 'loss and damage', it refers to the destructive effects of climate change, for which neither adaptation nor mitigation measures are efficient ²⁸. Loss and damage are particularly prominent in economic sectors relying on the environment such as agriculture, fisheries, tourism, and forestry ²⁹. It affects mostly the most vulnerable countries to climate change, small islands victims of sea-level rise or countries suffering from desertification for instance.

Developing countries have raised this issue for years in the climate negotiation fora, to create

a specific financial resource dedicated to this issue, but the topic remains very polarized as no countries have been attributed as a provider of the fundings. COP26 set up a three-year dialogue to discuss "arrangements for the funding of activities to avert, minimize and address loss and damage associated with the adverse impacts of climate change." ³⁰

Developing countries failed to raise the issue as a thematic on the COP27 agenda in June 2022 during the first session of the Glasgow Dialogue, but the topic will certainly be underpinning the discussions on adaptation at Sharm El Sheikh.



CONCLUSION

We are feeling climate change more than ever. While shifting to low-carbon energy is critical, enhancing global capabilities to adapt to the new climate patterns is imperative, and a matter of solidarity and human rights. The world has all the required abilities, knowledge, and resources to propel appropriate climate action. It remains to be seen whether the international community will reach consensus to adopt bolder and more conclusive climate engagements.

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