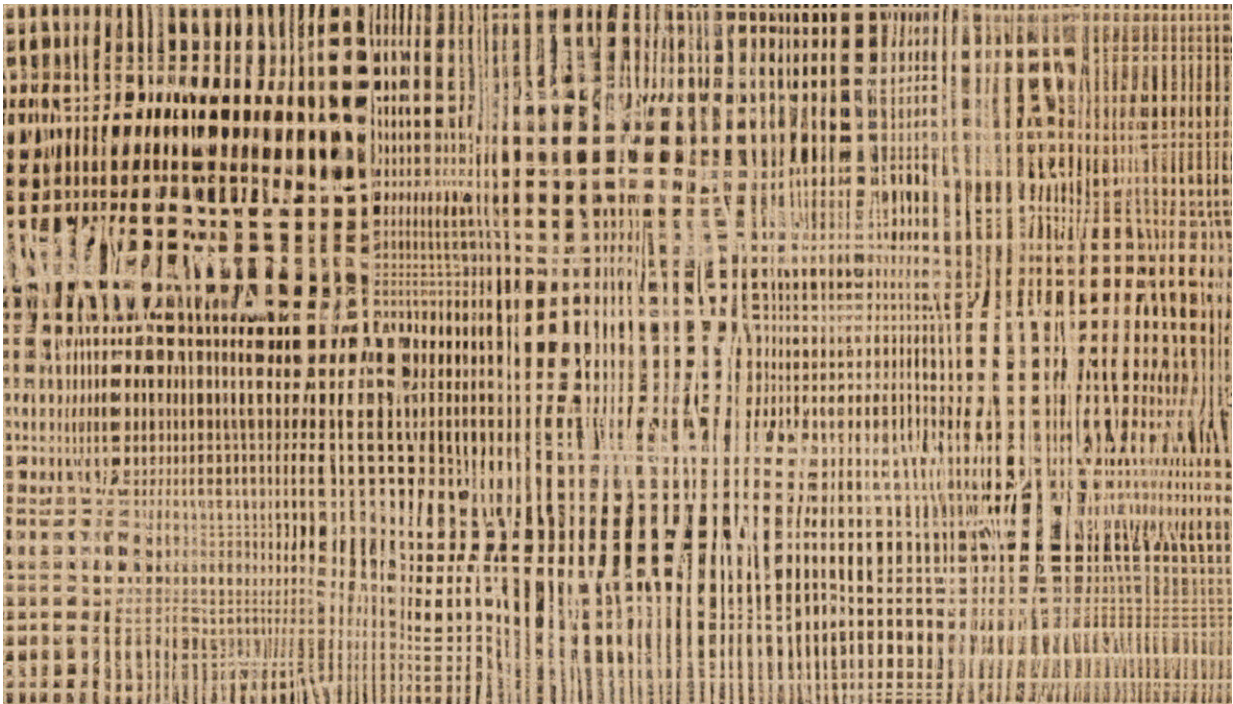


COP27 explained by experts: What is it and why should I care?

November 4 2022, by Imraan Valodia and Julia Taylor



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[COP27 is the 27th Conference of the Parties](#) (countries) that signed up to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The convention was established at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, and has been ratified by 198 countries. They agreed to stabilize the production of greenhouse gases in order to prevent dangerous climate change.

Since then, the Conference of the Parties has been hosted in a different country each year. These conferences broadly provide a platform for the negotiation of international climate change treaties.

The very first treaty acknowledged that the responsibility for action was different for developed and developing countries, because developed countries were responsible for most greenhouse gas emissions.

Despite some gains, commitment to these treaties has not translated into the action necessary to shift the course of global climate change. The recent [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report](#) states that global average temperatures have already reached 1.1°C above pre-industrial levels and that warming of over 1.5°C is all but inevitable unless drastic action is taken.

Everyone is affected by climate change, but some people and regions are [more vulnerable](#) than others. Regions that will experience the most adverse impacts of climate change are West, Central and East Africa, South Asia, Central and South America, Small Island Developing States and the Arctic. Populations living in informal settlements will have the worst of it.

Vulnerability to climate change impacts is driven by socioeconomic, political and environmental factors. African countries have [already experienced](#) loss and damage due to climate change. For example, food production, [economic output](#) and biodiversity have all declined and more people are at risk of dying due to climate change in African countries.

The COP27 is therefore important because that is where decisions are made about how to respond to climate change.

Climate change treaties

Three international treaties have been adopted on international climate change cooperation. They led to the development of different bodies which all convene under the banner of the COP. COP is where they meet, negotiate and evaluate progress, even though COP technically only refers to the parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

The first treaty was the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

The second was the Kyoto Protocol, established in 1997. Countries made commitments to reduce their emissions of greenhouse gases. The Kyoto Protocol was based on the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. It acknowledged that because of their higher levels of economic development, developed countries could and should take greater responsibility to reduce emissions.

The third and most recent treaty is the 2015 Paris Agreement. It covers [climate change mitigation](#), adaptation and financing and aims to limit the rise in temperatures to less than 2°C above pre-industrial levels. All signatories need to develop a non-binding plan for climate change mitigation, including reducing emissions. They also have to report on progress.

A key weakness of the Paris Agreement is that it is non-binding. Also, the commitments are self-determined. A [recent study](#) found that even if all countries did meet their commitments, it would not be enough to limit warming to below 2°C.

It is important to understand and engage in these processes as the impacts of climate change are increasing globally. The increase in the global average temperature is one of several climate impacts. Others [include](#) increased likelihood of droughts or floods, and increased intensity of storms and wildfires.

The frequency of climate events will increase as temperatures rise. There is an urgent need for action to prevent [global warming](#) from rising above 2°C. Temperatures over 2°C [will result in](#) irreversible climate impacts such as sea level rise, and affect far more people than an increase of 1.5°C.

Responses to climate change

There are three policy areas which have emerged to respond to climate change.

The first is mitigation—the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions to stabilize the climate. Examples of mitigation include replacing fossil fuels with [renewable energy sources](#), or developing electrified public transport to replace private vehicles powered by combustion engines.

The second is adaptation—interventions which would support climate resilience and reduce vulnerability. Examples include improved water management and conservation to reduce risk of drought, initiatives to improve food security and support for biodiversity.

The last policy area deals with loss and damage. [Loss and damage](#) refers to "the economic and non-economic damages associated with slow onset events and extreme weather events caused by global warming and the tools and institutions that identify and mitigate such risks." Interventions to address loss and damage can include risk management support and finance which is often framed as climate reparations.

Mitigation and adaptation are well understood and established within climate policy. And they have finance mechanisms within international treaties, even though existing commitments to these mechanisms have [not materialized](#) in practice, particularly when it comes to adaptation. Loss and damage, however, has received far less attention in

international treaties and negotiations.

Highlighting loss and damage

The [Warsaw International Mechanism on Loss and Damage](#) was established in 2013 to provide a framework to address loss and damage. It aims to improve understanding of risk management approaches, increase coordination and dialogue among stakeholders and enhance action and support.

The issue of loss and damage was incorporated into the Paris Agreement, but without any specific commitments around it. During negotiations at COP25, the Santiago Network was set up to avert, minimize and address loss and damage for developing countries but it focuses mostly on technical assistance rather than finance. At COP26 (in 2021) there was an [agreement to fund the Santiago Network](#), but the institutional framework is not yet finalized.

Loss and damage was raised as an important issue to be addressed during COP26. There were some promising moves, such as the Scottish first minister, Nicola Sturgeon, [pledging](#) £2 million towards a loss and damage finance facility. But many rich nations did not support this.

The negotiations led to the proposal to establish the Glasgow Finance Facility for loss and damage. But the wording of the decision was [changed at the last minute](#) to the Glasgow Dialogues, which committed to discussing arrangements for funding activities to avert, minimize and address loss and damage. This change has delayed any real financial support for loss and damage in the short term.

This was very disappointing for developing country parties, who will be pushing once more to secure financing for loss and damage at COP27, and holding other countries to account for the [US\\$100 billion annual](#)

[commitment towards climate finance](#) which has yet to materialize.

Many [climate](#) activists from the global south feel that if a [financing facility for loss and damage](#) is not discussed at COP27, it will be a failed conference.

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