

Access and exclusion: What COP28 revealed about the dynamics of global climate diplomacy

January 25 2024, by Marjolaine Lamontagne and Charles Berthelet



Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

With the host country of this year's COP29 climate conference already [forced into an embarrassing course correction over a shocking lack of](#)

[representation in its organizing committee](#), the issues of influence, access and exclusion at COP have never been more critical.

Anyone who has ever attended a Conference of the Parties (COP) can attest to the crushing disappointment of traveling thousands of kilometers, only to have United Nations security deny access to the room where key aspects of global climate policy are being debated.

This situation happened to us on more than one occasion as "this room is at full capacity; we are letting no one else in" became a commonly heard refrain.

Such a situation is unfortunately typical of the [highly exclusionary system of interstate diplomacy](#) that has been one of the defining institutions of the modern era. This system of exclusion is notably borne of the mundane practicalities of room capacities and on one's status as a "party" (i.e., a national representative) or a "non-party" to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

As Ph.D. candidates in [international relations](#) and sociology—and registered participants at COP28 in Dubai—we saw [gridlock](#) up close. COP28 produced yet another series of underwhelming [decisions](#) celebrated as a "historical achievement" when considered through the lenses of geopolitics instead of those of climate science.

Despite these difficulties, COPs are far from pointless.

States and civil societies

Prior to our departure, and upon our return to Montréal, we have been confronted with widespread cynicism and repeated skepticism from friends and family wondering whether a costly and carbon-intensive global gathering of [more than 70,000 people \(the biggest COP in](#)

[history](#)) would ever make a difference in reversing the climate crisis.

We agree to some extent with such criticism, for instance when considering [the astounding number of fossil industry lobbyists](#) that attended COP28.

Yet, we have returned from Dubai with a renewed conviction that COPs can nonetheless play a fundamental—if somewhat counter-intuitive—role in guiding the world towards a more sustainable future.

While COPs often fall short as a collective action exercise among states, they are a crucial venue for global [communities of practice](#)—groups which stem from diverse civil societies around the world—to take form. This is progressively increasing the influence and power of civil interests relative to sovereign states in international politics.

By progressively integrating non-state—and non-industry—voices within the inner sanctums of international politics, future COPs can contribute [to bridging the current separation between state and "non-state" entities](#).

Enabling connections

The UNFCCC process is already designed to encourage some measure of civil society engagement.

COP28 had a blue zone space within the host country managed and policed by the UN and only accessible to individuals accredited by either their [national government](#) or by an observer organization to the UNFCCC. The purpose of the latter form of accreditation is to increase the inclusivity, representation and accountability of global climate governance.

Most non-party observers to the convention are grouped under one of

[nine official constituencies recognized by the UNFCCC](#). Some of the constituencies coalesce around shared claims and interests, such as business, environmental, trade unions and farmer NGOs.

Other constituencies represent shared experiences of the world and a common fight against discrimination. Some groups are formed of members who embody alternate forms or levels of public authority and sovereignty, such as [local governments](#), municipal authorities and Indigenous Peoples.

Through designated representatives (called [focal points](#)), constituencies can make formal interventions and present joint positions during COP plenaries and opening and closing ceremonies.

Constituencies can also participate in workshops convened by the UN throughout the year leading up to COP and make brief statements at the end of party negotiations—crucially, "when time permits."

That being said, states have no formal obligation to take into account constituency positions, and focal point statements are too often delivered in the final minutes of intergovernmental meetings when most national delegates have already vacated the room and chairpersons have reduced speakers' time.

To increase their influence, constituencies have been petitioning states and the UNFCCC secretariat for the creation of mandated events and dedicated platforms. Examples of these include the Youth Forum Dialogue, the [Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform](#), and the newly created [Ministerial Meeting on Urbanization and Climate Change](#) and [Annual High-level Ministerial Roundtable on Just Transition](#). Such events bring national delegates and observers in direct conversation around topics of common concern.

Despite these efforts, the already secluded blue zone remains an exclusionary space in which the color of one's badge—pink for party delegates and yellow for observers—directly determines one's ease of circulation on the conference premises.

For many people, participation in COP will be made impossible simply due to the difficulty of securing a badge, a lack of funds to finance their trip or because of a denied visa to the host country—attendees from the Global South are particularly affected by the latter issues.

Look to the margins

The physical space at COP can, in some ways, be compared to a solar system. The national negotiators and heads of state stand directly at the center while all others revolve around them in an attempt to shift the gravity of negotiations and weigh in on the content of the texts—the ultimate goal of the game.

That is not to say the flurry of activity happening on the outer circles of this gravitational field is insignificant. To the contrary, COPs are unique sites for the formation and consolidation of global communities of practice (such as the "[climate justice community](#)") that evolved within the hundreds of country and NGO pavilions surrounding the negotiation rooms.

While COPs unsurprisingly appear distant and indecipherable to many citizens, these practitioners have spent years honing their advocacy and information gathering skills to the benefit of their own communities at home. They leverage the exceptional proximity to national decision-makers they have on COP premises to [stage creative demonstrations](#) and engage in informal lobbying of party negotiators in the conference halls.

By exchanging ideas, [best practices](#) and reliable insider knowledge on

the COP process, non-party blue zone representatives can directly contribute to creating productive linkages between science, human rights and policy.

This process is critically important for advancing multilevel decision-making, global and local governance, and building connections between national policymakers and wider civil society at all scales.

As we look ahead to COP29, we should be turning our attention to the apparent margins of climate talks. By focusing on these areas we will see an institution that should not only be considered as a means to an end, but as a valuable social process in, and of, itself.

This article is republished from [The Conversation](#) under a Creative Commons license. Read the [original article](#).

Provided by The Conversation

Citation: Access and exclusion: What COP28 revealed about the dynamics of global climate diplomacy (2024, January 25) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2024-01-access-exclusion-cop28-revealed-dynamics.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--