

THE HEAVY LIFTING ON CLIMATE ACTION MUST BEGIN

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Environmental Degradation - GHGs, Ozone Depletion and Climate Change

Will the recently concluded, and much reported on, [Glasgow climate meeting \(COP26\)](#) make a difference to humanity's efforts to address global [climate change](#)? Glasgow's success was that it finished building the scaffolding for climate action initiated through the [Paris Agreement](#). But true success depends on whether countries are receptive to these nudges. Without generating greater political support for implementation within countries, international negotiations do risk becoming the 'blah, blah, blah' talk-fests that youth activists such as Greta Thunberg warn about.

Yet, Glasgow was necessary for stronger action to address climate change because it put in place levers that stimulate domestic processes, such as the formulation of domestic pledges or 'Nationally Determined Contributions' (NDCs). Drawing on the insights from a webinar organised by the Centre for Policy Research, what were Glasgow's successes and failures?

Wide fault lines within the Global Climate Risk Index

Mitigation, or efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, as always, grabbed the headlines. Glasgow strengthened the Paris Agreement mechanism of eliciting pledges from countries and ratcheting them up over time. It requested countries to update and strengthen 2030 emission targets in their NDCs by the end of 2022, earlier than previously expected, created a benchmark of five yearly cycles for updates, urged countries to prepare long-term emissions strategies, and strengthened mechanisms to scrutinise both.

Success at Glasgow was explicitly defined around 'keeping 1.5 degrees alive' through such pledges. When added up by modellers, the flurry of net-zero pledges extracted pre-Glasgow, including a surprise net zero by 2070 pledge by India, showed that limiting warming to 1.5° is still technically feasible, but only just. In the jargon of climate negotiations, Glasgow clarified the 'ambition cycle', and this appears to have had results in the form of enhanced pledges.

There are two problems with this interpretation. First, the Paris, and Glasgow, approach focusing on target-setting gives insufficient importance to the challenge of implementing those targets. Long-term aspirational targets to 'keep 1.5 alive' get the headlines, but detailed shorter term 2030 targets, for which today's politicians can be held accountable, have received less attention. A focus on shorter term targets and their implementation — which India to its credit has been highlighting — will be important. Second, by calling on countries to strengthen targets to align with the Paris Agreement objectives without explicitly considering that countries have different roles and responsibilities in doing so risks side-stepping, again, the long-standing issue of climate equity. Future arguments over how we know whether a countries' pledges are adequate and fair are guaranteed.

U.K. PM says COP26 climate deal 'tinged with disappointment'

The question of equity crystallised around a specific high profile clause calling for the 'phase down of unabated coal power and phase out of inefficient fossil fuel subsidies'. India ended up at the centre of this particular storm, because it was the Indian Minister who read out an amendment modifying 'phase-out' to 'phase-down' for coal, among other changes, although the language originated from the U.S.-China statement. India's real concerns included not

precluding subsidies for social purposes, such as for cooking gas; querying whether from an equity point of view, all countries should be asked to limit coal use at the same time; and noting the lack of mention of oil and gas.

On coal specifically, India is actually on a strong footing substantively, as our investments in new coal-fired plants have been much less than projected even a few years ago. Nonetheless, the term 'phase-out' is of considerable importance to vulnerable countries, and, that India introduced the amendment although the language originated elsewhere, has given us a somewhat unnecessary diplomatic black eye. From an environmental point of view, more explicit discussion of coal, but ideally all fossil fuels, is a positive, including for India. From a developmental view, however, India is concerned that explicit mention of coal constrains us in our choice of fuel. A possible way out is for India to explicitly seek global support for an accelerated transition away from coal, an approach taken by South Africa.

Glasgow climate summit | Coal 'phase-down' is a right, says Environment Minister

Adaptation — preparing for the reality that some climate impacts are unavoidable — has long been neglected in global negotiations, reflecting a global power imbalance that places less weight on the concerns of vulnerable nations. In this context, it was a partial win that Glasgow set up an explicit two year work programme for a 'global goal' on adaptation.

However, the important complementary agenda of 'loss and damage' — compensating for unavoidable impacts that go beyond adaptation — received at most lip service. Even though there was discussion of a specific mechanism, backed by funding, to the dismay of small, vulnerable nations, only a 'dialogue' was established. At the core is the fear among some developed countries that taking forward the loss and damage agenda will open the door to a call for reparations.

Climate finance promised to be the central issue of COP26, with considerable frustration from developing countries that the decade-long commitment of \$100 billion had not been met. Beyond expressing 'deep regret' at this failure — a diplomatic slap on the face for developed countries — Glasgow did no more than establish a work programme on post-2025 financing and continue tracking progress on the \$100 billion. The exception was a call to double adaptation finance by 2025. Since current levels of finance are already low, this implies mobilising about \$40 billion, which is well short of estimated needs; the United Nations finds current needs are \$70 billion and rise considerably in coming years.

India demands \$1 trillion as 'climate finance'

However, there were indications that the climate finance discussion may become more complex. South Africa announced it had received multi-donor support of \$8.5 billion to support a 'just transition' out of coal, and India is reportedly negotiating support from the World Bank to address coal mine closures. Former Bank of England Governor Mark Carney indicated that companies committed to net zero initiatives could marshal a scarcely believable \$130 trillion, suggesting growing efforts to mobilise private finance. Developing countries have long insisted that publicly funded climate finance is a right devolving from the 'polluter pays' principle rather than aid. However, these tendencies suggest that to access substantial funds may require embracing a more multi-stranded approach.

There were two particularly important 'nuts and bolts' elements of what is called the 'Paris Rulebook' that were completed in Glasgow. First, the transparency framework was completed, which includes reporting rules and formats for emissions, progress on pledges and finance contributions. While India and some other countries pushed for separate rules for developed and

developing countries, the Glasgow outcomes narrowed this gap. To ratchet up pledges and action over time, this enhanced transparency is crucial and, other than issues of capacity, there is little justification for separate developing and developed country transparency requirements.

Editorial | [The numbers game: On Glasgow climate meeting](#)

The second key was completion of agreed rules for carbon markets, the complexities of which had stymied agreement for four years. For example, credits generated from earlier periods, including through the Clean Development Mechanism were permitted, but only from 2013 onwards. Rules were put in place to limit the scope for 'double-counting' of credits by more than one country.

What Glasgow accomplished was necessary, if not sufficient, for accelerated climate action. The meeting hit many, but not all, of its procedural benchmarks by building scaffolding for the future. But the real determinant of success or failure rests on national politics and popular support for climate change within countries — how countries use the scaffolding. For India, these politics are complex because they revolve around simultaneously balancing concerns over whether our policy space will be limited by inequities embedded in the global mitigation efforts, and our own interests as a vulnerable country in enhancing and accelerating climate action. A balanced view requires consideration of both objectives.

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