

UNDERSTANDING COP27

IN THE CONTEXT OF CLIMATE CHANGE IN PAKISTAN

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THE KNOWLEDGE FORUM

ABOUT US

The Knowledge Forum is an independent organisation that seeks to produce knowledge - based resources to assist in interventions and advocacy for communities ' rights . The initiative is rooted in the ideology that knowledge strengthens and guides the direction of actions aimed at advancing rights and social justice processes . TKF's knowledge generation is driven by the community agenda , prioritising the inclusion of their voice and participation. Through high quality research and discourse curation , TKF aims to assist in the creation of a more informed perspective on complex themes that have a bearing on communities ' access to rights and participation in political , democratic and development processes . TKF has been founded by a group of human rights practitioners , development professionals , activists and legal experts .



BRIEF OVERVIEW

The Knowledge Forum (TKF) organised a panel discussion on ‘Understanding COP27 in the context of climate change in Pakistan’ at the Karachi Press Club on November 10, 2022. The objective of the panel discussion was to enhance an understanding of Conference of the Parties (COP) processes, encourage public dialogue regarding the significance of COP27, initiate debate around its processes, deliberate over channels to support public participation in relevant matters, garner input on climate agendas, and Pakistan’s participation in the global event.

The panel discussion was moderated by TKF’s Director Ms. Zeenia Shaukat. Its key discussants included Ms Abira Ashfaq, a human rights activist associated with social movements and a faculty member at the Institute of Business Administration; Dr Aqdas Afzal, the program director and economics professor at Habib University; and Mustafa Amjad, the program manager at Renewables First.

BACKGROUND OF COP

Conferences of the Parties have been annually organised by the United Nations since 1995. Parties refer to the countries that have signed the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which entered into force in March 1994 following the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro where the Convention was first presented. At the annual event of COP, formal negotiating sessions are held for countries to advance their climate commitments and actions. At the same time, COPs are also used as a forum for a range of stakeholders from around the world to discuss the climate crisis and solutions. Following the 2015 Paris Agreement, the structure and orientation for the annual COPs now centre around the Agreement. COPs now represent a deadline for countries to submit enhanced nationally determined contributions (for 2030, embodying efforts by each country to reduce national emissions and adapt to the impacts of climate change).



SIGNIFICANCE OF COP27 FOR PAKISTAN

The COP27 was held from November 5 to November 18 in Sharm al-Shaikh, Egypt. This event marks a special significance for Pakistan, which is currently reeling from devastating floods that have impacted 33 million people in the country. The flooding has followed extreme weather patterns in the form of heatwaves and erratic rains. Pakistan's government has been flagging climate reparations following the floods. Its agenda at COP27 included advocacy of climate finance, loss and damages, and adaptation. Moreover, at COP27, the Prime Minister of Pakistan Shehbaz Sharif jointly chaired a round table with the Prime Minister for Norway, in addition to bilateral engagements at the ministerial level, negotiations on eight dedicated streams, and side events by Pakistani delegation and civil society members.

While the common citizens of Pakistan are bearing the brunt of the climate events, there is a need for contextualising COPs beyond the exchanges in closed-door settings of committee meetings and consultations. Public participation in shaping the COPs' agenda is critical to determining the priorities of the conference and has important implications for Pakistan's actions to respond to the climate change crisis.



PROCEEDINGS OF THE PANEL DISCUSSION

The session began with a rundown of The Knowledge Forum's objectives for conducting the discussion on the COP27 in Egypt where Pakistan, after witnessing one of the worst flooding in its history in 2022 with one-third of the country under water, initiated a conversation about 'loss and damage' incurred as a result of climate impact on its population.

Pakistan's importance at the global event is also being touted as significant following various other climate events that the country has experienced including extreme heatwaves and winters. It was highlighted before the start of the discussion that 128,000 people have so far died due to the impact of climate change in Pakistan. Other impacts include food shortage, agricultural loss, water shortage, and the spread of diseases among the population.

Countries around the world, particularly the Global North, are now under pressure to address these crises, as they are known to be the biggest contributors to the adverse impacts of climate change. They must now work more to reduce emissions within their geographical boundaries, adapt their activities and practices while keeping climate change in consideration, and compensate and address reparations for countries suffering the most.

This year, Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and his team visited COP27, alongside members of civil society and activists. Therefore, it has helped take the public's concerns to the global platform at the event. But since climate change is experienced at the micro-level, COP27 needs to understand relevant issues at the same level.

The session, therefore, was focused on bringing such facts and discussions from the ground on record, and conveying it to those making policy decisions at the highest levels both nationally and internationally, with particular emphasis on the role of marginalised groups including women, children, workers, religious minorities, and gender minorities in COP27.



MUSTAFA AMJAD — PROGRAM MANAGER, RENEWABLES FIRST

Mustafa Amjad, program manager of Renewables First — a think tank that works on energy and environment —broke down the process of COP and contextualised the relevant work being done in Pakistan.

At the start of his presentation ‘The COP Process: Embodiment of Global Climate Planning and Action’, Amjad shared a brief historical context of COP.

Amjad shared that the UN first organised the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1992, in which the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was adopted and its coordinating agency — what we now know as the UN Climate Change Secretariat — was put into place. In this treaty, nations agreed to "stabilise greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere to prevent dangerous interference from human activity on the climate system". So far, 197 different parties have signed it.

Since 1994, when the treaty entered into force, every year the UN has been bringing together almost every country on earth for global climate summits or COPs.

During these meetings, nations have negotiated various extensions of the original treaty to establish legally binding limits on emissions, for example, the Kyoto Protocol in 1997 and the Paris Agreement adopted in 2015, in which all countries of the world agreed to step up efforts to try and limit global warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial temperatures, and boost climate action financing.

Amjad then shared with participants the COP union which encapsulates negotiations, plenaries, science, host country, side events, climate ambition, and geopolitics. He then moved on to sharing the key objectives of COP27 which included mitigation, adaptation, climate finance, and loss and damage finance.

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Climate change is here. Beyond doing everything we can to cut emissions and slow the pace of global warming, countries must also adapt to climate consequences so that they can protect their citizens

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Focusing on the significance of mitigation, Amjad said that climate change mitigation refers to efforts to reduce or prevent the emission of greenhouse gases.

“Mitigation can mean using new technologies and renewable energy sources, making older equipment more energy efficient, or changing management practices or consumer behaviour,” he added.

He shared that last year, developed countries agreed to at least double finance for adaptation, and many stakeholders are calling for even greater levels of adaptation funding to match the amounts that are now being spent on mitigation, as established in the Paris Agreement. “This will be a big conversation topic at Sharm el-Sheikh,” Amjad said.

Amjad also shared some statistics concerning the recent devastating floods in Pakistan and went on to highlight the country’s key goal to curb climate change impacts.

He shared that as chair of the G77+China bloc, Pakistan is in a good position to drive the agenda for developing countries; therefore, a few promises will need to be made and delivered on; Pakistan’s focus on finance: mitigation, adaptation, loss and damage; and lastly, to focus on demanding global action and not just promises.



DR AQDAS AFZAL — PROGRAM DIRECTOR AND ECONOMICS PROFESSOR, HABIB UNIVERSITY

In his session at the panel discussion, Dr Aqdas Afzal talked about the way Pakistan has approached COP27. He said that Pakistan has done immense preparation to go to COP27. The government called in its ace negotiators including Munir Akram to be a part of the delegation. Sherry Rehman is also leading the delegation very well. The contingent is diversified, and even students are also part of the delegation. Pakistan prepared very well overall. However, a few days before the event PM Shehbaz spoke to Financial Times in an interview and said a few things were concerning. Dr Aqdas said that the PM spoke about climate justice, given the kind of catastrophes Pakistan has gone through remain outlier events but did not emphasise reparations.

“The heavy rainfalls were eight times worse than in the past. This goes back to the countries, that have burnt fossil fuels for the past 200 to 250 years, who must compensate Pakistan for the damage done to our environment. Shehbaz said that we don’t want reparations,” Dr Aqdas said, adding that the countries must compensate for the damages.

He added that the word reparation means to repair or restore. It can also be used as an alternative to compensation.

“Justice never completes unless the aggressor and oppressor don’t compensate the oppressed. If we talk about climate justice on one side, then why aren’t we focusing on reparations? We cannot withdraw our demand for reparations thinking that the Global North will not agree with it. We cannot give the aggressor a free pass to get away with their contributions to the negative impact of climate change.” Dr Aqdas said during his session. He stated that Pakistan must put its case on reparations before the world and spoke about the contribution of its neighbouring countries in exacerbating the impacts of climate change in our part of the world.

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Debt relief should be given to countries suffering from the impact of climate change. Barbados Prime Minister Mia Mottley demanded debt relief; Pakistan should also do the same. Climate change and debt should be brought at the same platform and nations impacted should ask for relief

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“China and India have used fossil fuels for their development. They also need to provide reparations for underdeveloped countries,” he said.

Dr Aqdas also highlighted the need for internal reparations as well, quoting that 94 districts in Pakistan have been declared catastrophe hit due to floods, of which 19 remain extremely poor and shared that while the damages of climate change exist, Pakistan’s debt stands at \$130 billion.

“One can imagine the level of devastation this section of the population is facing. Flood affectees need to be given four times the BISP compensation which is Rs25,000 at present. Their utility bills need to be waived off,” the academic said in the discussion.

He also condemned the developed nations’ disregard for the Global South’s sufferings and shared that the United Kingdom’s newly-elected Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has denied reparations to countries affected the most by climate change.

Dr Aqdas said that our politicians should keep the demands in front of the western countries. “We should look to FM Bilawal and Sherry Rehman to stand up and demand these developed nations to ensure reparations and debt relief,” he said.

Dr Aqdas insisted that government representatives should not be afraid to talk about reparations. “We need to demand it first because the injustice is visible. Loss and damage were added to the COP27’s agenda with immense difficulty,” he said.

Dr Aqdas underlined the partiality of global institutions such as the World Bank, IMF, and ADB.

“The President of the World Bank is known as a climate change denier. We must see who these people sitting at the top positions are. These institutions are not representative of the people who are being impacted directly by climate change. How can we expect justice in such a situation?” Dr Aqdas says in the discussion adding that the World Bank’s president is always an American, ADB’s head is Japanese, and the IMF’s head is always a European which reeks of discrimination with the Global South.

“A new system based on justice, and fairness needs to be installed for better redressal of issues in countries like Pakistan,” he maintained.



ABIRA ASHFAQ —LAWYER, ACTIVIST AND FACULTY MEMBER, INSTITUTE OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

Lawyer and activist Abira Ashfaq, who is associated with the Karachi Bachao Tehreek and a visiting faculty at the Institute of Business Administration IBA, shared her observations about climate justice concerning her experience advocating for the cause. Ashfaq said that when we take our climate justice issues to a platform like COP27, we must highlight the multi-layered injustices in Pakistan faced by the population which is most vulnerable not only due to international injustices but also domestic inequalities.

Abira shared that the voices of people directly impacted by climate change who are living in poverty should be represented at COP27. She said that people displaced due to massive flooding in Sindh's Badin district are still living on highways.

“Voices of the most marginalised and destitute class should reach such global platforms. We don't see them going to COP and speaking,” she said, adding that around 1.2 million people have migrated to Karachi from Badin and lamented that their voices do not even make it to local and national platforms, let alone COP.

Abira spoke about the complicated grievance mechanisms of institutions like the World Bank and said that while these institutions have made policies to ensure climate justice and reparations in case of violations, implementing their policies and holding them accountable is very difficult.

She emphasised that when speaking about reparations, the damage done due to development projects with international investments in the form of debts should also be considered. Abira highlighted the negative repercussions of Karachi's Malir Expressway which will connect the Defence Housing Authority with Bahria Town. Locals, according to Ashfaq, are concerned about the increase of real estate properties on both sides of the expressway. She added that investments in the local real estate market at present amount to up to \$2.7 trillion.

“At least 7,000 homes have been demolished near the Gujjar and Orangi nullahs in the last two years. Last week, work to demolish Mujahid Colony began. When we questioned the demolitions, we were given reference to Supreme Court's Chief Justice Gulzar Ahmed's August 2020 verdict to remove encroachment blocking nullahs in the city as a justification,” Abira said.

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When you try to confront an industry that's worth \$2.7 trillion, then policies and grievance mechanisms are of no use. You spend your time getting stuck amid documentation, but there's no real, structural change on the ground to bring climate resilience

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Another project that Abira spoke about was a 39km highway which is being funded by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and according to their social policy devised in 2009. As per this policy, the institution must ensure compliance and due diligence of projects that evicts indigenous communities, impacts climate, and enforces development on population. The said highway will be impacting everything around, according to Abira. She said that while the ADB has promised compensation, the process of having the affected local population — whose natural ecosystem is being ruined — compensated is complicated. On the other hand, the process of Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) is so flawed and vulnerable to corruption, that one cannot expect justice in return, Abira stated.

She further stated that it's been two years and the communities remain homeless as a narrative was built around their presence in their homes as encroachers even though they were fulfilling their duties as responsible citizens including paying utility bills and rent etc.

Abira also spoke about the increasing capital of builders with a growing number of real estate properties, which damage the environment and added that cities are being prepared for builders who are being facilitated by government departments.

Abira touched upon the impact of climate change on women and children. She quoted the example of Johi city in district Dadu where the population was impacted by the extreme flooding in recent months.

“In Johi, an Australian oil exploration company was operating. The country is not providing any reparations to us. We've had to file cases against them. Then multinational companies are reaping profits working in oil and gas fields in Sindh and Balochistan. These companies are never held accountable for the damage they do to our environment,” Abira said when commenting on the role MNCs play in damaging the environment and CSR funds as “lollipops”.

“Is there a UN convention to make these multinationals and businesses accountable under the Business and Human Rights debate?” she questioned.

Abira also stated Pakistan’s government doesn’t take risks of demanding western nations, and big corporations for reparations. “We need to stand up for our right to do that. We need to take the people hugely impacted by climate change to COP27, which instead should come to Pakistan to see the damage themselves,” she said.



WAY FORWARD

Toward the end of the panel discussion, the floor was opened for questions, comments and recommendations during which participants also spoke.

Saeed Baloch of the Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum said that climate change should be added to the National Finance Commission Award. He said that while countries such as the US were initially against COP, but are now in their favour.

“We have met institutions such as the World Bank as representatives of the PFF and they have accepted our grievances, but when we expect our government to demand compensation for the damages done to the environment, they again go and seek loans from these institutions. Our own prime minister encourages the use of coal to generate electricity. How can one appreciate that?” Baloch questioned the seriousness of the government to curb climate change impact in Pakistan.

He urged Pakistan’s government to keep the country’s case of dealing with climate change before the world and also demanded that countries like China and India, which are one of the biggest polluters in the world, should also be held accountable.

Shahid Hussain, a veteran independent journalist who writes on climate change, lamented that the media is not interested in news regarding the issue. “Media doesn’t print news which highlights the contribution of institutions like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund in furthering climate change issues in our part of the world,” he said.

Liaquat Ali Bugti, a farmer and social activist, spoke about the torrential rains in Sindh which led to devastating floods and how they destroyed the agricultural lands across the province. He said that the month of August was the worst for farmers.

“We were happy in June and July for the crops because of the rain. But by August the situation worsened and it was the worst rain I’ve ever witnessed,” Bugti said and mentioned that critiquing anyone was useless as the situation was uncontrollable.

Bugti also questioned where the aid, sent by other countries and meant for flood affectees, vanished with nothing left for victims of the catastrophe.

Habibuddin Junaidi, a senior trade unionist, suggested that the parliament is authoritative and the elites are in charge of leading in Pakistan; therefore, they must take steps to work toward curbing the negative impact of climate change, while the government must pressurise the world reparations as those living on the margins of the society in our country remain the most affected.

“The floods damaged everything including crops, infrastructure and agricultural fields, while the affected population remains vulnerable to diseases as a result,” he said, insisting the government to seek reparations. Mehwish Leghari, a participant in the discussion, said that people who contribute to climate change issues are getting to talk at COP27 and that it should be the other way around. She also highlighted that women are the most affected due to climate change.

“Women remain extremely vulnerable on the ground by the impact of climate injustice. Women’s representation should also be added to the agenda as well,” she said, adding that the impact on women further determines the health of the new generation as a result.

She maintained that women, girls and youth should be focused and represented during discussions on climate change. Mehwish also highlighted that those who reside in climate-vulnerable areas do not understand terms like corporate and fossil fuels; therefore, those responsible for organising events like COP27 should consider including these communities and individuals in their discussions.

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