



# THE INTERNATIONAL POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND LESSONS FOR PAKISTAN

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Out of imagining utopian worlds, we have created so many dystopias. The global climate disasters in a nexus with political turmoils seems to be recalibrating our moral compass – although for many politicians, stakeholders and policymakers, there was one silencing lining. The 2022 United Nations Climate Change Conference or more commonly referred to as COP27, i.e. Conference of the Parties, was held from 6th November to 20th November 2022 in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt.

The COP is the supreme decision-making body of the convention, and all the states are parties to the convention and represented. COP is also the largest conference of the United Nations, held annually in different countries and with around 25,000 representatives of different governments in participation.

This year, COP27 seems to have made a breakthrough of sorts in the form of a proposed 'loss and damage fund' for the countries that are vulnerable to climate extremities – prompting many commentators to deem it a milestone. Unfortunately, the agreement is devoid of an empirical understanding of climate change. Some critics see this as the need for vulnerable countries to find their own nature-based solutions, financial resources, and better mode of governance. The delegation of Pakistan played a key role in COP27 in tabling a loss and damage agenda, but a lot of uncertainty remains around what this will specifically mean for countries. Climate catastrophes, after all, cause ripple effects that go beyond borders.

The nations decided to pool funds for the damage but they concluded the marathon climate talks without contemplating the root causes of climate disasters – in terms of their structural origins. The funds are unfortunately not cause for hope in the Global South, as they are an effort to address symptoms rather than the underlying disease. Funding of this sort is unlikely to be effective for countries such as Pakistan anyway, where elite capture of the state apparatus is so pervasive – meaning that these resources will ultimately end up with the corrupt government or private contractors rather than the masses in dire need. Jason Hickel in his book, *The Divide: A Brief Guide to Global Inequality and its Solutions*, reveals that 70% of the 588 billion tons of global carbon emission in 2010 came from developed and industrial economies but ironically 83% of deaths and disasters related to climate change occurred in the developing countries with the lowest carbon emissions. An example of this is Pakistan.

Climate change itself isn't the problem, the structure of the global political economy – with its insistence on unrelenting growth – is what has made climate annihilation a real possibility. International climate conferences may pay lip service to the severity of the climate crisis but have failed to address the structural problems that are responsible for it. Western economies and corporations have contributed more than 90% of excess emissions that are accelerating climate disasters, which the Global South is disproportionately impacted by in the form of heatwaves, flash floods, droughts, crop failures, and human displacements. It is not that the policymakers and social movements are oblivious to this fact in the global south but that their pleas fall on deaf ears.

According to the World Bank, the recent climate disaster in Pakistan has caused more than 1,700 deaths and displaced more than 8 million people. The disaster also wreaked havoc on infrastructure, crops, and livestock. Pakistan's urban population is highly exposed to hazard, risk, and vulnerability (HRV), which would increase from 37% in 2020 to 60% in 2050. The change in the rate of urbanization in Afghanistan and Bangladesh has been attributed to the significant change in the GDP structure of the respective countries – which naturally create pressures to migrate from rural areas to cities in search of livelihoods.

According to Michael Kugelman, the pace of urbanisation in Pakistan is reported at an annual rate of 3% which is the fastest in South Asia. The ecological richness in Pakistan is threatened due to the over-extraction of resources, high pollution, and alteration in ecosystems. This has destructive effects on economic growth, poverty reduction, and social and economic stability. The energy sector is a powerful catalyst of economic development and poverty reduction. It is a huge drain on public finances and foreign exchange reserves and a major contributor to Green House Gas emissions. Prioritizing technical and collection losses in transmission and distribution, Pakistan must lower the cost of generation, including through energy efficiency, cost-reflective tariffs, and improved subsidies. The investment in public transportation could also help transition out of highly polluting modes of transport. Despite having a minimal (0.8% relative to other countries) contribution to GHG emissions, Pakistan is one of the world's most severely impacted by climate change.

It would be a logical fallacy to perceive Global North and Global South from a reductionist perspective. In the Global South, countries as such China and India account for 60% of the Global South's overall emissions followed by other countries, averaging 2 to 3% each. The Global South's emissions are also heavily concentrated.



Developing countries do not pursue joint interests when it comes to international climate negotiations. The climate strategy is not homogenous for the Global South due to inevitable differences between political orientations of governments in various countries. These rarely consider themselves as having joint objectives in the international climate negotiations as these countries belong to more than a dozen groups—including regional groups with different concerns and strategies related to climate technology transfer, energy issues, agriculture, deforestation, loss, and damage. Climate conferences aren't just enough; but also require the mobilization of stakeholders, and people at the grassroots level need to advocate for strategies to overcome climate disasters. It should also take into account the opinions and capabilities of the marginalized people who are most affected by climate change and be receptive to non-western methods of adaptation. Indigenous communities who are the safeguards of the natural world could also offer first-hand knowledge on climate adaptation techniques and must be included in any path set forward.

Martin Kaiser, the head of Greenpeace Germany, described the agreement on a loss and damage as, “a small plaster on a huge, gaping wound”.

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