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COP28: African Priorities and Expectations

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The 28th Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP28) will be hosted by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) from 30 November to 12 December 2023.¹ This year's COP is unconventional, being hosted in a country that is a major oil producer. It is notable to acknowledge the UAE's increased presence in terms of investments in Africa's energy and development spaces. However, Africa seems to be focused on the agenda set for COP28 as the continent stands for just transition with more of a 'phase-down' rather than a 'phase-out'.²

The aim of COP28 is to bring together a wide spectrum of stakeholders – all levels of governments, youth, business and investors, civil society, frontline communities and

¹ <https://www.cop28.com/en/cop28-presidency>

² https://www.chathamhouse.org/2023/09/what-cop28-and-why-it-important?gclid=CjwKCAiA9dGqBhAqEiwAmRpTC-BOzDNZ1UYcOi9-38zrnHNa6HI9YHENN6fiHpy3HXtVYVR9pONdmRoCaSIQAvD_BwE

indigenous people - to have a consensus around specific solutions that must be scaled up to limit of the planet to 2 degrees Celsius, build resilience, and mobilize finance.³

COP28 will set the stage for the world to take stock of its progress on the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to combat climate change since adopting the Paris Agreement; a process known as the Global Stocktake (GST). Additionally, as the world gears to the GST at this year's COP, negotiations will happen in a rather complex and knotty geopolitical landscape with the ongoing Israel-Hamas war. The solutions set to be adopted in COP28 will focus on the action agenda set by the COP28 Presidency, which includes:

- › Fast-tracking energy transitions;
- › Fixing climate finance;
- › Focusing on nature, people, lives, and livelihoods;
- › Achieving full inclusivity.

This opinion piece interrogates what Africa, as a continent, aims to achieve in the negotiations that will culminate at COP28, regarding the set action agenda.

Africa and the Just and Inclusive Energy Transition

It is evidently critical that the global community works in concerted approaches towards reducing carbon emissions and realizing a transition to cleaner energy systems to meet the goal of limiting average global surface temperature increase to below 2 degrees above the pre-industrial temperatures by mid-century.⁴ In the African context, however, a just, inclusive and equitable energy transition will need to appreciate the unique and contextual circumstances. For instance, currently, more than 600 million people are living without access to electricity while over 900 million still lack access to clean cooking solutions in the region.⁵ Therefore, effective transition approaches for Africa will be those that are people-centered and focused on building long-term solutions for addressing the broad-based and far-reaching challenges of limited energy access and catalyzing long-term climate resilient development agenda.

Throughout the year, Africa has made headlines for the critical minerals and metals critical to the just energy transition that the region houses.⁶ If these are effectively harnessed, the rich and widely untapped natural resources and minerals will not only play a leading role in enhancing just and inclusive energy transition and economic growth in Africa but also position the region more strategically in the global geopolitics of energy transition and related geo-economic realignments and interests. To effectively exploit these minerals and achieve a just and inclusive energy transition, Africa will require that energy development systems are designed to be technologically adequate, cost-optimal, and economically viable so that they can rapidly accelerate energy access.⁷

³ <https://www.cop28.com/en/letter-to-parties>

⁴ <https://climatepromise.undp.org/news-and-stories/what-just-transition-and-why-it-important>

⁵ <https://www.iea.org/reports/africa-energy-outlook-2022/key-findings>

⁶ <https://www.lexology.com/library/detail.aspx?g=a7bdde4e-b974-49d5-a287-1c2fda080d10>

⁷ <https://www.afdb.org/en/news-and-events/press-releases/renewable-energy-offers-africas-best-opportunity-achieve-sustainable-development-goals-experts-say-63909>

An important consideration in the quest for a just and inclusive energy transition in the region is whether there are adequate policies and legal frameworks to facilitate the transition agenda and ensure that projects are clean, green, fair, just and sustainable.⁸ The legal frameworks are needed to define and establish pathways towards balanced energy transition, energy security and access as well as economic development. The pathways should be supported by effective international cooperation and governance that also promotes intra-Africa trade, productivity and manufacturing of critical minerals.

Therefore, COP28 is a defining moment that Africa expects industrialized and developed countries to be clearer and pronounce effective and adequate support in terms of financial resources, capacity building and advanced technologies that will unlock exploitation of the critical minerals, promote innovative and scalable renewables and clean solutions that will enable a just and inclusive energy transition in the region.⁹

Fixing Climate Finance

According to the United Nations, climate finance is any “local, national, or transnational financing—drawn from public, private and alternative sources of financing—that seeks to support mitigation and adaptation actions that will address climate change”.¹⁰ Currently, most public climate finance consists of debt, often in the form of loans. For instance, countries can borrow from commercial banks to achieve climate goals.¹¹ Moreover, multilateral development banks (MDBs), such as the World Bank, can offer “concessional financing” for climate projects - below-market-rate debt with a more generous grace period for repayment.¹² This is rather problematic for African countries which, despite being the least contributors to GHG emissions suffer the most severe impacts of climate change. Added to already existing debt for developmental projects to improve livelihoods in the region, the current architecture of climate finance means that countries will have to take on additional debt to address the impacts of climate change.

51 out of 53 African countries that submitted their NDCs have already provided data on the costs of implementing their NDCs. Collectively, these represent more than 93% of Africa's GDP. Based on this data, it will cost around US\$ 2.8 trillion between 2020 and 2030 to implement Africa's NDCs. African governments have committed US\$ 264 billion of domestic public resources, about 10% of the total cost. US\$ 2.5 trillion must come from international public sources and the domestic and international private sectors. It is therefore imperative that developed countries scale up efforts to meet their financial commitments¹³ but also for African countries to increasingly prioritize climate change in their national budgeting processes.

⁸ <https://unctad.org/publication/economic-development-africa-report-2023>

⁹ <https://mo.ibrahim.foundation/sites/default/files/2022-11/minerals-resource-governance.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://unfccc.int/topics/introduction-to-climate-finance#:~:text=What%20is%20climate%20finance%3F,that%20will%20address%20climate%20change.>

¹¹ <https://www.cfr.org/article/climate-finance-gains-momentum-ahead-cop28>

¹² <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2021/09/16/what-you-need-to-know-about-concessional-finance-for-climate-action>

¹³ <https://www.climatepolicyinitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Climate-Finance-Needs-of-African-Countries.pdf>

Since the establishment of the Loss and Damage Fund (LDF), there has been a preoccupation to get the fund operational, especially from African countries. A proposal has been agreed upon to be presented at COP28, but this proposal has been the subject of criticism. The most problematic of the proposals to operationalize the LDF is where it will be hosted, the World Bank, given the 24% hosting fee that the fund will be subjected to. Moreover, there is no clarity on who will be eligible to access the fund, and most importantly, the proposal is not prescriptive on who should contribute to the fund.¹⁴¹⁵

Given the growing calls for restructuring the global financial system to ensure that African countries are not subjected to higher interest rates due to risk perceptions, climate finance will be a priority at COP28. It is anticipated that African countries will band together to suggest alternatives to the proposals for the operationalization of the LDF.

Prioritizing Full Inclusivity, Nature, People, Lives and Conditions

The Global Stocktake's technical committee released its synthesis report that stated that despite the 'near-universal climate action', there is room and need for more ambition by focusing more on inclusion and equity.¹⁶ The report proceeds to call for greater ambition in the inclusivity of local and indigenous communities for better effectiveness. Stepping up from the Nairobi Declaration on Climate Change, Africa, a continent bearing the brunt of climate change despite contributing minimally to global emissions, is poised to take a pivotal role at the upcoming COP28. Africa embodies the importance of protecting and restoring nature, recognizing that biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation exacerbate the impacts of climate change. The continent will call for increased efforts to conserve Africa's rich biodiversity and strengthen ecosystem services, which are essential for human well-being and economic development.¹⁷

With a focus on full inclusivity, nature, people, lives and conditions, Africa's position will be firmly rooted in the need for equitable climate action, sustainable development and resilience to the devastating impacts of climate change. Given the COP28 Presidency's inclusion of agriculture and food systems and health in the agenda for the upcoming COP28, Africa will champion for discussion on the same.¹⁸ Agriculture and food systems hold immense value in Africa, in terms of contribution to the continent's GDP and the potential to provide employment to the largely youthful continent. Across Africa, nearly 60% of the population is not on track to meet the food security and nutrition targets of Sustainable Development Goal 2. The GST Synthesis report has recommended the integration of food systems and agriculture with the UNFCCC parties' National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) and NDCs, with an aim to ensure nature-positive food production, healthy sustainable diets and

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https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/TC5_4_Cochairs%20draft%20text_Rev2.pdf

15 <https://www.carbonbrief.org/qa-the-fight-over-the-loss-and-damage-fund-for-climate-change/>

16 https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/sb2023_09E.pdf

17 https://au.int/sites/default/files/decisions/43124-Nairobi_Declaration_06092023.pdf

18 https://www.unfoodsystemshub.org/docs/unfoodsystemslibraries/press-releases/hub-cop28-pr-26-july.pdf?sfvrsn=5e153e5f_1

minimal food loss and waste. Therefore, as Africa strives to realize the full potential of its arable lands and provision of nutrition, the call to decarbonize food systems and agriculture will call for radical and innovative strategies and technologies.

Africa will, also, advocate for a truly inclusive COP28, ensuring that the voices of vulnerable communities, particularly women, youth and indigenous peoples, are heard and their perspectives incorporated into climate negotiations. This inclusive approach is essential for effective and equitable climate action, as these groups are disproportionately affected by climate change and hold valuable knowledge about adaptation and resilience.

Concluding Remarks

Africa's position at COP28 will be a clarion call for collective action to address the climate crisis, a key message from the Nairobi Declaration on Climate Change; a just and inclusive energy transition that provides room for economic growth in Africa; a proposal for the operationalization of the LDF that is suited better for Africa and potentially the restructuring of the global financial framework. Additionally, the expected talks on GST is an opportunity to establish modalities and pathways for enhancing and scaling up climate action. The Africa's rich biodiversity, vibrant cultures, resilient communities and energy potential hold immense potential for a sustainable future. However, this potential can only be realized through global cooperation and a commitment to a just, equitable, sustainable and people-centered climate action.

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