



## THE WEEKEND READER

"Your Weekly Read on Debt, Development & Socio-Economic Justice"

### #COP27: A DEFINING MOMENT IN CLIMATE ACTION

The Climate Change Conference is a global summit on climate change also popularly known as Conference of the Parties is conducted by United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) parties which is an international treaty whose aim is to avert dangerous human interference with the climate system by stabilising greenhouse gas emissions. This year marks the 27th United Nations Climate Change Conference hence COP27.

**“There’s one issue that will define the contours of this century more dramatically than any other, and that is the urgent threat of a changing climate.”**

**Barack Obama** on Climate Change

For Africa, the 27th climate change conference is a special one as it is being hosted in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt. It’s a two-week long summit running from 6 to 18 November 2022. More than 90 heads of state and representatives from 190 nations are expected to attend. The Climate Change Conference was established in 1992 following the United Nations Climate Agreement which was subsequently used by governments to agree on climate change mitigation and adaptation policies.

According to the United Nations, climate change refers to long-term temperature modifications and weather patterns. These changes may be natural for example through variations in solar cycle. However, it is important to note that since the 1800s, human activities have been the main contributors of climate change, largely caused by burning fossil fuels like coal, oil and gas. Burning fossil fuels produces greenhouse gas emissions that takes a form of a blanket covering the earth, which then traps the sun’s heat and causes a raise in temperature. Greenhouse emissions that contribute to climate change include carbon dioxide and methane. These emit from cars, coal, burning of forests etc. Another major source of methane emissions are landfills for garbage. The main emitting sectors include energy, industry, transport, buildings, agriculture and land use.

Emissions that cause climate change are not from one part of the globe, however, some countries are producing more as compared to the other countries. 3% of total emissions are produced by the 100 least-emitting countries whilst 68% is produced by a small number of only 10 countries. This then points to the discussions of climate financing where governments have agreed that the countries contributing more to global warming have the biggest responsibility to provide financing for the developing countries to cope with climate change effects.

## **Climate Action**

Switching energy systems from fossil fuels to renewables like solar or wind will reduce the emissions causing climate change. Immediate action is to make sure that at least half of the emissions cuts are achieved by 2030 to keep warming below 1.5°C, with a bigger goal of net zero emission by 2050. This action involves critical measures to ensure that fossil fuel production drops by about 6% per year between 2020 and 2030. Evidently climate action takes human determination in order to mitigate its effects on the eco-system cycle, additionally it requires huge financing by both governments and corporates. Certainly, what is more damaging and costly is climate inaction to reduce climate change effects.

At a global level there are frameworks and agreements in place to guide progress which are Sustainable Development Goals, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement. Main thrust of climate action is reducing emissions, adapting to climate impacts and financing required adjustments. During COP26 held in Glasgow, developed countries made a \$100 billion commitment to developing countries which is yet to be fulfilled. It was also in the same conference that coal was identified as one of the major contributors to existing climatic conditions and global warming. Developing continents like Africa and Asia are still heavily relying on coal as a source of energy. Subsequently a consensus was reached to reduce reliance on coal for energy which the continents believed to be unfair. Zimbabwe and Botswana are among nations that have large coal reserves. From this, the developed countries promised USD100 billion every year to Africa to expediate the shift from use of coal to cleaner sources of energy such as solar, hydro and wind. This is a heated debate on how the Western countries are expecting Africa to cut use of coal for energy when they in effect developed through use of fossil energy.

**Of critical concern** is the fact that the 3rd world is unable to focus on climate action especially as they rely heavily on fossil fuels such as coal which they have in abundance. Furthermore, they don't have the resources to finance transition, disaster reduction, mitigation and adaptation efforts. In the same light, the institutions in the 3rd world meant to champion climate action remain under resourced. This coupled with the overall challenges in transparency and accountability on public funds defeats the effort especially considering that there are little to no resources in the first place. When African governments receive disaster packages, there is no transparency and accountability of the funds. Sadly, the communities meant to benefit from the disasters hardly benefit from the resource when they are the ones affected by natural disasters. In 2020, after Zimbabwe received COVID-19 financial assistance, the then Minister of Health, Child and Welfare was implicated in a USD60 million scandal.

The same applies to Cyclone Idai donations, after the Cyclone Idai which hit Manicaland, Masvingo, Mashonaland East and Midlands provinces in March 2019. It's key to note that cyclones are yet another result of increased climate change/ variability. The disaster affected 52 027 households and it left 17 708 people homeless. Following this disaster, the local and international community responded by giving monetary and non-monetary donations. The Auditor General undertook a special audit report on Disaster preparedness and distribution of Cyclone Idai donations. The audit findings revealed that records availed were inadequate and some of the donations are believed to have been misappropriated or stolen with no record or trace of the goods / funds. More details can be found at: <https://bit.ly/3NRU35V>

On the other hand, it is concerning that COP gatherings seem to be a decorative engagement as states revert to default settings right after the summit. In essence, climate change action remains a rhetoric! Bar the efforts in clean energy, fossil fuels are still widely used and our dependence on them hasn't been reduced, as evidenced by the ensuing conversation when supply chains were disturbed by COVID-19 and the Russia-Ukraine war.

### **Recommendations**

- **Political will:** There is need for both 3rd and 1st world to sincerely pursue climate action beyond the rhetoric.
- **Commitment to Climate financing:** As committed, the 1st world should support 3rd world initiatives for clean energy also considering that they developed on fossil fuels and continue to emit disproportionately more.
- **Strict sanctioning on emissions:** Currently, there are no significant sanctions to pollution. Stringent measures will ensure the already existing and widely ratified commitments are adhered to.
- **Education on Climate Change:** Climate change (especially the global warming phenomenon) remains a contested reality across the globe. There is need for increased information blitzes to ensure people are aware of the effects and required action against it.

### **Conclusion**

In the words of Barack Obama, "Climate change is no longer some far off problem; it is happening here, it is happening now." As such, there is need for governments across the board to direct the required attention to climate action through financing, adhering to existing restrictive instruments and uptake of clean energy. There is only one earth and the resources she carries are exhaustible!