

# A loosing battle?

## Post-COP28 reflections and next steps

**Bruna Cañada & Clàudia Custodio**

COP28 (28th Conference of the parties), also known as the climate summit, has been controversial: the chosen host country was the United Arab Emirates, a country which has an economy largely based on fossil fuels and where human rights are systematically violated. Every year, a different country hosts the COP, and it is chosen on a rotating basis between regions of the United Nations. In 2023, it was the turn of the Asia-Pacific region, [1] and the consensus country was EAU.

The host country proposed the presidency of Sultan Ahmed Al Jaber for this COP28; the CEO of the national oil company ADNOC. This generated a lot of concern among activists and civil society, as the figure of the presidency plays a key role in the negotiations. The choice of a person who had close ties to the fossil industry made clear the intention to continue ignoring the science that has been warning for years that fossil fuels must be kept in the ground to guarantee the continuity of life on the planet.

Moreover, COPs have for years lost legitimacy, due to the lack of ambition in commitments and binding mechanisms that ensure compliance in recent years. In response, activist groups and collectives from around the world got together to call for boycotting



Sesión plenaria de la COP28 en Dubai (2023)

the summit and proposed to meet in Colombia on the same dates to organise real climate action – to mobilise. [2]

In this context, COP28 occupied a lot of space in the media at the beginning of December. One of the goals of the summit for 2023 was to finalize the first Global Stocktake since the Paris Agreement. This document assesses whether the climate targets have been achieved and how it has been done since 2015 and establishes the road map to achieve them in the next 5 years.

### Any progress?

As is usual in these summits, it was not possible to end the negotiations on the scheduled time and date. COP28 lasted a whole day longer, until December 13. the truth is that reaching consensus agreements is not easy in a multilateral negotiation space between countries with very different positions and interests.

So what is the agreement? What have been the hot topics? And what implications does it have for the future of life on the planet? The buzzword at COPs is *fossil fuels*. However, they had not been part of the vocabulary of the agreements until now. Hence, this is what Al Jaber is bragging from: at COP28, fossil fuels were mentioned for the first time ever.

However, this is no victory. Specifically, the text of the Global Stocktake talks about “transitioning-away from fossil fuels” given the worrisome situation of climate emergency and the need to drastically reduce greenhouse emissions making specific reference to science. Yet, it does not specify if this entails a full phase-out or at which speed should the “transition” be —it only mentions achieving climate neutrality by 2050. [3] Full phase-out is only referred to for “inefficient” fossil fuels. Moreover, other dangerous measures are included to go along with this “transition”:

- To triple global renewable capacity and double efficiency by 2030... Without linking it with a reduction in fossil fuel energy production, that is, making sure it serves to substitute them. Hence, it allows for continuing as before: increasing global energy production by adding new sources without reducing fossil production, and, consequently, emissions.
- To make an effort to reduce energy production from unabated coal. This measure is highly insufficient: we need to phase-out all fossil fuels in order to have any chances to keep global warming below 1,5 degrees Celsius, as the IPCC has pointed out. [4] On the other hand, using «unabated» opens the door to market mechanisms for emission trading and technologies such as carbon capture and storage, which are highly problematic and have not had significant success in reducing real emissions. [5]



- To promote carbon capture and storage technologies and «low-carbon» hydrogen. CCS technologies are an invention of the fossil fuel industry to justify its continued expansion. “Low-carbon” hydrogen is blue hydrogen, produced with fossil gas, but the emissions of which have been captured. However, this process is very energy-intensive, and it has not been proven that the resulting emissions can be “stored” forever and without leaks. [6]
- To legitimise fossil gas under the label «transition fuel» and also nuclear energy, which is not a fossil energy but very dangerous for people’s health and the environment and dependent on uranium extraction, which is finite and non-renewable resource.

Thus, the hard work of lobbyists has not been in vain: in 2023 there was a new record of lobbyists from the fossil industry participating at the COP. [7]

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There are three pillars to tackling climate change: mitigation, adaptation and loss and damage. However, the first always predominates over the rest because it is the most convenient for the rich countries, which are the historical emitters. Also because it is the pillar from which the most economic income can be extracted and therefore, it is of more interest to the private sector.

When it comes to adaptation, indicators and stronger language on the means of implementation through the Global Adaptation Goal have been included. However, rich countries would need to provide these means and the lack of funding for adaptation remains evident. It is estimated that countries of the Global South will need between 215 and 387 billion dollars per year until 2030 for adaptation.

The more invested in mitigation and adaptation, the less will have to be invested in losses and damages. But faced with the effects of climate change, the insufficient commitments to deal with it and the lack of funding, households and communities are increasingly having to assume more of the economic and non-economic costs of loss and damage. It is estimated that 400,000 million dollars a year would be needed to be able to cover the costs. [8] The countries most affected by loss and damage are impoverished countries, because they are the most vulnerable in the face of climate change. Thus, addressing loss and damage is a climate justice matter.

Civil society, activists and the countries of the

Global South had been demanding the Loss and Damage fund that was agreed on the first day of the COP for thirty years (probably to make an announcement that would distract from all the criticism around the presidency). Either way, it's a bitter-sweet deal.

Rich countries are not obliged to put money into the fund, no financing targets have been set, the funds pledged are not new or additional, the door is left open for the financing to be in the form of loans and the World Bank, despite the opposition of impoverished countries and civil society, will be in charge of managing the fund for the first four years. [9]

The Just Transition Program was also agreed upon, which unfortunately has been watered down a lot. The negotiations on this text were marked by a clear division between those States that wanted to limit it to workers' rights —mostly from the Global North— and those that wanted it to have a wider scope —mostly from the Global South.

While the language of the preamble is powerful in terms of Human Rights and the recognition of the common but differentiated responsibility of countries in the face of climate change, it does not establish financial means of implementation. Without economic resources, it is not trustworthy.

The transition must be just for everyone. It is not only about ensuring that people who work in the fossil sector will continue to have employment once the sector disappears. The just transition must take into account the context and needs of each territory, how they are affected by climate change and how the necessary socio-economic transformation will impact.



Los países del Sur Global llevan treinta años reclamando el Fondo de Pérdidas y Beneficios acordado el primer día de la COP28 en Dubai

At the same time, economic planning is needed, which prioritizes those sectors that are truly necessary for life and with a view of global justice.

## Nobody wants to pay the bill

Which is not new is the lack of funding available. Given the demands Global South countries in the negotiations of the need for early and transparent financing and the allegations of non-compliance with the agreements, the text of the Global Stocktake recognizes that there is a very large financing gap and that the milestone of \$100 billion per year from 2020 has not been met. However, even if delivered, this figure would still be insufficient given that it is estimated that countries in the Global South will need between 5.8 and 5.9 trillion dollars until 2030 to meet their climate commitments. [10]

At the same time, the final text also appeals to the key role of the private sector as a provider of climate finance. Yet, as we have already pointed out, corporate power seeks to obtain a return on investments and therefore does not want to put money into adaptation or loss and damage.

Finally, although previous versions talked about the need for fiscal space, in the final version of the Global Stocktake debt is only mentioned once, despite impoverished countries often find themselves in a kind of vicious circle: the countries most vulnerable to climate change are mostly also in a situation of debt crisis. [11]

To deal with the external debt, which must be paid in foreign currency, they need to direct their economy to export. This reinforces the role impoverished countries have played since the colonial era: exporting raw materials at low prices and importing manufactured goods to rich countries at high prices. Extracting these raw materials—such as fossil fuels, minerals or monocultures such as soy or palm oil—contributes to aggravating the climate crisis. [12]

At the same time, these countries have to deal with existing debts, so they have less capacity to invest in climate mitigation or adaptation measures. Lastly, climate disasters mean that they have to deal with the losses and damages caused. Consequently, they have to ask for loans once again at very high interest rates, which again aggravate the external debt situation.

Therefore, we must continue to work for public financing, in advance, transparent, fair and in the form of subsidies and not loans that generate more debt.

## COP29 in Azerbaijan: another polemical host

Another of the decisions that was agreed upon at COP28 is where the next one would take place. In 2024, the region to host the summit is Eastern Europe. But in a context of war due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, finding a host country that would accept all the countries in the region has been difficult. Finally, it was decided that it would be Azerbaijan.

Again, a non-democratic country with an economy directly dependent on fossil fuels. In fact, more than 60% of GDP comes from the extraction of fossil fuels. In addition, Azerbaijan has been pointed at for high levels of corruption. [13] The COP29 president appointed by the host country will be Mukhtar Babayev, current Minister for the Environment and who had worked for SOCAR —the national oil company— for 26 years. [14] To top it all off, the organizing committee initially presented consisted of 28 men. After receiving harsh criticism, Azerbaijan made some changes by adding 12 more women and 2 more men to the committee.

Fossil fuels took centre stage in Dubai; in Baku, it will be money and the scrutiny of international financial institutions. It is expected that COP29 will focus on climate finance. The following year, in Belem (Brazil), Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) will be reviewed. For this reason, many countries already have their eyes on COP30, which will take place next to the Amazonia in territory where indigenous groups live; an area heavily affected by extractivism for centuries,



Estand en uno de los pabellones de negociación de la COP28, con los eslóganes de la campaña de comunicación: "Pensemos sin límites" y "La acción genera confianza"

which is already suffering the impacts of the climate emergency and a symbol of social mobilization and resistance from the Global South. In addition, many civil society groups have set 2025 as a target to achieve debt cancellation for the countries of the Global South, and therefore for the countries of the Amazonia. COP30 can be the strategic moment to achieve this. It will predictably be an important summit and a high turnout is expected. However, it is not expected to reach the participation levels of COP28: which has been, and will be, the largest in history.

## Beyond COPs

COPs are a meeting place between all the countries of the world to seek global solutions to a global problem: the climate emergency. A study [15] was presented at COP28 which identified some tipping points —such as the collapse of the Greenland and West Antarctic ice sheets, the mortality of corals or the accelerated melting of permafrost— which if they occur will generate a catastrophic cascade effect given that all the Earth's systems are interconnected.



Therefore, real commitments and immediate actions are needed to prevent the temperature from rising. And because the problem is global, COPs represent a unique opportunity to address climate change.

In the same way that the Earth's systems are interconnected, there are also a series of socio-economic and environmental problems that are related in one way or another to the emergency climate as the result of globalization and the spread of the capitalist system everywhere, such as the food crisis in some countries, climate displacement, debt crises, the increase in inequalities between countries, the loss of biodiversity...

Therefore, it is key to broaden the scope of the negotiations. It will do no good to set goals that can only be met by countries that have money, based on technological improvements and at the service of corporate power, to be able to continue growing economically without taking into account planetary boundaries.

We need reparation measures and that the rich countries —historical emitters and

therefore accumulating an ecological debt with the South— to put money on the table without generating more economic debt. We also need a greater diversity of actors to be able to take part in the negotiations so that different knowledge and voices are present: scientists, indigenous peoples, people who work the land and are suffering the consequences of climate change, representatives of the cities (as large consumers and emitters) and also the sub-national administrations (which are closer to each territory)...

Stepping back and examining the broader picture, the problem has many edges to be tackled. Isolated measures are not enough: the socio-economic system that has brought us here must be called into question. This requires economic planning that prioritizes those sectors that are truly essential for life and thus reduce emissions from those that are not necessary, such as luxury products. And ultimately, we need to move towards just transitions on a global scale, with an eco-feminist perspective and adapted to each territory.

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[1] For more information on the rotation, see:

<https://unfccc.int/process/bodies/supreme-bodies/conference-of-the-parties-cop>

[2] On the countersummit's website there is a summary and next steps:

[https://earthsocialconference.org/wrap-up/#next\\_steps](https://earthsocialconference.org/wrap-up/#next_steps)

[3] Climate neutrality implies having offset all emissions emitted, setting the counter back to 0. It is a problematic measure since the means of compensation, such as massive tree planting, do not have the same effect as no emission of greenhouse gases.

[4] Allen, M., Dube, O.P., Solecki, W., Aragón-Durand, F., Cramer, W., Humphreys, S. and Kainuma, M., 2018. *Special Report: Global Warming of 1.5 C. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (IPCC).

[5] Global Witness, 2023. *What is carbon capture and storage? CCS easily explained*. Disponible en:

<https://www.globalwitness.org/en/blog/what-carbon-capture-and-storage-ccs-easily-explained/>

[6] As explained by this study from University of Cornell:

<https://news.cornell.edu/stories/2021/08/touted-clean-blue-hydrogen-may-be-worse-gas-or-coal>

[7] According to an analysis of the coalition "Kick Big Polluters Out":

<https://kickbigpollutersout.org/articles/release-record-number-fossil-fuel-lobbyists-attend-cop28>

[8] The Loss and Damage Collaboration (13/12/2023). Did COP28 get us closer to the world we want? Assessing the outcome on loss and damage. Available at:

<https://www.lossanddamagecollaboration.org/pages/did-cop-28-get-us-closer-to-the-world-we-want-assessing-the-outcome-on-loss-and-damage>

[9] Tess Woolfenden (14/12/2023). COP28 outcomes for debt justice: a legacy of deepening debt crisis. Available at:

<https://debtjustice.org.uk/blog/cop28-outcomes-for-debt-justice-the-good-the-distracting-and-the-damaging>

[10] Latindadd (2023). *Latindadd frente a los resultados de la COP28*. Available at:

<https://www.latindadd.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/latindadd-frente-a-los-resultados-de-la-cop28.pdf>

[11] According to data published by ActionAid, in 2022 93% of the countries most vulnerable to the climate crisis were also in a situation of over-indebtedness or were at significant risk of being so.

[12] ActionAid (April 10th 2023). *The Vicious Cycle: Connections Between the Debt Crisis and Climate Crisis*.

Disponible en:

<https://actionaid.org/publications/2023/vicious-cycle>

[13] <https://climatica.coop/cuatro-motivos-cop29-no-en-azerbaiyan/>

[14] <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/jan/08/cop29-hostazerbaijan-to-hike-gas-output-by-a-third-over-next-decade>

[13] For more information, check:

<https://global-tipping-points.org/>

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