

From Pledges to Progress: COP28 Reflections and Urgent Call to Action

The 28th Conference of Parties (COP28) held in Dubai, UAE between 29th November to 12th December 2023 which aimed to assess global efforts to keep the goal of limiting global warming to 1.5C above pre-industrial levels was attended by over 85,000 participants, including world leaders, representatives from various multilateral bodies, civil society organisations (CSOs), scientific and research expert groups and a record number of fossil fuels business lobbyists among others. The first day of the conference was marked by a landmark agreement on the operationalization of the Loss and Damage Fund (LDF), which is the culmination of the process that began from the Sharm El-Sheikh COP27 decision and was crafted over five meetings throughout the year by the UN Transitional Committee. While acknowledging this milestone, it is imperative to address certain concerns. A key concern is that developed countries meet their financial obligations in a manner appropriate to their role, historically, in contributing to the climate crisis. Other concerns include the appropriate scale and replenishment cycle of the fund and the stipulation that the finance should be new, additional, predictable, adequate, fair and non-debt creating, coming in as grants, not loans. In the absence of these important stipulations, the notion of climate justice fails.

Nepal, as the chair of the LDCs in the United Nations (UN), must take a proactive stance in demanding reparations for the LDCs, calling for greater global cooperation and ensuring that the developed countries follow through on their commitments. The pledges of the developed countries in the past have not corresponded with their actions, and while certain developed countries have proactively pledged some millions to the LDF, we must question whether the pledges reflect and are proportionate to their historic contributions to and exacerbation of the climate crisis. We must also objectively examine whether these pledges are sufficient for the scope of the LDF mandate in developing countries. On a positive note for the LDCs, eight governments have announced new commitments to the Least Developed Countries Fund (LDCF) and Special Climate Change Fund (SCCF), both administered by the Global Environment Facility (GEF). In response to this promising development, governments in the LDCs must strategically prepare themselves to effectively utilise these funds, ensuring efficiency and a tangible impact on the ground.

The first Global Stocktake (GST), which aims to evaluate the progress on achieving the key provisions of the 2015 Paris Agreement was also concluded at the conference. Despite commendable efforts by Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to advocate for the phasing out of fossil fuels, there remains a critical need to scrutinize the language used in the GST. While the text mentions “transitioning away from fossil fuels”, the removal of the stronger term “phase out” raises questions about the adequacy and equity of this decision. The absence of clear timelines and targets for fossil-fuel phase-out is gravely concerning, especially given the unequivocal scientific consensus on the urgency of this matter. For Nepal and other LDCs, an increase in fossil fuel usage by developed countries equates to a heightened risk of increased loss and damage in our countries. Moreover, the text’s call to “phase down” the “unabated” use of coal introduces potential loopholes, permitting unfettered levels of coal burning under the guise of carbon capture promises.

Speaking of Nepal’s engagement at the COP28, its active participation proved to be result-oriented for the country. In the lead-up to COP28, Nepal consistently advocated for scaling up climate finance and adaptation and gave top priority to its ‘Mountain Agenda.’ This concerted effort successfully led to the incorporation of the ‘Mountain Agenda’ into the GST, where conserving and restoring nature, protecting biodiversity and implementing multi-sectoral, natural-based solutions and ecosystem-based approaches have been highlighted. Additionally, the Chair of the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice has been requested to

hold an expert dialogue on mountains and climate change at its sixtieth session. This milestone stands as a noteworthy achievement for Nepal, given the profound impact of climate change on the Himalayas, ranging from glacial melting, pervasive floods, escalated occurrences of landslides and heightened risks of Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs).

Rural Reconstruction Nepal (RRN) appreciates the Government of Nepal for its strategic planning and engagement at COP28. Notably, Nepal's pavilion at COP28 provided a platform for diverse stakeholders to amplify their voices on the climate agenda collaboratively. As a Least Developed Country (LDC), a Landlocked Developing Country (LLDC), and a mountainous country, Nepal seized the opportunity to emphasize its unique vulnerabilities and present its agenda effectively in front of the international community. As we reflect on the outcomes of COP28, we must call for increased global cooperation and commitments and issue a resounding call to action in our fight against climate change.

RRN's Urgent Call to Action

- We call for the urgent delivery and scale-up of climate finance, demanding that developed countries close the financing gap that is needed for climate adaptation and mitigation, energy transition and disaster relief. We strongly call upon the international community to prioritize climate finance and accelerate the pace of climate finance delivery.
- We demand reparations for loss and damage and strongly urge developed countries to deliver climate finance for the LDF, ensuring that the finance is new, additional, predictable, fair and debt-free. We call for robust commitments, effective channels for fund distribution and accessibility of the fund in light of equity and historical responsibility.
- We must hold developed countries accountable for their emissions, advocating for a phase out of fossil fuels while implementing a just transition that is equitable, timely, and well-funded. We strongly reject the numerous false solutions that serve as distractions, instead, we demand international cooperation for increased technology transfers, the removal of capacity barriers, and improved direct access to climate funds.
- We call upon CSOs to come together and advocate for clearer GST targets and commitments. We must work collectively at the national, regional and international levels to thoroughly examine the loopholes in the GST and ensure that these gaps are identified and addressed, thereby advancing global climate efforts.
- We strongly encourage the Government of Nepal to proactively prioritize the 'Himalayan Agenda' within the broader 'Mountain Agenda.' This is crucial to ensuring that the concerns of our people are not only acknowledged at the international level but that concrete steps are taken towards safeguarding them.
- We strongly urge the Government of Nepal to take decisive measures to enhance the capacity of local governments to utilise funds effectively, such as the LDF and LDCF. As the Chair of the LDC Group, Nepal must set an example by implementing comprehensive training programs, streamlining administrative processes and fostering community engagement at the local level, to localize the climate agenda among vulnerable communities.