Panos Caribbean Media Briefing on the United Nations Climate Talks 2022

Key Issues for Small Island Developing States

Introduction

Climate change, with its many risks and threats, is a clear and present danger to countries the world over, but in particular Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and others from the global South.

Their vulnerability can be seen in their small size and, in many instances, struggling economies, together with their geographical locations that put them in the path of natural disasters. These factors make it essential that sustained, scaled-up actions be taken to halt the warming of the planet and the associated impacts.

Enhanced international cooperation can accelerate immediate and near-term actions that go far beyond the ambition and investments set out to date. Making this happen requires a significantly enhanced, wide range of individual country, and collaborative initiatives, both from Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and other stakeholders; as well as to quickly transition all sectors to a pathway to net-zero emissions, while building climate resilience.

This can leverage actions capable of going beyond the 2030 objectives in the current Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), which reflect country efforts to cut greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate change risks and threats. (https://wwfint.awsassets.panda.org/downloads/wwf_cop27_expectations_paper.pdf).

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) AR6 Report has confirmed that to have any chance of limiting global warming to 1.5°C, emissions must peak in the first half of this decade, with 2025 global emissions lower than in 2020, on the way to a 43% reduction by 2030 from 2019 levels.

The IPCC makes clear the many cost-effective positive social and environmental outcomes available in meeting these goals, including improved equity, poverty alleviation, food security, as well as health and well-being.

From November 6-18, 2022, roughly 35,000 persons including more than 100 Heads of State and Governments participated in high level and side events, key negotiations and other activities at the United Nations 27th Conference of the Parties held in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt. Below are some of the key issues that have implications for SIDS and especially Caribbean countries.

1) Loss and Damage

Loss and damage has been a longstanding issue for SIDS, with their successful, years-long lobby leading to its inclusion as an agenda item for the United Nations Climate Talks (COP27) in Egypt recently. Further, COP27 concluded with a decision to establish a loss and damage fund for developing countries. This fund is to specifically address the ex-post response of developing countries to climate impacts.

The announced establishment of the fund was welcomed by SIDS – especially the negotiating block of the Alliance of Small Island Developing States (AOSIS), including those from the Caribbean, who are among the most vulnerable to climate change impacts, including extreme weather events – the likes of which have been experienced over recent years with a resulting loss of lives, livelihoods and millions of dollars in damage.

The decision to establish the loss and damage fund comes after some three decades of advocacy from the developing world whose stakeholders are now eager for the operationalisation of the fund, and with dedicated new sources of financing.

This is in addition to what is to be made available for adaptation and mitigation and should form a part of the New Collective Quantified Goal.

2) Climate Financing

Going into the November 2022 COP, the goal was to meet and exceed the US$100 billion pledged from developed countries and exceed $600 billion for the period 2020-25. The US$100 billion was made in 2009 at the UN Climate Talks in Copenhagen, Denmark.

The climate finance goal going into COP 27 anticipated that at least half of public financing would be going to adaptation, and that all countries would be working to align public and private finance flows with climate and biodiversity goals and the Sustainable Development Goals. (https://wwfint.awsassets.panda.org/downloads/wwf_cop27_expectations_paper.pdf).

The IPCC Working Group III also notes that finance flows for fossil fuels are still greater than those for climate adaptation and mitigation.

This notwithstanding, the Egypt COP failed to deliver on implementation for the joint mobilisation of the USD 100 billion per year by 2020, with the language from the cover decision (https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cop27_auv_2_cover%20decision.pdf) reflecting only the need for "accelerated financial support for developing countries and other sources" in order to enhance mitigation action and address inequalities in access to finance.

The document also referred to the fact that finance flows are small when compared to the level of need within the developing world. Currently, finance flows are calculated at some USD 803 billion or only 31 per cent to 32 per cent of the required annual investment.

3) Adaptation -1.5 to Stay Alive

Climate scientists, including celebrated Caribbean physicist, Professor Michael Taylor, insist it is necessary to hold global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels or risk the survival of SIDS. When matched against projected increases in warming and the associated threats – from sea level rise to affected rainfall patterns, and coastal erosion, among others, the situation of SIDS, should the world fail to realise the 1.5 target, would be dire.

As reflected in the 2017 study *''Future Caribbean Climates in a World of Rising temperatures: The 1.5 vs. 2.0 Dilemma",* 'a global warming target of 1.5 degrees Celsius will still result in significant climatic change in the Caribbean' – from 'a further 0.28 – 1.0 degrees Celsius

warming, almost year-round warm spells, longer hot and dry spells, and greater portions of the domain being under drought", to "increased occurrence of extreme drought conditions, and a transition to a mean drier regime across the entire domain".

Still, even with the risks, which are also reflected in the IPCC special report on global warming of 1.5 degrees Celsius, COP27 did not yield sufficiently strong language regarding the goal. Instead, it 'reiterated' that climate impacts will be much less felt at a temperature of no more than 1.5 degrees Celsius when compared with 2 degrees Celsius.

4) Technology Transfer

The development and transfer of technologies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and complement the overall climate response has been an essential element of the process of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change since the outset. In the race to limit global warming, technology development and transfer is critical for the creation of the necessary enabling environment for the achievement of NDCs.

COP27 has yielded some progress on technology transfer, with the first joint work programme of the Technology Executive Committee and Climate Technology Centre and Network set for 2023-2027. Among the action items are a technology needs assessment together with actions plans and road maps.

5) Mitigation

It is critical that global emissions be cut in half by the end of the decade. This will allow us to keep the goal of limiting temperature rise to 1.5 degrees. At the end of the UN Climate Talks in 2021, more than 150 Country Parties had submitted new NDC reports indicating how they would cut emissions by 2030. However, for some of the major emitters, their 2030 targets are weak and do not offer credible pathways for achieving their net-zero targets.

This has resulted in what some are calling a 'credibility gap' between the between the 2.5 degrees Celsius-aligned 2030 targets and nations' net-zero targets. Many are pressing for these countries to strengthen their 2030 emission-reduction targets to line up with their net-zero commitments.

COP27 has seen parties called upon to make best efforts to transition to low-emission energy systems, "including rapidly scaling up the deployment of clean power generation and energy efficiency measures". It also pointed to the need to achieve the temperature goal of the Paris

Agreement of "well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, recognizing that this would significantly reduce the risks and impacts of climate change".

Conclusion

There were some gains from the recent COP, not the least of these the commitment to establish a fund to support loss and damage associated with climate change impacts in the developing world. Still, there is much at stake for Caribbean SIDS and others from the developing world, as developed countries make the slow march to reducing emissions and making available the promised new and additional financing to support adaptation and mitigation.

Potential Follow up story ideas:

1) How will Caribbean countries advance the 1.5 target over the next year?
2) How much climate finance has been directed to Caribbean countries? Who are the main Caribbean countries that have benefitted from climate financing?
3) How are Caribbean SIDS benefitting from the Climate Technology Transfer agreements?
4) How is AOSIS planning to advance the loss and damage agenda following this COP outcome?

Resource Persons:

1) Professor Michael Taylor, head of the Climate Studies Group at the University of the West Indies, Mona Campus. Contact: Michael.taylor@uwimona.edu.jm
2) Le-Anne Roper, Negotiator on loss and damage for Jamaica and co-chair of the Executive Committee of the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage associated with Climate change impacts. Contact: le-anne.roper@megjc.gov.jm
3) Dr. Colin Young, Executive Director of the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre. Email: cyoung@caribbeanclimate.bz
4) Mr. Carlos Fuller, Permanent Representative of Belize to the United Nations and Vice-President of the Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Email: cfuller@belizemission.com
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