

Priorities of the Implementation COP

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A comprehensive vision should aim at protecting the life of the citizen against not only threats from climate crises but also the timeworn enemies of humankind: hunger and poverty.

Egypt is hosting the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP27) in November 2022. The African hosting of the COP is an opportunity to rethink climate priorities, voice the demands of the developing world, and –most importantly– turn climate pledges into implementation.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) annual reports paint a stark picture of the impacts climate change has on our planet, our lives and that of future generations. But, they also direct our attention to the great injustice that characterizes the climate crisis. Both historical and contemporaneous statistics show us how climate change is primarily a developed countries' originated externality which is paid for by citizens of the planet, whether poor or rich. This can be clearly illustrated through figures of greenhouse gas emissions of different countries and regions around the globe. For instance, Africa is the source of only 3% of the world's total emissions, while the United States, with a population size roughly a quarter of the African population, emits 12.5% of the global total.

This teaches us that finding a just and sustainable solution to the climate crisis requires immediate implementation of mitigation and adaptation action while tackling injustice. It is not easy, nor straightforward, to balance these two aspects. **Below, I list five climate action priorities, which collectively aim at such a critical balance.**



The first priority is to adopt a holistic approach to climate change. This means abstaining from a reductionist approach, which minimizes climate action to simply mitigation, and from mitigation to decarbonization. While these are central elements of the solution, we must not forget the bigger picture. Finance, adaptation, loss, and damage are at least as critical as mitigation. Further, from the perspective of developing nations, a more comprehensive agenda for sustainable development is as existential and as important as climate action itself. It is not realistic to call for climate action without considering the whole context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which address poverty and hunger, employment, and women empowerment.

The responsibility of developed nations to lead the way in terms of climate action and green technology is indisputable. Nobel laureate economist Michael Spence argues that advanced countries should lead the climate action way with technology and a global strategy to reduce the carbon intensity of their economies. This would lay the groundwork for developing economies to follow a sustainable path as they graduate to higher income levels. In this context, I argue, in turn, that **the second priority** must be to shift from more pledges and promises into actual implementation and climate investments.

Thirteen years ago, at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen (COP15), rich nations promised to channel USD 100 billion a year to less wealthy nations by 2020 to help them adapt to climate change and mitigate further rises in temperature. While finance mobilization has been rising slowly since the Paris agreement in 2015, total numbers have been well below the promised sum, which is by itself too low compared to the actual financing needs of the developing nations or if measured as a percentage of the global output (0.12% of global GDP). Developed nations admit that such a lack of fulfillment exists and that this effectively undermines the trust between rich and poor countries. For COP27 to be indeed the 'Implementation COP', action must be taken, such finance is mobilized, promising ideas are projectized, and existing initiatives are replicated and scaled up.

The third climate action priority is regionalization. Climate action thrives on cooperation, coordination, and mutual understanding. Regional coworking ensures that climate policy actions are technically, economically, socially, and politically feasible. It is also a necessary condition for the much-needed just transition, which is achieved by adequately considering regional socio-economic challenges and geopolitical specifications. Regionalizing climate action is, therefore, an excellent mechanism for sharing experience and expertise, developing regionally tailored goals, and avoiding disparities and tensions.

Regionalization takes us to localization, which is **the fourth priority**. Considering heterogeneity among –and also within countries– is crucial for achieving a just transition. Local demographic characteristics –such as income, education, health, as well as environmental characteristics– are key determinants of suitable climate action paths. This argues for a bigger role for local players, private ones (e.g., businesses and communities) or public ones (e.g., cities and governorates) in the climate agenda, which is a key focus of my work this year with the Marrakech Partnership.

The fifth priority is finance, without which none of the above would be possible. Currently, debt is the main instrument used for climate finance in developing countries. This is neither sustainable nor fair. We need to see more investments and concessional financing, especially for developing economies that have reached –even surpassed– their debt limits. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), 60 percent of low-income countries are now at a high risk of, or already in, debt distress. This calls for financing resilience in the world’s most vulnerable countries without adding to their debt. This further calls for innovation in finance instruments, blending of climate finance, and establishment of international carbon markets.

Finally, the battle against climate change need not be in conflict with the developmental needs of the developing countries. Indeed, the latest IPCC report states that climate financing should be additional to, not at the cost of, the SDGs. A comprehensive vision should aim at protecting the life of the citizen against not only threats from climate crises but also the timeworn enemies of humankind: hunger and poverty.

