

Keeping it relevant

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Context:

COP meetings must use climate science to promote justice and equity.

Introduction:

Since 1995, when the first of the United Nations Conference of Parties (COP) was organised, it has undergone a remarkable shift in character. From stuffy, closed-door meetings peopled by bureaucrats and technocrats, they have morphed into a carnival.

Growth of Officialdom:

1. Officialdom has of course grown, with the UN climate secretariat bursting at the seams with reams of subsidiary bodies, 'working groups' and intricately convoluted agenda items. But this has been accompanied by the burgeoning of activist groups, indigenous groups, big and small business, consultancies, traders, and a vast media presence.
2. It is on the one hand fair to conclude that this is a welcome development and due to the growing awareness of how anthropogenic climate change, amplified by centuries of industrialisation, poses an existential threat to humanity.

Faith in the Climate assessment:

1. Climate denialists, vociferous and significant in power corridors even until a decade ago, are now relegated to the obscurity of the darknet, along with Flat Earthers, and their ranks filled by parvenus and the pivoting merchants of the fossil fuel era who see opportunity in the messianic espousal of renewable energy.
2. There is no country today that will not publicly affirm its faith in the scientific assessment — that greenhouse gas emissions must be contained drastically to cap the rise in global temperatures to 1.5°C — and yet it has never inspired any sense of urgency to cut fossil fuel use, the dominant source of GHGs.

Acknowledging the fact, Dubai consensus:

1. That it has taken nearly three decades for COP to acknowledge this fact, as laid out in the Dubai Consensus, suggests that political expediency and strategic second-guessing has unfortunately weaponised even climate science.
2. Thus, countries responsible for most of the human-emitted carbon point to record temperatures and their links to rising emissions when arguing for reining in emissions from developing countries. However, they are loathe to accept this link when developing and island nations demand funds as reparations for devastations already wreaked by climate change.

Loss and Damage fund:

1. The Loss and Damage Fund, which received commitments worth \$750 million, and therefore cheered as a COP28-success, has only been approved on the condition that it not be considered as compensation for historical carbon pollution.
2. Related to this is the larger concern that COP meetings are deemed as 'historic' only when they insert new verb phrases — phase out, phase down, transition — on cutting emissions but are banal when they consider how little money and technology have been channelled for fossil fuel de-addiction.

Conclusion:

It is time that future meetings use the science to promote justice and equity and strengthen faith in what is now one of the few working multilateral processes.



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