

Understanding COP:

Your Quick Guide to Global Climate Action



**African Climate
Reality Project**

THE BASICS

What is COP?

COP stands for the Conference of the Parties, involving 198 countries that are part of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the first global climate treaty.

The Conference of the Parties (COP) is an annual summit where countries that are parties (or signatories) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) gather to negotiate and advance global climate policies. COP serves as a critical platform for international climate action, aiming to address and mitigate the impacts of climate change through binding agreements and collaborative efforts. Each COP meeting reviews the progress of past agreements, sets new targets, and fosters global cooperation to tackle climate challenges.

Why Does COP Matter?

COP is crucial because it is a space to unite countries to tackle climate change, a challenge that affects everyone globally. At these meetings, leaders build on previous commitments, address urgent climate issues, and set ambitious new targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. By working together, they can confront significant challenges that no single country can solve alone, paving the way for a sustainable future for all.

The Importance of African Youth Voices

African youth voices are crucial in climate negotiations, yet they are often sidelined during major UN events. Young people in Africa are among the most impacted by climate change, facing extreme weather events, food insecurity, and economic instability. Their experiences, perspectives, and innovative solutions are essential for shaping effective and inclusive climate policies. This resource will help young people navigate the complexities of COP, understand its significance, and amplify their voices to influence outcomes.



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Let's unpack the UNFCCC

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is a key international treaty established within the framework of the United Nations (UN). The UNFCCC was adopted in 1992 at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro and serves as the primary international instrument for addressing climate change.

Key Points:

Part of the UN System:

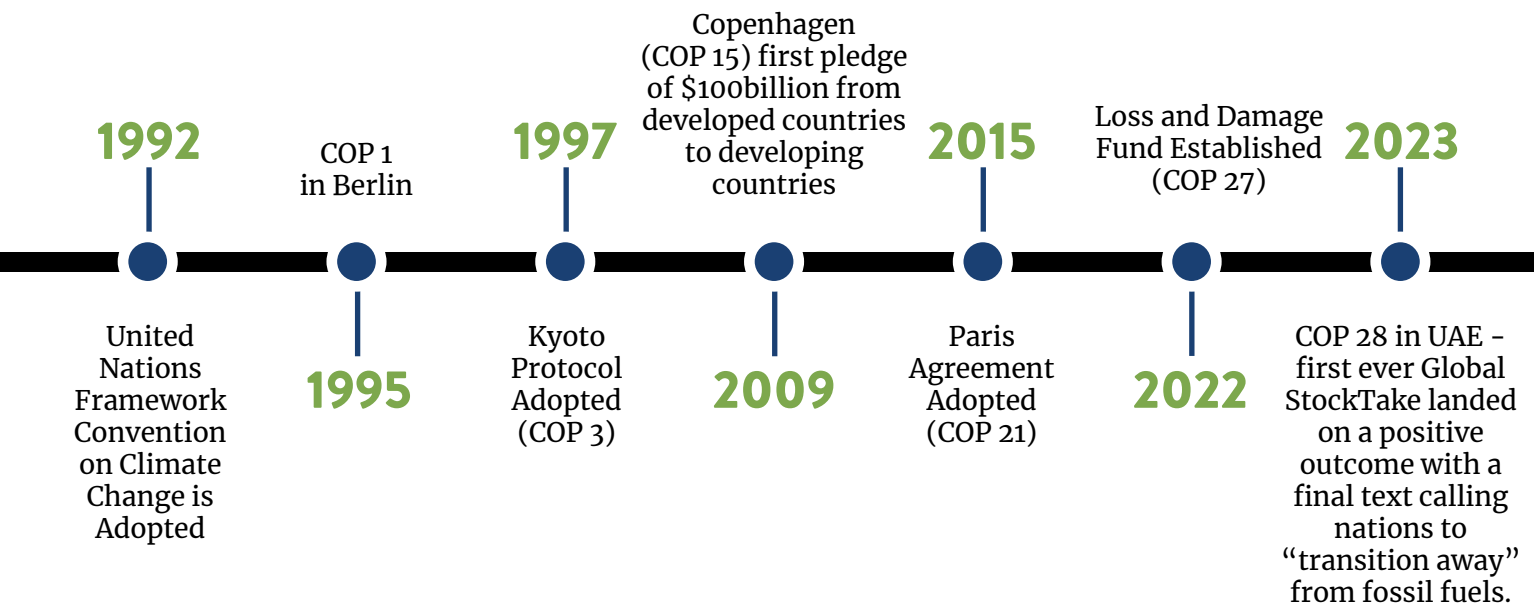
The UNFCCC is part of the broader UN system and operates under its auspices. It collaborates with other UN bodies and agencies, such as the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Objectives:

The main goal of the UNFCCC is to stabilise greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere to prevent dangerous human interference with the climate system. The Convention sets the framework for international cooperation on climate action.

Key Milestones

The Timeline: A quick timeline of major events and treaties (negotiations and smaller agreements at COPs)



Structure of the Conference of the Parties (COP)

The Conference of the Parties (COP) is the supreme decision-making body of the UNFCCC, composed of representatives from the countries that are parties to the Convention. Here's how the COP is structured:

- 1 Annual Meetings:** The COP meets annually, typically referred to by the year it occurs (e.g., COP26). These meetings are crucial for reviewing progress, negotiating agreements, and setting future climate goals.
- 2 Delegates:** Each party (country) sends a delegation to the COP, which usually includes government officials, negotiators, and sometimes representatives from civil society and private sectors.
- 3 Presidency:** The COP is presided over by a country that hosts the conference. This country's representatives play a key role in guiding the discussions and negotiations.
- 4 Working Groups:** The COP establishes various subsidiary bodies and working groups to address specific issues, such as the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) and the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI). These bodies help facilitate discussions and provide technical support.
- 5 Decision-Making:** Decisions are made by consensus whenever possible. If consensus cannot be reached, decisions may be adopted by a two-thirds majority vote.
- 6 Reports and Outcomes:** Each COP produces decisions, resolutions, and reports outlining the outcomes of the negotiations, commitments made by countries, and plans for future actions. These documents guide international climate policy and cooperation.
- 7 Engagement with Stakeholders:** The COP also facilitates engagement with non-state actors, including civil society organisations, businesses, and indigenous groups, ensuring that diverse perspectives are considered in climate discussions.



Key Terms

UNFCCC:

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change: a treaty to stabilise greenhouse gas concentrations

IPCC:

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change: the leading climate science body globally, informing policy decisions.

Kyoto Protocol:

First treaty with binding emissions targets

Paris Agreement:

Legally binding, aims to limit warming to 1.5°C since before the industrial revolution

1.5°C:

Critical limit laid out in the Paris Agreement to avoid dangerous climate tipping points

Loss and Damage:

Loss and damage refers to the harm caused by climate-related impacts, this happens when efforts to adapt and reduce emissions don't make people less vulnerable to these issues.

Mitigation:

Actions taken to limit the causes of climate change, this involves cutting emissions to limit future warming. Countries set specific targets through their nationally determined commitments (NDCs) and long-term strategies (LTSs) to reduce carbon emissions by 2030.

Adaptation:

Actions taken to deal with the impacts of climate change happening now, or preparing or adjusting for impacts to come. This includes modifying infrastructure and daily life to cope with issues like sea-level rise and droughts. Adaptation efforts are especially important for developing countries and those most vulnerable to climate effects.

Climate Finance:

Funding sourced from local, national, or transnational levels—encompassing public, private, and alternative financial resources—that aims to support actions for both mitigation and adaptation in response to climate change. This funding is crucial for implementing strategies that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and enhance resilience to climate impacts.

Significantly, climate finance plays a vital role in adaptation efforts, as substantial financial resources are necessary to address the adverse effects of climate change and minimise its impacts on vulnerable communities and ecosystems.



Current Challenges

Insufficient Targets:

Current pledges on track for 2.5°C warming, and do not demonstrate an ambitious mitigation plan.

Climate Finance:

Aligning climate finance commitments with global needs is essential, yet many elements of the New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) remain contested.

Loss and Damage Fund:

The fund's financial contributions are minimal compared to the global needs for addressing loss and damage from climate impacts.

Adaptation Strategies:

Adaptation efforts are frequently overshadowed by mitigation priorities, leaving vulnerable communities without adequate support.

Fossil Fuel Subsidies:

Existing fossil fuel subsidies continue to undermine climate progress and lack a clear phase-out plan.

Debt Solutions:

Many developing countries face challenges in accessing debt relief, limiting their ability to invest in climate action.



What You Can Do

Get Informed:
Learn more about COP processes

COP 101:
An Introduction to International
Climate Negotiations

Strengthening International
Cooperation on Climate



My little COP
pocketbook

UNFCCC observer
handbook

What is COP 29

What is Your Call to Action?

Advocate:

Demand stronger pledges for a net-zero future: To create a livable future for everyone, we need to push world leaders to enhance their emissions reduction commitments and take action!



Net-Zero
Now!



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