

# UAE Consensus didn't deliver on its ambition



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**COP28 PLANNED TO** be the most ambitious, but its final outcome significantly fell short. It wanted to be a COP of action, with a report card on progress towards the goals of the Paris Agreement. And there was delivery on several fronts with the Loss and Damage fund, India's Green Credit Initiative and a range of coalitions and pledges. But, in the end, despite the progress made, the final text muddles the message on many counts and weakens climate justice and action.

First, where are the two key principles of historical responsibility and differentiation when it comes to emissions? The COP28 outcome emphasises the importance of science and recognises that global emissions would need to peak by 2025 in line with IPCC findings. At the same time, it notes that the peaking year would be different for countries, shaped by sustainable development, poverty alleviation, equity in line with different national circumstances. Differentiation, thus, has found space. However, historical responsibility has been largely sidelined. While the decision acknowledges that historical carbon dioxide emissions already account for four-fifths of the small and rapidly depleting carbon budget, it doesn't tag this to the actions of the developed world. This has tectonic implications for the future of the climate debate.

Second, there is undue spotlight on coal while oil and gas walk free. The most hotly debated issue at COP28 was that of fossil fuel 'phaseout'. Emissions from all fossil fuels need to be eliminated in order to achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement. Still, oil



Fossil fuel 'phaseout' was the most hotly debated issue at COP28 REUTERS

and gas producers and consumers created tactical blocks during negotiations. At one point, the decision text had options as ambitious as peaking of fossil fuel use in this decade. The final decision text, however, is a significant let down with not even a mention of phasedown but only of a 'transition away' from fossil fuels.

The decision also recognises that transitional fuels (read natural gas) can play an important role in energy transition. Natural gas producers may temporarily rejoice but given the call for phasing out of all fossil fuels will continue to get louder, investments will become more concentrated and the pace slower over the coming decade.

Third, two new and important doors were opened. The first relates to methane emissions. This took centre stage in Glasgow with the US launching the Global Methane Pledge to reduce methane emissions by 30% by 2030 compared to 2020 levels. The pledge is now supported by 155 countries, representing over 50% of global anthropogenic methane emissions. In Dubai, the issue of non-CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and methane has been placed on the final text for the first time. What does this mean for India? Methane emissions in India largely come from livestock and paddy cultiva-

tion. India's environment minister has stated clearly that agriculture and allied emissions are not within the purview of India's climate targets. However, it is only a matter of time COP negotiations focus on this.

The second door relates to unilateral actions. The European Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) has been a significant bone of contention. Many countries in the Global North are thinking about creating their own versions of CBAM. The developing countries successfully made this an important issue at COP.

Further, there is a glaring gap—COP28 decided nothing meaningful on climate finance, either a quantum or who pays for it. The Loss & Damage fund was operationalised, but its footprint makes implementation weak. Useful procedural progress on Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA) was also achieved but this will need to become a core agenda at future COPs.

Overall, developments at the first GST COP signalled the beginning of the end of the fossil fuel era, but delivered nothing ambitious enough. Now, the 1.5°C warming limit hangs by a thread.

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