

COP27 - 2022 United Nations Climate Change Conference

COP27 was held in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt, in November, and marked the 30th anniversary of the adoption of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Goals for COP27 were described as mitigation, adaptation, finance and collaboration. A much heralded outcome was the agreement on the establishment of a fund for loss and damage for countries particularly vulnerable to adverse climate change effects, and a recommitment to keeping the 1.5°C target goal alive via a new work program. While the fund to support developing countries was welcomed, the funding details and launch date remain unclear, and critics have also pointed out that no clear progress was made on the key issues of emission reduction and the abandonment of fossil fuels.

Women were underrepresented in the climate negotiations. The BBC reported that women made up less than 34% of the negotiating teams at COP27 despite the fact that they bear a disproportionate burden from climate change.¹ Action Aid published a report in November 2022 which looked at the impacts on women of climate change-induced loss and damage in four African countries, – Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda and Zambia – and emphasised that climate justice can only be achieved when based on the foundations of gender justice.² A climate justice and feminist approach was taken in the report which argues for a systemic and transformational approach that shifts power, safeguards women’s rights, and enables women to lead.

When a photograph of world leaders at COP27 was widely published in the media it was shocking to note there were only seven women in the group amongst 103 men. According to the Women’s Environment and Development Organisation (WEDO)³ which has been tracking female participation in climate policy making since 2009, this was one of the lowest numbers of women seen at the UN climate summits. Because women’s lack of power and influence undermines progress towards a sustainable and secure future this inequity in representation will need to be addressed urgently.

Elizabeth Wathuti from Kenya, founder of the Green Generation Initiative which is a non-profit youth led organisation, spoke of the need to *“put women’s needs, experiences, and their wisdom at the centre of places where policies are being made.”*⁴ Women Gender Constituency, in a press release on November 22nd, expressed disappointment and frustration about women’s rights advocates being left out while Parties failed to advance critical issues, and Carmen Capriles, from Bolivia stated, *“We refuse to be complacent in an outcome that treats the symptoms but not the cause”* and likened the carbon offsetting and loopholes that have been created to delay meaningful action as *“plugging holes in a dam that is ready to break.”*⁵

Unfortunately, the small wins at COP27 failed to address the urgent need for climate justice action, and until the root cause of climate change is addressed – the burning of fossil fuels – there will be little progress made in tackling global warming. It was reported that at least 636 fossil fuel lobbyists were granted access to COP27 with twenty-nine countries including lobbyists as part of their official delegations.⁶

The Hon James Shaw, reporting in a New Zealand National Statement on COP27, said that Aotearoa New Zealand *“is committed to bold, enduring action in the fight against climate change.”* Shaw described climate change in the Pacific as an *“existential challenge”*, and

said that without “adequate mitigation, we will not be able to adapt.”⁷ The New Zealand Climate and Health Council’s (Ora Taiao) co-conveners, Dr Dermot Coffey and Summer Wright acknowledged the positive development of the loss and damage fund decision at COP27, to which Aotearoa New Zealand has contributed \$20 million, while recognising the critical work that still needs to be done to address climate change rather than what they describe as “tinkering at the edges.”⁸

The 2022 Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate Change⁹ described the world as being at a critical juncture, and that a health-centred response to the crisis would still provide an opportunity for a low carbon and resilient future, and avoid climate change health harms. The Lancet Countdown report is described as showing “the direst findings yet”, with 1.1°C of heating “increasingly undermining every pillar of good health and compounding the health impacts of the current COVID-19 pandemic and geopolitical conflicts.”

On a positive note, despite the false solutions to climate change being promoted, such as carbon trading and offsetting, and the underrepresentation of women at the discussion and decision making table, COP27 marked the first multilateral environmental agreement to include an explicit reference to the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.¹⁰ The 2022 Lancet Countdown report also report some “glimmers of hope” with government engagement with health and climate change reaching record levels in 2021.¹¹

COP28 in November 2023 will be held in the United Arab Emirates, which is among the world’s ten largest oil producers. Time will tell as to how many fossil fuel lobbyists will attend, and what effect the potential conflicts of interest will have on meaningful progress towards a sustainable future.

¹ Stallard, E. (2022). *COP27: Lack of women at negotiations raises concern*. 16th November 2022.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-63636435>

² Action Aid UK. (2022). *Women confronting loss and damage in Africa*.

<https://www.actionaid.org.uk/publications/women-confronting-loss-and-damage-africa>

³ Women’s Environment and Development Organisation. <https://wedo.org/about-us/vision-mission/>

⁴ Environmental and Energy Study Institute (EESI). (2022). *COP27 Dispatch – November 14 2022. Gender and Water Day*. <https://www.eesi.org/newsletters/view/cop27-dispatch-november-14-2022>

⁵ Bidga, L. (2022). *Collective power shines amid a process that fails on urgent climate action*. November 20th 2022. <https://womengenderclimate.org/press-release-collective-power-shines-amid-a-process-that-fails-on-urgent-climate-action/>

⁶ Global Witness. (2022). *636 fossil fuel lobbyists granted access to COP27*. November 10th, 2022.

<https://www.globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/fossil-gas/636-fossil-fuel-lobbyists-granted-access-cop27/>

⁷ New Zealand Government. (2022). *New Zealand National Statement – COP27*. Hon James Shaw 16th November 2022. <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/speech/new-zealand-national-statement-%E2%80%93-cop27>

⁸ Coffey, D., & Wright, S. (2022). *A COP-out on a #HealthyClimate? New Zealand Doctor*, Monday 21 November. <https://www.nzdoctor.co.nz/article/opinion/cop-out-healthyclimate>

⁹ Romanello, M., Di Napoli, C., Drummond, P., et al. (2022). *The 2022 report of the Lancet Countdown on health and climate change: health at the mercy of fossil fuels*. *The Lancet*, 400:1619-1654.

¹⁰ Bidga, L. (2022). *Collective power shines amid a process that fails on urgent climate action*. November 20th 2022. <https://womengenderclimate.org/press-release-collective-power-shines-amid-a-process-that-fails-on-urgent-climate-action/>

¹¹ Romanello, M., Di Napoli, C., Drummond, P., et al. (2022). *The 2022 report of the Lancet Countdown on health and climate change: health at the mercy of fossil fuels*. *The Lancet*, 400:1619-1654.