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ISSUE BRIEF

Climate change and sustainability policies are processes, not events. The COPs—summits of the Conference of the Parties who signed the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)—are celebrated for their ability to focus global attention on mitigation, adaptation, and energy transition. The COPs review and assess progress toward environmental sustainability as well as commit to mechanisms that ensure the just sharing of burdens, responsibilities, and benefits. While each COP achieves progress on some fronts, much work stays on the agenda for future COPs.

But we are running out of time. At COP21 in 2015, the world agreed to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius by 2050. To do that, the world needs to halve carbon emissions in the next seven years. We are far behind. To get there, we need to commit trillions of dollars to equitable economic, social, and cultural transformational measures.

In this issue of the *Cairo Review* titled “COP27: A Climate Tipping Point?”, Ambassador Miguel Ruiz Cabañas asserts that COP27 in Egypt was a diplomatic success that gave hope for climate justice, but that left many challenges to be addressed in COP28 in Dubai. In COP27, a breakthrough was achieved with a loss and damage fund to help poorer countries that are battered by climate disasters. Further work on the loss and damage fund needs to take place; the fund has to hammer out details in terms of exact amounts and mechanisms of disbursement. In COP27, the international community failed to commit to tougher measures for limiting global warming. More work in this respect is still ahead.

Another piece of unfinished work is the transition out of fossil fuels and other harmful extractive industries. We need to build on the achievements attained in Glasgow in 2021 (COP26), in Sharm El-Sheikh in 2022 (COP27), and in the G20 meeting in Bali, Indonesia in 2022. In Glasgow, South Africa announced an 8.5 billion dollar “Just Energy Transition Partnership” (JETP), and in Egypt the following year further specifics regarding JETP were hammered out. At the G20 meeting in Bali, Indonesia announced a 20-billion-dollar partnership fund to support its own energy transition. Those funds are important steps to help specific countries finance their just energy transition. Yet, vastly larger volumes of funds are needed to graduate from national funds to a global and just energy transition fund, and to achieve that fund, we still need to formulate equitable criteria and mechanisms for disbursement.

It would be welcome if an oil producer like the UAE could continue the march away from fossil fuels. And yet, the appointment of a CEO of an oil company to the

presidency of COP28, though not without precedence in COP history, is causing global concern among energy transition advocates, argues Sarah El-Shaarawi in this issue.

The welcome message on the official COP28 page manifests the tensions ahead. The conference commits to “help align efforts on climate action,” “bridge the gaps in progress,” and “rethink, reboot, and refocus the climate agenda”. COP28’s UAE Presidency understands this to mean the prioritization of “efforts to accelerate emissions reductions through a pragmatic energy transition, reform land use, and transform food systems”. It remains to be seen what pragmatic energy transition means, given “the long history of both indirect and direct participation in and influence upon UN Climate talks” by the fossil fuel industry, as El-Shaarawi argues. As to reforming land use and transforming food systems, sustainable water policies will be key. Professor of Geosciences Thomas L. Crisman (University of South Florida) and researcher Malak Altaeb explain in this issue the centrality of inclusive water management issues, nature-based solutions, and adaptive management that may hold the key to water conservation in the region.

COP28 also promises to make the summit inclusive. Zeinab Shuker, associate professor of Sociology at Sam Houston State University in Texas, argues in this issue that if progress on climate change is to be made, voices from the most vulnerable Global South and African countries must be heard and included in conversations at climate conferences. Inclusion of civil society, the private sector, and other stakeholders at COP27 produced a mixed record of achievements and disappointments. For this reason, inclusion will continue to be a work in progress in future COPs.

By the same token, the inclusion of voices representing the future of work conversation is a must. In her essay, Associate Professor of Public Policy at GAPP Ghada Barsoum explores how the pressures of climate change could define the future of work as green. She shows why green initiatives are limited and questions who pushes for them to grow.

Finally, Arunabha Ghosh, CEO of India’s Council on Energy, Environment and Water, writes about the COPs as chances to reframe such climate summits as forums for action and accountability. This is a most crucial point. Looking at every conversation for climate change as an accountability dialogue will allow important transformations to happen.

I invite you to read this issue of *Cairo Review of Global Affairs* and follow GAPP’s “chat with the dean” interview series as well as GAPP’s policy briefs on climate and public policy, covering policy issues such as work, urbanism, and accountability.

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