

# Conference of Parties (COP) – Integrating countries for people and planet

## Understanding COP and what it entails?

### Background

Climate change poses one of the most significant threats to our planet and humanity by exacerbating social, economic, and environmental inequalities, therefore, disproportionately affecting vulnerable communities all over the world.

Though environmental issues were discussed during the United Nations Scientific Conferences, however, a direct climate action plan remained overlooked until the establishment of Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 1988. The IPCC deep dived into the scientific basis for climate change and produced periodic

assessment reports (ARs), thereby warning governments to be mindful of activities leading to climate change.

These reports were discussed at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in 1992 and became instrumental for many landmark decisions such as 'Rio Declaration', 'Agenda 21', 'Statement of Forest Principle', and, establishment of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

The UNFCCC is an international environmental treaty aimed at addressing climate change and its impacts. The UNFCCC entered

into force in March 1994 and the Conference of the Parties (COP) originated from the UNFCCC. The first COP, (COP1) was held in 1995 at Berlin, Germany whereas the latest was COP28, held at Dubai, UAE. During COP, stakeholders from all over the world congregate to discuss and make decisions on future climate actions to generate a global momentum against climate change. This article features the 'Frequently Asked Questions' about COP. It may serve as a convenient resource to learn basic information about COP along with its prominence and effectiveness in combating the climate change.



## What is Conference of the Parties (COP) and how does it function?

The COP is the apex decision-making body of the UNFCCC. The 'parties' refers to countries. All countries who ratified the UN Convention are represented at the conference. Apart from raising awareness about the urgency of addressing climate change, COP shapes global climate action to foster international negotiation, cooperation, and collaboration through sharing of knowledge, experiences, and best practices among parties. It also develops frameworks for global effort in reducing greenhouse gas emissions by setting targets and reporting on progress to ensure transparency and accountability of parties.

## Who is eligible to attend COP?

COP has 198 member parties, broadly organized in five regional groups:

1. African states
2. Asian states
3. Central & East European states
4. Latin America & the Caribbean states, and
5. West European & other states (where other states are Australia, Canada, Iceland, New Zealand, Norway, Switzerland, and the United States of America)

The other attendees include non-member country representatives, United Nations (UN) agencies, Media, Observer organizations such as inter-governmental organizations (IGOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), environmental advocacy

groups, research institutions, industry/business associations, investors, etc.

While representatives of Parties participate in the core negotiations, other attendees often contribute to discussions through side events and presentations. Attendees play essential roles in COP meetings by raising voices in favor of strong climate action from parties and advocating for ambitious climate agenda, raising public awareness, monitoring progress, and fostering collaboration among stakeholders. Their active participation helps ensure that COP outcomes reflect the interests and priorities of a diverse range of stakeholders, including vulnerable communities and future generations.

## What is the structure and duration of COP?

COP activities take place in two zones – Blue & Green. The Blue Zone is under the management of the UNFCCC that maintains exclusivity and serves as the center for official negotiations and high-level meetings among party representatives. In contrast, the Green Zone is managed by the host country which is a more inclusive space designed to engage the wider public. As per previous COPs, the conference

duration oscillated between 10-14 days.

## When and how frequent are COP meetings organised?

Generally, COP is an annual event. However there have been two exceptions in the past which are –

- COP6, The Hague, Netherlands, year 2000 - Negotiations reached an impasse due to disagreements over consequences for non-compliance of Kyoto protocol and therefore, COP6 later resumed as COP6.2 or COP6-bis in Bonn, Germany in the year 2001.
- COP26, Glasgow, United Kingdom, year 2020 - Rescheduled in 2021 due to COVID-19 pandemic.

## Where does COP meetings take place and how is the venue selected?

The host country of the COP normally rotates among the five UN regional groups. A tentative host country is determined through consultations among regional group members and then the selected country sends its formal offer to the UNFCCC secretariat. A country can offer to host COP more than once but a period of three years needs to lapse between the two COPs that



it organizes. Poland, has hosted three COPs i.e., COP14 in Poznan (2008), COP19 in Warsaw (2013), and COP24 in Katowice (2018).

- Also, if there is no offer to host or if a host backouts, the default site is the seat of the secretariat in Germany which has hosted COPs four times i.e., COP1 (1995) in Berlin; COP5 (1999), COP6.2 (2001), and COP23 (2017).

### How are the COP host and the COP Presidency interconnected?

The COP Presidency entails leadership and facilitation responsibilities during the conference, while the host country provides the logistical support and infrastructure for the event. It is usually the country hosting the conference that also holds

the COP Presidency, however, two contrasting scenarios have occurred in past –

- The Government of Fiji held the Presidency of COP23 while the conference was held in Bonn for logistical reasons.

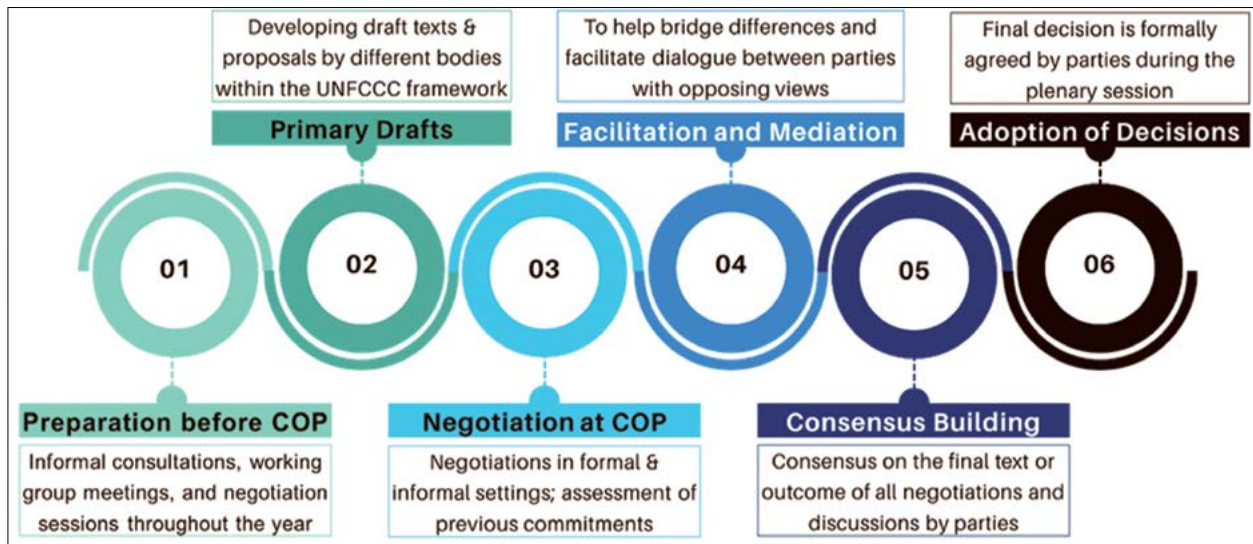
- Brazil and Chile offered to host COP25, however, they could not host due to political instability and civil unrest in these countries, respectively. Therefore, the conference was relocated to another host i.e., Madrid, Spain while Chile retained the Presidency.

The regional group members of the host region hold consultations to nominate a country representative for election as COP-President. The chairperson of respective regional group sends this information formally

to the UNFCCC secretariat. At the opening of each COP, the candidate nominated is elected as President. The UNFCCC does not have a conflict-of-interest policy, but it does have a draft rule of procedures that states that the President shall participate in the session in that capacity and shall not simultaneously exercise the rights of a representative of a Party.

The COP President ensures the observance of rules of procedure and works with country delegations to reach consensus on key issues. The Presidency visions for the best possible outcome of the meeting by developing effective international relationships to achieve the necessary commitments in advance of and at COP.

### What is the process of decisions-making at COP?



### What are challenges and criticism surrounding the COP?

Countries have diverse interests and priorities based on varied

political, social, economic, and, environmental scenarios. It is inevitable to have incongruency between their national climate action agenda and the frameworks developed at COP. It

often leads to intense negotiations before reaching to an agreement on contentious issues including –

- Lack of ambition, binding commitments, and enforcement mechanisms from major polluters

- Equity of climate agreements e.g., common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBDR-RC)
- Political deadlocks
- Corporate influence from major companies dealing in conventional fossil fuels
- Disproportion of marginalized stakeholders being represented at COP

### What is CBDR-RC and why is it supported by developing and Least Developed Countries (LDCs)?

Common But Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC) acknowledges that all countries share a common responsibility to address climate change, but recognizes that developed countries should take the lead due to their historical contributions to greenhouse gas emissions and their greater financial and technological capabilities. The treaty established different responsibilities for three categories of signatory states:

- **Annex I:** Parties include the industrialized countries that were members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 1992, plus countries with economies in transition (the EIT Parties), including the Russian Federation, the Baltic States, and several Central and Eastern European States.
- **Annex II:** Parties consist of the OECD members of Annex I, but not the EIT Parties. They are required to provide financial resources to enable developing countries to undertake emissions reduction activities.

• **Non-annex I:** Parties are mostly developing countries. Certain groups of developing countries are recognized by the Convention as being especially vulnerable to the adverse impacts of climate change, including countries with low-lying coastal areas and those prone to desertification and drought. A total of 49 Parties classified as least developed countries (LDCs) by the United Nations are given special consideration under the Convention on account of their limited capacity to respond to adverse effects of climate change.

The concept of CBDR-RC is supported by majority, especially by developing and least-developed countries at COPs as it is seen as a matter of equity and fairness. Developing countries and LDCs argue that –

- developed countries, historically, have been the largest emitters of greenhouse gases and have contributed the most to global climate change; also, they have more resources, technological capabilities, and institutional capacities to address climate change
- all countries should have the right to pursue economic development and poverty eradication without compromising their ability to adapt to and mitigate climate change, therefore, support from developed countries is wanted

### Why is the agenda of phasing out of conventional fuels difficult to follow by developing and least-developed countries?

As of now, the national economy

of most of these countries are dependent on public, private and other industries that use conventional fossil fuels. The use of conventional fuels in hard-to-abate yet strategic sectors of such economies is inevitable for next few years until these countries reach 100% capacity of green energy by using mix of renewable (e.g., solar, wind, etc.) and alternative sources of energy such as green hydrogen.

### How did COP reach to the landmark decision to limit global warming to 1.5°C (Paris Agreement)?

The IPCC and UNFCCC are two distinct entities with different roles, but they are closely related within the context of addressing climate change. The IPCC operates through a process of periodic assessment reports where thousands of scientists worldwide collaborate to provide a scientific basis for climate change. These reports contribute to the foundation of knowledge that play a key role in the annual climate negotiations (COP) among decision- and policy-makers from countries under the UNFCCC.

Apart from six assessment reports (AR1-AR6) till 2021-22, IPCC has produced many special reports targeting specific problems such as global warming. The IPCC through its AR4 (2007) and AR5 (2014) revealed that while natural factors continue to play a role in shaping climate patterns but the global warming over the past century is primarily due to GHGs released by anthropogenic activities. They cautioned all governments that at current



trend of GHG emission, global temperature could increase by 4°C which will have catastrophic and irreversible impacts on environment and life. Therefore, IPCC recommended governments to cut down GHG emissions to limit global warming to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels, with efforts to limit the increase to 1.5°C. These reports and recommendations were discussed during COP21 (2015)

in Paris (France) and a landmark “Paris Agreement” to set the 1.5°C limit as a threshold was ratified. Later, IPCC released a special report on global warming of 1.5°C (2018) that concluded as “even global warming of 1.5°C above the preindustrial average, over an extended period would lead to high risks for some regions and vulnerable ecosystems”.

At COP21, the Paris Agreement marked a departure from the

previous approach of CBDR-RC principle, with all nations committing to Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) covering both mitigation and adaptation efforts. Recently, another enhanced transparency and accountability mechanism has been introduced i.e., Global Stocktake (GST) – a process that happens every five years to evaluate the world’s progress on climate action.

## What are major decisions made at various COPs?

<p><b>COP1 (1995)</b></p> <p><b>Berlin, Germany</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The first COP meeting</li> <li>• Addressed initial steps toward achieving the UNFCCC objective by establishing rules and procedures</li> </ul>	<p><b>COP3 (1997)</b></p> <p><b>Kyoto, Japan</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developed Kyoto Protocol - the first global agreement on climate change</li> <li>• Established legally binding emission reduction targets for Annex-I countries</li> <li>• Introduced Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) and emissions trading</li> </ul>	<p><b>COP6.2 (2001)</b></p> <p><b>Bonn, Germany</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• United States rejected Kyoto Protocol</li> <li>• Clarified the rules for flexibility mechanisms including emissions trading, joint implementation (JI), and the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM)</li> <li>• Established the Adaptation Fund</li> </ul>
<p><b>COP7 (2001)</b></p> <p><b>Marrakech, Morocco</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marrakech Accord</li> <li>• Special attention was given to developing countries to build their capacities and ensuring technology transfer through least developed countries (LDC) Fund, special climate change fund (SCCF) and adaptation fund</li> </ul>	<p><b>COP10 (2004)</b></p> <p><b>Buenos Aires, Argentina</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategies were drafted to reduce emissions from deforestation and promote sustainable forest management</li> </ul>	<p><b>COP11 (2005)</b></p> <p><b>Montreal, Canada</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set the stage for establishing subsidiary bodies - AWG-KP and AWG-LCA</li> <li>• Kyoto Protocol's first commitment period officially entered into force</li> <li>• Life of the Kyoto Protocol was extended (2008-2012)</li> <li>• Emphasized the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBDR)</li> </ul>
<p><b>COP13 (2007)</b></p> <p><b>Bali, Indonesia</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishment of two ad hoc working groups i.e., AWG-LCA and AWG-KP</li> <li>• Continued the negotiations on the future of the adaptation fund, REDD, CDM, technology transfer, capacity building, engagement of civil society, and NGOs</li> </ul>	<p><b>COP15 (2009)</b></p> <p><b>Copenhagen, Denmark</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Copenhagen Accord - first voluntary emissions reduction pledges by parties</li> <li>• Conference was marked by protests from civil society and environmental activists who expressed dissatisfaction with the perceived lack of ambition and progress in the negotiations</li> </ul>	<p><b>COP16 (2010)</b></p> <p><b>Cancun, Mexico</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cancun Adaptation Framework seeking enhance resilience in developing countries through Green Climate Fund, a Technology Executive Committee, and a Climate Technology Centre and Network</li> <li>• Recognized the 4<sup>th</sup> Assessment Report of IPCC (2007) - goal of limiting temperature increase to 2°C / 1.5°C</li> </ul>
<p><b>COP18 (2012)</b></p> <p><b>Doha, Qatar</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Doha Amendment to the Kyoto Protocol</li> <li>• Established the second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol (2013-2020)</li> <li>• First time discussion on the importance of gender considerations in climate policies</li> </ul>	<p><b>COP21 (2015)</b></p> <p><b>Paris, France</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adoption of the Paris Agreement - a legally binding international treaty aimed at limiting global warming to 1.5°C</li> <li>• Accountability and transparency was ensured through all nations committing to NDCs and updating it every five years</li> </ul>	<p><b>COP24 (2018)</b></p> <p><b>Katowice, Poland</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Katowice Climate Package - rulebook of Paris agreement was adopted</li> <li>• Adoption of 'Solidarity and Just Transition Silesia Declaration' to identify just shift to low-carbon economies</li> <li>• Established the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform for engaging local communities</li> </ul>
<p><b>COP26 (2021)</b></p> <p><b>Glasgow, United Kingdom</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Glasgow Climate Pact - aiming to turn the 2020s into a decade of climate action and support</li> <li>• Over 40 countries, committed to the Global Coal to Clean Power Transition, pledging to phase out unabated coal power</li> <li>• Various pledges such as 'Coal to Clean Power Transition', 'Global Electric Vehicle', and 'Declaration on Forests and Land Use'</li> </ul>	<p><b>COP27 (2022)</b></p> <p><b>Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adopted the Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan "SHIP" as the main decision for guiding and boosting "low emission" energy</li> <li>• Launch of the Food and Agriculture for Sustainable Transformation initiative aiming to transform agriculture and food systems</li> <li>• Global Stocktake was discussed</li> </ul>	<p><b>COP28 (2023)</b></p> <p><b>Dubai, UAE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Global Stocktake (GST) of the Paris Agreement was adopted</li> <li>• Parties agreed on the need to transition away from fossil fuels in energy systems</li> <li>• Calls on countries to accelerate low- and zero-emission technologies</li> <li>• Climate finance such as Green Climate Fund (GCF), Adaptation Fund, etc. took center stage at the conference</li> </ul>

### What is schedule of upcoming COP meetings?

As of now, Baku in Azerbaijan and Belem in Brazil have been selected to host COP29 (2024) and COP30 (2025), respectively. Australia and Turkey have declared their candidature to host COP31 (2026), and recently India has proposed to host COP33 (2028) but decisions are yet to be taken.

### What has been India's stance on COP?

India has always participated

and been supportive to all major global climate change negotiations including Kyoto Protocol, Montreal Protocol, Paris Agreement, to name a few.

India has always discussed, negotiated, and took firm stand during COPs. India has always highlighted the issue of equity by supporting CBDR-RC principle, at the same time, it also ratified latest COP decisions such as NDCs and Global Stocktake (GST), showing its commitment to the idea of global efforts to mitigate climate change.

These declarations followed by concerted actions through several national (e.g., India's National Action Plan on Climate Change, National Solar Mission, National Adaptation Fund for Climate Change, etc.) and international (e.g., International Solar Alliance, Green Grids Initiative – One Sun One World One Grid, Leadership Group for Industry Transition, etc.) programmes and schemes are now the pillars of its climate leadership.

**Kyoto Protocol Participation Map**

Green = Countries that have signed and ratified the treaty  
 Grey = Countries that have not yet decided  
 Red = No intention to ratify at this stage

**Prime Minister presents India's 'Panchamrit' - the five key elements to deal with climate change:**

- Enhance renewable energy capacity to 500 GW by 2030
- To achieve about 50 percent cumulative electric power installed capacity from renewable energy resources by 2030
- Reduce total projected carbon emissions by 1 billion tonnes, from now to 2030
- To reduce the emissions intensity of GDP by more than 45 percent by 2030 from 2005 level
- To achieve the Net Zero Target by 2070

**INDIA PROPOSES TO HOST THE COP-33 SUMMIT**

**PM MODI'S SPEECH AT HIGH LEVEL MEETING ON GREEN CREDITS DURING COP28**

**INDIA'S ROAD TO 'NET ZERO'**

At COP-27, India announced its long-term strategy to transition to a 'low emissions' pathway to become carbon neutral by 2070

**KEY MILESTONES**

- The National Hydrogen Mission, launched in 2021, aims to make India a green hydrogen hub
- At least a three-fold increase in nuclear capacity by 2032
- Achieving an ethanol blending target of 20% by 2025
- Maximising the use of electric vehicles, increase public transport
- Increased climate finance to be provided by developed nations
- The long-term strategy aims at keeping global temperatures well below 2 degrees Celsius and, ambitiously, 1.5 degrees Celsius by the century-end

**Recognize that the principle of 'Common but Differentiated Responsibilities' applies to all global challenges.**

Quoting Remarks of PM Modi at issue of Global South Summit 2023, 12 January 2023

**Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav at the COP-27 summit in Egypt on Monday. REUTERS**

**INDIA'S NATIONAL SOLAR MISSION**

**L.I.F.E. Lifestyle for Environment**

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- What are India's responses and subsequent climate actions?
- How have COP decisions impacted Indian PSEs?