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COP29: A Pivotal Opportunity for Global Climate Action and Pakistan's Strategic Advocacy

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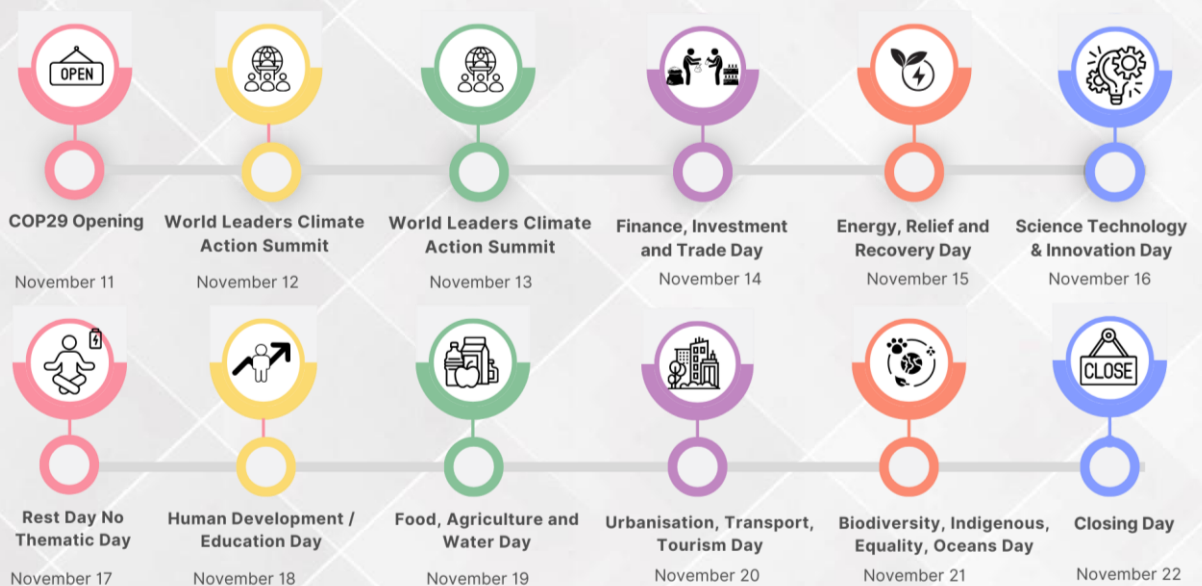
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Introduction

The 29th Conference of the Parties (COP29) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is currently being hosted in Baku, Azerbaijan in November 2024. Under the presidency of Azerbaijan, COP29 focuses on climate finance, adaptation, mitigation, and promoting global cooperation toward a sustainable, low-carbon future. This year's conference, dubbed the "Climate Finance COP," aims to finalize a new and enhanced climate finance target to replace the existing commitment of \$100 billion per year from the Global North to support climate action in the Global South (WRI, 2024). The latest figures indicate that the target could range from hundreds of billions to over a trillion dollars annually, which is crucial for scaling up financial support for climate-related initiatives. Figure 1 below shows COP29's two weeks of agenda and thematic days.

Figure 1 COP29 Two Week Agenda and Thematic Days



Climate Change Impact on Pakistan

Pakistan, despite contributing just 0.88% of global greenhouse gas emissions, ranks among the top five countries most vulnerable to climate change. The nation faces escalating challenges posed by rising temperatures, erratic weather patterns, and climate-induced disasters. These challenges threaten the livelihoods, health, and food security of millions while hampering economic development.

- **Rising Temperatures:** Since the 1960s, Pakistan's average annual temperature has increased by 0.5°C. Projections suggest an additional rise of 1.3°C to 1.5°C by 2050, leading to more intense heatwaves and prolonged summers (ADP, 2017). These conditions pose significant health

risks, worsen water scarcity, and decrease agricultural productivity—especially for heat-sensitive crops like wheat and rice.

- **Extreme Weather Events:** Pakistan experienced catastrophic floods in 2022, causing damages exceeding USD 40 billion (Aljazeera, 2022). Meanwhile, erratic rainfall patterns continue to drive droughts in some regions and amplify water stress. By the period 2035–2044, approximately 5 million people are expected to face exposure to extreme river floods annually.
- **Glacial Melt and Water Availability:** Rising temperatures in Pakistan's northern regions have accelerated the melting of glaciers, increasing the risk of Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs) in the short term (Dawn, 2024). At the same time, these events threaten long-term water availability for agriculture and hydropower, posing a dual threat to Pakistan's water security.
- **Air Pollution:** Cities like Lahore are grappling with hazardous air quality levels, as the Air Quality Index (AQI) peaked at 1,900 in 2024—far surpassing the WHO's hazardous threshold of 300 (Reuters, 2024). The health implications of this pollution include increased medical treatment needs and reduced life expectancy, with social tensions also exacerbated by environmental degradation.
- **Economic Consequences:** The World Bank estimates that climate-related risks, compounded by environmental degradation, could reduce Pakistan's GDP by 18–20% by 2050. This underscores the urgent need for adaptive measures and comprehensive mitigation strategies.

COP29 Key Commitments and Climate Finance Goal

COP29 represents a critical juncture in international climate negotiations. The main focus this year is on finalizing a new climate finance target. The current target of \$100 billion per year, which was agreed upon over a decade ago, will be replaced by a new commitment ranging from several hundred billion to over a trillion dollars annually. This target is seen as an essential step toward providing scaled-up financial support for climate action, particularly in the Global South.

- **Enhancing Financial Support:** The COP29 negotiations have made significant progress in setting the new finance target, although consensus remains elusive. There are differing views on how to split the financial burden between developed and developing countries, and what specific areas the funding should cover—ranging from adaptation and mitigation to technology transfer, sustainable infrastructure, and climate resilience measures.
- **Need for Inclusive and Equitable Climate Finance:** A true climate finance mechanism must address the pressing needs of vulnerable communities, including marginalized groups such as women, indigenous peoples, and those in climate-sensitive regions like the Hindu Kush Himalayan region. At COP29, we must ensure that these voices are adequately represented in discussions and decision-making processes to provide tailored, effective solutions.
- **Limited Progress and Lack of Consensus:** The first week of COP29 has been marked by slow progress, with key discussions on climate mitigation, adaptation, and financial goals hindered by a lack of consensus and incomplete drafts.

- Despite the significance of these issues, powerful interests, including fossil fuel companies and other polluters, continue to exert a dominant influence. With over 1,700 lobbyists at the summit, their presence outnumbers the delegates from the ten most vulnerable nations combined (GW, 2024). This imbalance has led to delays in advancing critical actions, such as addressing air pollution crises in cities like Lahore, where the health and livelihood of millions are at risk.
- **Marginalization of Indigenous Communities:** Indigenous communities, particularly those from the Hindu Kush Himalayan region, have remained marginalized at COP29, despite being among the most vulnerable to climate change. Their absence in key decision-making processes undermines the potential for solutions that are tailored to the unique challenges faced by these communities. The lack of representation risks transforming COP29 into a platform for political maneuvering rather than a forum for actionable, community-focused climate solutions. To ensure that meaningful and sustainable outcomes are achieved, it is crucial to amplify the voices of these communities and integrate their perspectives into the global climate discourse.

The Way Forward

COP29 presents an opportunity to build on past agreements and strengthen climate finance, adaptation, and mitigation measures. However, meaningful progress requires a concerted effort to include marginalized voices and ensure that climate finance reaches those who need it the most.

Recommendation:

Exploring Debt-for-Nature Swaps for Pakistan's Climate Finance: PRAC underscores the potential of exploring Debt-for-Nature swaps as a viable solution to Pakistan's climate finance challenges, which necessitate \$340 billion by 2030 to effectively address the country's climate vulnerabilities. With a debt-to-GDP ratio of 78%, Pakistan faces limited fiscal space to invest in climate action. By engaging in debt-for-nature swaps, Pakistan could reduce its debt burden while committing to environmental conservation. For example, the 2022 swap between Barbados and The Nature Conservancy involved \$150 million in debt relief for marine conservation, while Gabon's \$500 million deal financed marine protection (Dawn, 2024). These swaps can upgrade a nation's sovereign credit rating, lower borrowing costs, and unlock more funding for climate resilience projects. By incorporating measurable metrics such as carbon emissions and deforestation rates, Pakistan can ensure transparency and effectiveness, making it easier to attract international climate finance.

- **Pursue Financial Support and Strengthen Advocacy for Climate Adaptation Initiatives:** PRAC emphasizes the need for Pakistan to intensify its lobbying efforts with developed nations and multilateral financial institutions to secure funding for its National Adaptation Plan (NAP) and key initiatives such as Recharge Pakistan, the revitalization of the Indus Basin, and the Living Indus Initiative. Simultaneously, Pakistan should advocate for the Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA), ensuring that adaptation measures meet the needs of developing countries, particularly those outlined in the NAP. Robust international support must be mobilized for implementing adaptation strategies across critical sectors like the agriculture–water nexus, urban resilience, pollution control, and disaster risk management to enhance the country’s resilience to climate change.
- **Secure Regular Replenishment of the Loss and Damage Fund (LDF):** PRAC urges that Pakistan should work with G77 allies to ensure a regular and reliable replenishment mechanism for the LDF, with simpler, more accessible approval procedures to ensure that funds are utilized effectively. This fund should support climate resilience projects, particularly those addressing Pakistan’s vulnerability to climate change impacts, such as floods and droughts.
- **Hold Developed Countries Accountable for Climate Finance Commitments:** PRAC advocates that Pakistan should remind developed countries of their aid pledges following the 2022 floods and continue to press for full and timely fulfillment of these promises. This includes holding developed nations accountable for their commitments to meet climate finance targets, particularly the unmet USD 100 billion annual pledge.
- **Push for Enhanced Financial Support under the New Collective Quantified Goal on Climate Finance (NCQG):** PRAC suggest that Pakistan should push for more ambitious climate finance targets under the NCQG, given the huge financing gap (USD 5–6.8 trillion) for climate action in developing nations. Pakistan should also advocate for the realignment of global financial institutions’ lending practices to better support climate change mitigation and adaptation.
- **Promote Cooperation on Renewable Energy, Sustainable Agriculture, and Resilient Food Systems:** PRAC advises that Pakistan should engage with international initiatives focused on renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and food systems resilience, such as the Alliance of Champions for Food Systems Transformation. These initiatives offer opportunities for partnerships that could help Pakistan enhance its climate resilience while promoting sustainable practices.
- **Foster Public-Private Partnerships for Climate Action:** PRAC advises that Pakistan should leverage public-private partnerships to implement climate projects,

- particularly those focusing on local actions to combat climate change in urban areas, reducing methane emissions, and promoting renewable energy. The success of these partnerships at previous COPs should be assessed, and Pakistan should seek opportunities for collaboration with international actors.
- **Pakistan's Carbon Market Regulations at COP29:** At COP29 in Baku, Pakistan introduced its carbon market regulations after two years of development. The policy should ensure transparency in carbon markets, preventing greenwashing by ensuring emission reductions are genuine and verifiable. Moreover, carbon markets should complement, not replace, climate finance from Global North. The policy also addresses concerns of rights abuses, emphasizing the involvement of local communities, particularly in vulnerable sectors like agriculture and forestry. A robust system for monitoring the environmental and social impacts of carbon trading is essential for its success.
- **Strengthening Climate Resilience Investments:** As proposed during IMF negotiation, Pakistan should allocate 1% of its GDP annually towards climate adaptation projects to mitigate the growing environmental risks like floods, droughts, and glacier melting (The News, 2024). The government should seek additional concessional loans to support climate adaptation initiatives, enhancing the country's ability to address climate impacts while pursuing development goals.
- **Open Database for Climate Finance Tracking:** An open database for climate finance should be established by the Federal Ministry of Climate and Provincial Climate Departments through Climate Finance Units. This tracking system must include data from all stakeholders to facilitate coordination, monitoring, and management of overall climate action efforts.
- **Strengthening Climate Governance and Enhancing Access to International Finance:** Given the country's developing climate governance framework, there is a pressing need to strengthen institutional capacity to meet the high accreditation standards required by international climate finance mechanisms. At present, only two entities from Pakistan are accredited with the Green Climate Fund (GCF). With limited visibility and accessibility on such platforms, Pakistan's ability to effectively secure international climate funding remains constrained.
- **Prioritize Adaptation alongside Mitigation in Pakistan's Climate Strategy:** PRAC recommends that Pakistan's climate strategy should prioritize a balanced approach that equally emphasizes both mitigation and adaptation efforts.

- While the current Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) focus primarily on reducing greenhouse gas emissions, there is a critical need to strengthen adaptation measures, especially for vulnerable sectors such as agriculture, which plays a significant role in Pakistan's economy. To ensure long-term resilience, the adaptation strategy must be enhanced to address the immediate and future impacts of climate change. Furthermore, Pakistan should honor its commitment to integrating child rights and needs into climate policies, particularly within the framework of the upcoming NDC 3.0, with a focus on COP30 in Brazil.