

COP 28 and Nepal's Climate Diplomacy

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Abstract

Climate change has become an issue of global concern in recent years. No country is immune to the impact of such change. Unrestricted emission of greenhouse gases resulting in global warming and challenging the earth's ecosystem has threatened the very survival of mankind. Nepal, a mountainous country with rugged geographical terrain of varying altitudes, has become highly vulnerable to the impact of climate change on the living conditions of people and their livelihoods based on natural resources. Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal, addressing the 28th meeting of the Conference of Parties (COP) in Dubai last year, presented the plight of the country and forcefully pleaded for global partnership and international cooperation to cope with the climate change-induced crisis affecting the world, in particular, the Least Developed Countries (LDC) like Nepal with low adaptation.

Keywords: Climate change, COP 28, greenhouse gas, ecosystem, Nepal.

Introduction

The United Nations has been regularly organizing climate change conferences attended by member states or parties of the UN Framework, Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Others participating in such conferences are world leaders, policymakers, activists, representatives of civil society and the business community, climate scientists, academics, professionals, media persons, young people and a large number of experts and stakeholders. The COP is a multilateral decision-making forum that provides an opportunity for each member state and participant to discuss climate change and come up with solutions or practical measures to combat the crisis that has already become a burning issue of serious global concern. The immediate challenge is to limit global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius, help vulnerable populations across the globe adapt to the effects of climate change and achieve net-zero emissions preferably by 2050.

The 28th meeting of the COP was held in Dubai, UAE, from November 30 to December 12, 2023. The Global Stocktake (GST), an assessment process designed to evaluate global progress toward achieving the climate goals laid down in the 2015 Paris Agreement was the focal point of COP 28 (UNFCCC, 2023).

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The global community is aware of and concerned about the unrestricted emission of greenhouse gas that has escalated global warming threatening or even endangering the very survival of mankind and challenging the earth's ecosystem. Due to climate change, glacial lakes are melting and exploding. While drought and landslides have adversely affected the hills and the plains, excessive rainfall, low rainfall and partial rainfall are on the increase as erratic manifestations of climate change. Climatologists forecast a 65 percent water shortfall by the end of this century due to melting glaciers and glacial outbursts in the Himalayas (The New York Times, 2023).

Addressing Nepal's Parliament on October 31 last year, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, while praising Nepal as a promoter of peace, champion of multilateralism, staunch supporter of sustainable development and frontrunner on climate action, categorically stated: "Nepal contributes a minimal fraction of a percent, 0.04 percent, to global emissions. But monsoons, storms and landslides are growing in force and ferocity, sweeping away crops, livestock and entire villages, decimating economies and ruining lives. Nepal is now one of the countries that is suffering the most but other South Asian countries might become in the future terrible victims of the receding glaciers of Nepal. What is happening in this country as a result of climate change is an appalling injustice and a searing indictment of the fossil fuel age" (Guterres, 2023).

Later, in Dubai, Mr. Guterres, during the opening of the UN Climate Change Conference or COP 28, referred to his Nepal visit and made the following statement: "Just days ago, I was on the melting ice of Antarctica. Not long before, I was among the melting glaciers of Nepal. These two spots are far in distance but united in crisis. Polar ice and glaciers are vanishing before our eyes, causing havoc the world over: from landslides and floods to rising seas." (Guterres, 2023). The international community noted with appreciation Guterres' frank acknowledgment of Nepal's problems induced by climate change.

Nepal at COP 28

Nepal's delegation to COP 28 in Dubai was led by Prime Minister Dahal. He informed the global community that Nepal was one of the worst victims of climate change despite its negligible role in greenhouse emissions. As he represented a mountainous country, he said emphatically, "Our message is clear: mountains are tortured by rising temperature. Due to an appalling injustice inflicted on us, our people are severely affected by climate-induced disasters such as landslides, floods, wildfires, glacier lakes outbursts, drought, etc." (Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda', 2023). He also referred to the findings of the IPCC report that points out climate-induced disasters breaking records in the Himalayas. The Himalayas, he reminded

the august gathering, are “foundations of human civilizations, ecosystems and biodiversity”. Prime Minister Dahal also reiterated Nepal’s commitment to the 2015 Paris Agreement as well as to achieving net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2045, five years earlier than the global target. Describing Nepali people as innocent, he not only pleaded for climate justice but also emphasized the need for doubling the climate finance pledge of 100 billion dollars by 2025 along with easy operationalization of the loss and damage fund (Guterres, 2023).

Implementing Climate Action: Challenge for Nepal

There is no denying that climate finance is of crucial importance in dealing with the climate crisis (Prachanda, 2023). The Paris Agreement and earlier the Kyoto Protocol have called on highly developed and industrialized countries to provide financial and technical assistance to developing countries and LDCs like Nepal to enable them to minimize the effects of climate change. These countries lack adequate resources to overcome the climate change crisis. It is, however, sad to note that the commitment of developed countries to provide 100 billion dollars to developing countries and LDCs, exclusively for climate change crisis mitigation remains unfulfilled. COP 28 has agreed to operationalize the loss and damage fund which was appreciated by the conference (World Economic Forum, 2021). Apart from being active in international forums, Nepal needs to do serious homework internally to benefit from the fund and other resources likely to be made available to highly vulnerable countries hardest hit by climate change and climate-induced disasters.

The need for a critical review of policies, strategies and measures hitherto adopted by Nepal on the climate change front cannot be undermined. There is no dearth of documents over the years for climate change mitigation. While some measures have been implemented, Nepal is required to adopt sound policies, frame laws and set up institutional mechanisms including financial provisions as per the UN Climate Convention. Mention may be made of Climate Change Policy 2076, Environment Protection Act 2076, Environment Protection Regulations 2077, Adaptation Plan (National Framework) 2076, Climate Mitigation and Improvement Project and Budget Directive 2077, and Gender and Social Inclusivity Relating to Climate Change 2077-2087 (UN Women, 2022) What is important is the implementation of these laws and regulations. Critics have commented on lacuna in the implementation strategy such as lack of coordination among line agencies, lack of stable and strong institutions, committed manpower and, above all, political will. While political parties and their leaders have realized the gravity of the crisis, they have yet to respond positively through coherent and credible plans and strategies.

In an article, “Changing Climate raises alarm in Nepal”, Arjun Poudel refers to a critical comment of Manjit Dhakal, a climate expert: ‘Nepal’s approach to

adopting pre-emptive measures has been lackadaisical so far. Whatever the policies on mitigation and adaptation we have made, their implementation is poor” (The Kathmandu Post, 2023).

Nagarik Daily in its editorial, “Justification for Climate Parliament” on January 12 this year welcomes the idea of such a parliament in which all MPs, in particular young parliamentarians, could take the initiative to provide political leadership for effective implementation and monitoring of laws and regulations relating to climate change.

Conclusion

It is gratifying to note that Nepal achieved some success in conducting climate diplomacy at the recently concluded COP 28 in Dubai. This is evident from the editorial comment in the Kathmandu Post of December 6 last year. It says, ‘Nepal has gained rare visibility in international climate circuits. It must not fail to capitalize on it.’ No doubt, euphoria over success should not lead us to complacency. Nepal should gear itself up to stem the climate crisis with a catastrophe looming large on the horizon by mobilizing all sections of the population, both government and NGOs, civil society, the business community, media, professionals and experts, including the common people who suffer the most when crisis deepens and adversely affects their livelihood. I would like to conclude this paper with the following extract from the editorial mentioned above.

The Himalayas are indeed crying out for help, and only a timely response can save them. The commitments made at COP 28 should be translated into action, or expedited through short-, mid- and long-term implementation plans. It is up to the country’s leaders to uphold its climate goals credibility through strong and credible negotiations. This entails asking for compensation for loss and damage, regular follow-up on pledges made by polluting countries and seriousness in its climate commitments. This is the only way to ensure that we leave behind a habitable Nepal for future generations.

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