Forgotten Afghanistan: Addressing Climate Change Challenges at COP28

Report by: Abdulhadi Achakzai – Officially invited delegate and virtual participant

Executive summary

This report provides an overview of the United Nations 28th Conference of the Parties (COP28), held in Expo-City, Dubai, UAE, from 30th November to 12th December 2023. The focus of this report is to highlight the efforts made during the conference to address the adverse impacts of climate change on Afghanistan and the urgent need for global attention and support for the country. Additionally, an advocacy campaign was conducted during the conference to address the absence of Afghanistan from the global stage for over three years, which has had significant consequences for its 20 million people who are directly suffering from the chronic challenges of climate change.

During the conference, world leaders agreed on several significant moves to address climate change challenges. One important development was the approval of loss and damage funds, with developed countries pledging to contribute to this fund, which will directly benefit poor and affected countries. The establishment of a loss and damage fund has been a long-standing desire of the poor and least developed countries (LDCs). Additionally, the parties also agreed for the targets of the Global Goal on adaptation fund and its framework to support vulnerable countries. The issue of gender and climate was also recognized and addressed by the parties. The parties approved the initiative to stop the use of fossil fuel. However, a long-term plan was revealed in this regard.

We, as climate change activists, expressed our concerns regarding Afghanistan's exclusion from the significant COP28 conference. However, we also recognize that Afghanistan has the potential to contribute and attract attention at international conferences and it is crucial for the relevant authorities in Afghanistan to understand the importance of these conferences and support civil societies and national-level NGOs in participating and raising awareness about the country's vulnerabilities. Unfortunately, the government has not been providing adequate support in this regard. For instance, as a representative of a national NGO, my travel to the COP28 conference was interfered with, and I was not given any reason or explanation for this interference. Despite my attempts to seek assistance from senior authorities, I did not receive any support. But, I was informed to attend the conference on December 10th, with a mere two days remaining.

Fortunately, the UNFCCC provided an official virtual platform that only invited delegates were allowed to use and actively participate in sessions and plenary discussions. Through this platform, I was able to take an active part in negotiations and other sessions organized by different countries, institutions and UN agencies. Based on our plans, we conducted a session at the MONASH University pavilion. The session titled "Forgotten Frontlines: Afghanistan's Climate Crisis and the

Humanitarian Emergency" was highly successful, with a panel of four climate experts delivering presentations and more than 40 in-person and virtual participants from different countries attended. The session raised awareness about Afghanistan's vulnerability, highlighted the country's contribution to emissions as it is relatively low, yet it remains among the top 10 most affected nations. The session advocated for Afghanistan's inclusion in global climate change discussions, emphasizing the importance of addressing its climate-related issues to alleviate the suffering of Afghan communities. In addition to the efforts, UNAMA called on all stakeholders from the COP28 conference to move from awareness to action as climatic shocks and pressures continue to deeply affect the daily lives of millions of Afghans. "Afghanistan remains among the top ten most vulnerable and least ready countries to deal with the impacts of climate change. Nearly 20 million Afghans face emergency or crisis levels of food insecurity, driven by a third consecutive year of drought, economic pressures, and high vulnerability to other natural hazards – including two devastating earthquakes in the last two years".

Report Details

The Conference of the Parties (COP) serves as a critical platform for world leaders to come together and discuss their country's contributions and challenges in addressing climate change. The 28th session of the United Nations (COP28) brought together over 85,000 attendees, including head of states, government officials, diplomats, international industry leaders, private sector representatives, academics, experts, youth, and non-state actors from nearly 200 countries. The conference took place in the Expo-City Dubai, UAE from November 30 to December 12, 2023 with the aim of expediting the transition to a clean-energy future. This gathering provided extraordinary opportunities for sharing insights, progress, commitments, and contributions for the course of 12 days.

In the conference, the extremely vulnerable countries, particularly the Least Developed Countries (LDC), hoped to benefit from the opportunities and commitments presented by the state leaders at the conference. During the opening plenary of the COP28 conference, a historic agreement was reached regarding the establishment of a Loss and Damage Fund. This fund aims to provide support to the country's most severely impacted by climate change, particularly those that bear little responsibility for causing the crisis.

The Loss and Damage Fund is a significant milestone for the global south, which has been advocating for such a mechanism for decades. It recognizes the need to address the pain and suffering experienced by vulnerable and poor countries due to climate breakdown. These countries, which have contributed minimally to greenhouse gas emissions, are disproportionately affected by the adverse impacts of climate change, including extreme weather events, rising sea levels, and loss of livelihoods.

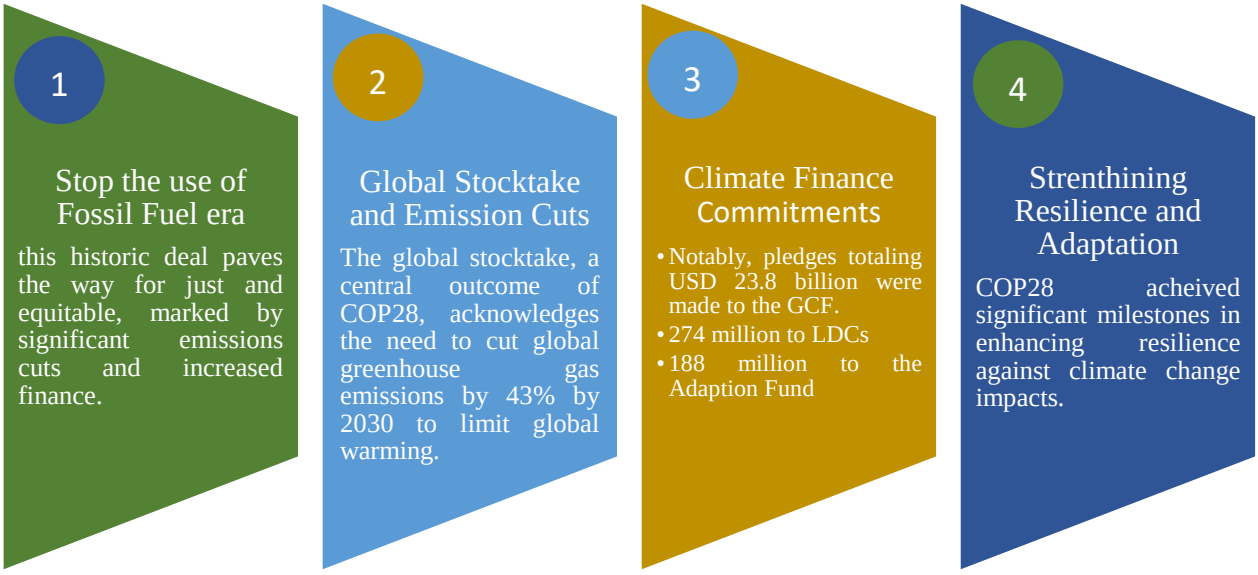
The fund operates on the principle of holding the biggest fossil fuel polluting countries liable for the loss and damage experienced by vulnerable nations. It seeks to provide financial resources to support these countries in adapting to and recovering from the impacts of climate change. The fund acknowledges that these countries often lack the financial and technological resources necessary to address the far-reaching consequences of climate change.

The beneficiaries of the Loss and Damage Fund are primarily the most vulnerable and affected countries, particularly those within the least developed countries category. These countries, such as small island states and nations with fragile ecosystems, are at the forefront of climate change impacts and face significant challenges in adapting to and mitigating these effects.

Another initiative announced on the last day of the conference was the commitment to phase out the use of fossil fuels. This groundbreaking decision marks a significant step towards reducing greenhouse gas emissions and supporting the expansion of clean energy initiatives. By transitioning away from fossil fuels, countries aim to mitigate the adverse effects of climate change and promote sustainable development. This initiative reflects the global recognition of the urgent need to address the environmental challenges posed by reliance on fossil fuels and underscores the collective commitment to a greener and more sustainable future.

During the conference, it was also agreed that the Adaptation Fund would be made accessible to the least developed countries to enhance their resilience to the impacts of climate change. This decision recognizes the disproportionate vulnerability of these countries to the adverse effects of climate change and the urgent need for targeted support. By providing financial resources through the Adaptation Fund, the international community aims to assist the least developed countries in implementing adaptation measures and building their capacity to cope with climate-related challenges. This commitment reflects a collective effort to ensure a more equitable and inclusive response to climate change, with a focus on empowering the most vulnerable nations.

Major Achievements of the COP28: The conference operationalized the loss and damage fund, established the Santiago Network for Loss and Damage, and outlined concrete objectives within the Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA).



Since the Afghan government is not recognized by the international community, it may face challenges in directly accessing the benefits and resources associated with the developments agreed upon in the COP28 conference. This includes funds such as the loss and damage fund, adaptation fund, and other initiatives that are typically directed to governments.

Extreme Vulnerability of Afghanistan and COP28 Conference

Afghanistan, a country already burdened by numerous socio-economic challenges, is increasingly experiencing the devastating impacts of climate change. Its extreme vulnerability to these effects exacerbates the existing difficulties faced by the nation. One significant impact of climate change on Afghanistan is the alteration of precipitation patterns and increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather events. This has led to more frequent and severe droughts, floods, and storms, posing significant threats to the country's agricultural sector, water resources, and infrastructure.

The agricultural sector, which plays a crucial role in Afghanistan's economy and sustenance of its population, is particularly susceptible to climate change. Erratic rainfall patterns and prolonged droughts have led to reduced crop yields, food insecurity, and displacement of rural communities. Moreover, the melting of glaciers in the Hindu Kush and Pamir mountain ranges, which serve as vital water sources for the country, further exacerbates water scarcity and poses long-term risks to agriculture and livelihoods.

The impacts of climate change also intersect with the complex socio-political dynamics in Afghanistan. The fragile governance systems hinder effective climate change adaptation and response efforts. Limited resources, weak infrastructure, and inadequate institutional capacity further exacerbate the challenges faced by communities in adapting to and recovering from climate-related disasters.

Afghanistan, as a significant member of the parties that signed the Paris Agreement in 2015, holds substantial relevance and deserves representation at the Conference of the Parties (COP) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Inclusion of Afghanistan in the global summits is crucial for several reasons, reflecting both the country's vulnerability to climate change and its commitment to addressing this global challenge.

The United Nations 28th Conference of the Parties (COP28) presented a unique opportunity for poor and climate affected countries, considering their vulnerabilities to climate change and the impacts that the countries are experiencing. Although, Afghanistan is among the top 10th most vulnerable countries, it is unfortunate that this country's climate change issues have been excluded from the global agenda for the past three years, denying the country the chance to benefit from global discussions and initiatives. However, the current situation in Afghanistan highlights the urgent need for attention to its climate change challenges. Afghan communities are already enduring the devastating impacts of climate change, including extreme weather events, storms, heatwaves, droughts, and disruptions in food security and agriculture. These issues have

exacerbated poverty and led to displacements within our communities. Therefore, it is crucial for Afghanistan to have a seat at the global stage to effectively address these challenges and benefit from global best practices, knowledge sharing, and collaboration.

Afghanistan participation in the global summits would enable the country to contribute its unique experiences and perspectives, advocate for its specific needs, and access resources and support to implement climate change mitigation and adaptation measures. It would also provide a platform for Afghanistan to exchange knowledge, forge partnerships, and establish cooperative initiatives with other nations facing similar climate-related challenges.

Recognizing Afghanistan's vulnerability and commitment to addressing climate change, it is essential to ensure its inclusion in the COP conferences. By granting Afghanistan a seat at the global climate negotiation tables, the international community can demonstrate its solidarity and support for the country's efforts to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change. This inclusion would foster a more inclusive and equitable approach to addressing global climate challenges and contribute to the overall success of the global conferences.

However Afghanistan was not official part of the COP28 conference but still some efforts were provided by different stakeholders to raise the awareness about this country vulnerability.

Efforts provided for Afghanistan during the COP28 conference:

- UNAMA called on all stakeholders from the COP28 conference to move from awareness to action as climatic shocks and pressures continue to deeply affect the daily lives of millions of Afghans.
- On 10th December, Afghan climate activists conducted a side-vent at the MONASH University pavilion. The session titled "Forgotten Frontlines: Afghanistan's Climate Crisis and the Humanitarian Emergency, where 40 people from different countries participated in person and online.
- Abdulhadi Achakzai attended several side-events through the UNFCCC virtual platform, he shared questions with the panelists regarding their insights to support affected countries like Afghanistan.
- Several international news reported the exclusion of Afghanistan from the COP28 conference and addressed its effects.

EPTDO as an accredited NGO with UNFCCC and our efforts for the COP28 conference

EPTDO, an accredited NGO with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), has obtained official recognition for the UNFCCC conferences. This accreditation allows EPTDO to participate in conferences related to the Paris Agreement and Kyoto Protocol. Notably, EPTDO is the sole organization from Afghanistan to have received UNFCCC accreditation. As an accredited NGO, Mr. Abdulhadi Achakzai, the founder and director of EPTDO, attended the COP27 conference held in Egypt in 2022. Additionally, he has received an official invitation to the upcoming COP28 conference.

Mr. Achakzai dedicated extensive efforts spanning 5 (five) months to diligently prepare for the conference and represent the voices of affected communities. He collaborated with national and international stakeholders and partners to gather data and utilize it during the conference. Mr. Achakzai aimed to raise awareness among communities, national and international organizations, and UN agencies regarding the vulnerability of Afghanistan. As a result, he forged valuable connections, organized several sessions within the country, and made use of the opportunities presented.

Mr. Achakzai was a core member of the Afghanistan Conference of Youths (ALCOY) organized in Afghanistan. This conference was endorsed by YOUNGO, the official Children and Youths Constituency within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The event brought together climate change experts, practitioners, activists, and hundreds of youths from around the country to discuss climate change issues in Afghanistan.

The conference featured various sessions over two days, including plenary discussions, academic dialogues, group discussions, and presentations. It provided a platform for participants to engage in meaningful conversations and exchange ideas on tackling climate change in Afghanistan.

Moreover, the conference welcomed lecturers from international universities in the USA, as well as representatives from UN agencies and other international organizations. On the first day, Mr. Salim Khan, who represented UNDP Afghanistan, shared his insights and experiences. On the second day, Ms. Surayo Buzurukova, the Deputy Resident Representative for Programme at UNDP, highly contributed to the conference by sharing her meaningful perspectives and commitments to addressing climate change priorities in Afghanistan.

At the end of the conference, awards were distributed to the best presentations, best essays submitted by youths, best arts and photography that the participants already submitted. The Afghanistan Local Conference of Youths (ALCOY) facilitated a valuable opportunity for collaboration, learning, and the formulation of strategies to address climate change challenges in Afghanistan. By bringing together diverse stakeholders and fostering dialogue, the conference aimed to drive positive change and promote sustainable practices in the country. All discussed points and the conference results will be shared with the UNFCCC through YOUNGO. In addition, the GAI team have developed a climate change policy brief and submitted the first draft to YOUNGO for the inclusion in their agenda for the COP28 conference.

Mr. Achakzai also delivered presentations highlighting the vulnerability of Afghanistan and emphasizing the significance of the COP28 conference. These presentations took place during monthly meetings of the Food Security and Agriculture Cluster, Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Groups, and various national and international sessions and meetings. In addition, Mr. Achakzai held several meetings with national and international partners to discuss their support and engagement in these efforts.

Fortunately, UNDP has pledged to provide financial sponsorship for Mr. Achakzai's participation in the COP28 conference.

Recommendations

1st Recommendation

To address Afghanistan's current vulnerability at the national and international levels, it is crucial to establish a Climate Change Center in Kabul, Afghanistan. This center will serve as an initiative to bring together national and international organizations working in Afghanistan to share their experiences, insights, identify gaps, and explore opportunities for Afghanistan. The main objective of the center will be to create a unified voice and establish mechanisms for conducting monthly meetings to identify the most vulnerable aspects and develop specific strategies to address climate change in Afghanistan.

This platform will serve as climate change cluster within UN Agencies, International Organizations and national NGOs. Through the platform, international organizations working in Afghanistan will convene monthly meetings to discuss the major challenges faced by Afghanistan regarding climate change. This initiative aims to establish mechanisms among non-governmental organizations to address climate change in Afghanistan while the country remains excluded from the global stages. Additionally, the center will provide options and proposals to the Loss and Damage Fund, Adaptation Fund, Green Climate Fund, and other stakeholders to take alternative action in Afghanistan until the recognition of the Afghan government.

The dialogue process will involve several levels:

1. **Engagement of International Organizations:** Engaging national and international NGOs including UN agencies, world bank, EU Commission and etc. to provide collaborations, find more options for addressing urgency of climate change, share experiences and provide insights regarding the alternative ways to include Afghanistan benefit from the loss and damage fund and etc.
2. **Local-level dialogues:** Establish regional and local level consultative and capacity building program. This program will cover all 34 provinces to identify climate change gaps, measure approaches, and engage communities. These dialogues will include community leaders, district council members, tribal elders, civil societies, and women's groups. District governors and other government officials will also be involved through workshops, awareness campaigns, training sessions, focused group discussions, and consultative meetings.
3. **Central government engagement:** Engaging de facto authorities in climate change is crucial. Their involvement will be part of decision-making processes and capacity support programs. Through this engagement we aim to provide workshops, findings sharing, and organize integrated consultation meetings once in a month to secure their support and increase their capacities.
4. **International Conference on Afghanistan Climate Change:** Hosting an annual international conference on Afghanistan's climate change in another country. This conference will span 5 to 10 days and focus on discussing findings, opportunities, and including Afghanistan in the global climate change agenda. This conference will serve as a donor meeting through which findings and other key decision regarding alternative options would be shared. Key partners of the conference will include international donors such as USAID, European Commission, World Bank, Green Climate Fund, Global Environmental Facility, Adaptation Fund, FCDO, and others. The conference will feature presentations on district-level findings in Afghanistan, monthly meetings with international partners, and meetings with relevant international organizations.

Through this initiative, an agreement will be announced and shared with international communities, including UNFCCC and the Santiago Network managing the Loss and Damage Fund, Global Goal of Adaptation Fund, and Least Developed Countries (LDCs). This will facilitate decision-making regarding Afghanistan's inclusion in their assistance. The Climate Change Dialogue Center will employ national and international climate change experts and proposal developers to write proposals and submit them to the mentioned donors for resource allocation.

Impacts

The establishment of a Climate Change Center in Afghanistan is crucial to raise awareness about the country's vulnerability to climate change at the local, national, and international levels. The center will play a key role in helping international partners understand the impacts of climate change in Afghanistan, enabling them to consider these factors in their decision-making processes. Additionally, the center will provide opportunities for communities to grasp the direct impacts of climate change on their lives and stress the significance of including Afghanistan in national-level discussions.

Moreover, the Climate Change Center will actively engage governmental authorities, encouraging their support for the initiatives undertaken by national and international organizations. This collaborative approach aims to prevent the rejection of support from these authorities. By effectively accessing international platforms, Afghanistan is expected to benefit from the Loss and Damage Fund and Adaptation Fund, ensuring that the necessary funds are allocated to the country's climate change efforts.

2nd Recommendation

In the current circumstances, Afghanistan is facing challenges in benefiting from global environmental funds, as evidenced by the example of COP28 where international partners faced difficulties in obtaining badges for Afghan officials, and UNFCCC did not provide badges for sidelined participation. Given this situation, it is crucial to support national NGOs, establish a network of climate activists, and provide resources and technical assistance for them in advocating for the inclusion of Afghanistan.

To provide this support, two conferences can be utilized. The first conference is the United Nations Bonn Climate Change International Conference, also known as SBI 59, scheduled for June 2024. This conference serves as a precursor to COP29, where parties come together to set the agenda for the upcoming COP. Afghan youth participants can engage in side-events, exhibitions, and advocacy conferences during this conference. Furthermore, climate activists can also participate in the subsequent COP29 conference to organize side-events, exhibitions, and advocacy conferences.

Given the lack of government support, it is crucial to initiate a dialogue supported by UN agencies among governmental authorities to emphasize the independence of NGOs and the significance of their advocacy programs. This dialogue will help in fostering understanding and support from the government for these initiatives. The EPTDO, as an accredited organization, can extend invitations and facilitate free visas and badges for the identified participants. Additionally, the organization is prepared to submit applications to secure spaces for side-events, exhibitions, and advocacy conferences.

3rd Recommendation

Finding donors for Afghanistan is crucial, especially considering that several international organizations are already working in the country and have provided funding for climate change projects. It is vital to sustain this commitment and support in order to mitigate the impacts of climate change and facilitate the development of water and agriculture projects that benefit rural communities. We urge to extend these initiatives and convince donors to pay their attention to the vulnerability of Afghanistan. Through this funding, most significant areas of climate change would be addressed.

4th Recommendation

EPTDO has been in communication with the Adaptation Fund, which has pledged to provide an annual assistance of 10 million USD to Afghanistan. However, it is important to note that this fund typically goes directly to governments. Given the current situation in Afghanistan, the Adaptation Fund has expressed willingness to support NGOs that have obtained or are willing to be accredited as National Implementing Entities (NIE) or Regional Implementing Entities (RIE). In light of this, it is crucial to host a meeting with the heads of the Adaptation Fund to introduce organizations like UNDP as a regional entity, and EPTDO or other eligible climate change-focused national-level organizations for NIE accreditations. This platform can be provided to NGOs to help them benefit from the adaptation funds. The achievement of these goals can be facilitated by the direct support of UNDP, other UN agencies, and interested international organizations working together towards this purpose.

With best regards

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