The heavy lifting on climate action must begin

Glasgow's success was that it finished building the scaffolding for climate action, and countries must respond now

Success at Glasgow was explicitly defined around "keeping 1.5 degrees alive" through such pledges. When added up by modellers, the flurry of net-zero pledges extracted pre-Glasgow, including a surprise net zero by 2070 pledge by India, showed that limiting warming to 1.5°C is still technically feasible, but only just.

In the jargon of climate negotiations, Glasgow clarified the "ambition cycle", and this appears to have had real results in the form of enhanced pledges.

There are two problems with this approach. First, the Paris and Glasgow approach focusing on target-setting gives insufficient importance to the challenge of implementing these promises. Long-term aspirational targets such as "keep 1.5°C alive" get the headlines, but detailed shorter-term 2030 targets for, say, a country's electricity sector, may not be asked to be implemented, remain little more than projected even a few years ago. Nonetheless, the term "phase-out" is of considerable importance, for example, credit is still being used, and, that India introduced the amendment although the language originated elsewhere, has given rise to a somewhat necessary diplomatic black eye. From an environmental point of view, more explicit discussion of coal, but ideally all fossil fuels, is a positive, including for India. From a developmental viewpoint, however, India is concerned that explicit mention of coal as a "phase-out" may cause a possible way out for India to explicitly seek global support for an accelerated transition away from coal, an approach taken by South Africa.

Adaptation — preparing for the reality that some climate impacts are unavoidable — has long been neglected in global negotiations, reflecting a global power imbalance that undermines the efforts of those who are already coping with the impacts.

However, the important complementarity agenda of "loss and damage" is still being discussed and is rewarded for going beyond adaptation — received at most lip service. Even though there was discussion of a specific mechanism, backed by funding, to the dismay of small, vulnerable nations, not so on the "vulnerable" front. At the core is the fear among some developed countries that taking forward the loss and damage agenda will open the door to a call for reparations.

Finance, the central issue

Glasgow promised to be the central issue of COP26, with considerable frustration from developing countries that the developed world failed to live up to its commitment of $100 billion had not been met. Beyond expressing "deep regret" at this failure — a diplomatic slap on the face for developed countries — Glasgow did not even establish a work programme on post-2025 financing and continue tracking progress towards $100 billion. The negotiations were a call to double adaptation finance by 2025. Since current levels of finance are already low, this is a credibility booster of about $43 billion, which is well short of estimated needs; the United Nations finds current needs are $870 billion and rising considerably in coming years.

However, there were indications that the climate finance discussion may become more nuanced. Africa and the Sahel countries in particular had struggled to secure funding for their adaptation efforts. The meeting hit many, but not all, of its procedural benchmarks by building scaffolding for the future. But the real determinant of success or failure rests on national politics and popular support for climate change within countries — how countries use the scaffolding. For India, these politics are complex because they revolve around significant changes in lifestyles and policies. Developing countries have long insisted that publicly funded climate finance is a right derivative of the "polluter pays" principle rather than aid. However, these tenden- cies suggest that to access substantial funds may require embracing a more multi-stranded approach.

There were two particularly important "nuts and bolts" elements of what is called the "Paris Rulebook" that were completed in Glasgow. First, the transparency framework was completed, which includes reporting rules and formats for emissions, progress on pledges and finance contributions. While India and some other countries pushed for separate rules for developed and developing countries, the Glasgow outcome was a ratchet-up pledges and action over time, this enhanced transparency is crucial and, other than issues of equity and justice, is the key for separate developing and developed countries.

The second key was completion of agreed rules for carbon markets, the complexities of which had stymied agreement for four years. The rules were put in place to limit the scope for "double-counting" of credits by more than one country.

Support at home is key

What Glasgow accomplished was necessary, if not sufficient, for ac-

celerating climate action. The meeting hit many, but not all, of its procedural benchmarks by building scaffolding for the future. But the real determinant of success or failure rests on national politics and popular support for climate change within countries — how countries use the scaffolding. For India, these politics are complex because they revolve around significant changes in lifestyles and policies.