

The Yin and Yang of Conference of Parties (COP)

Hello, I'm writing this to share my journey of COP29 in Baku, Azerbaijan as a first time COP attendee. So, rather than delving into the details of negotiations (you'll find countless articles on that), I want to take you on a journey of COP29 through my experience, as it was quite different from what I had imagined. Let me introduce myself first- I am Sneha Rai from the Prakriti Resources Centre, Nepal. I will share some of my tips to help you survive and thrive the two whirlwind COP weeks.

The first COP was held in Berlin, Germany in 1995 and since then COP has met annually. COP is the decision-making body of the UNFCCC bringing together countries from all over the world to assess the progress in combating climate change. COP29 was considered a 'climate finance COP' because the top agenda was to establish a new higher climate finance goal through New Collective Quantifiable Goal (NCQG). NCQG anticipated for ambitious 1.3 trillion USD by 2035 to replace the existing 100 billion USD goal expiring in 2025.

First Impression: Navigating the Hustle and Bustle

Picture this, a temporary setup inside the sprawling Baku Football Stadium, divided into the Blue Zone (for negotiations and official meetings along with pavilion events and side events) and the Green Zone (open to the public and buzzing with side events) and everything happening in parallel.



I entered the Blue Zone and the venue's size overwhelmed me. Well, I became a pretty good navigator after I reached the wrong places a couple of times. There are volunteers to help you, so you do not have to worry much about it. My first stop was the Resilience Hub pavilion, where a session on Financial Innovations for Locally Led Adaptation was explored. It was inspiring to see how different countries tackle similar challenges by strengthening governance and emphasizing participatory approaches. At COP29, my focus areas were Loss and Damage and the New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) on Climate Finance. It's important to select a focus area and commit to them as it is impossible to attend every session and cover all topics. Concentrating on key priority areas will allow you to have a deeper understanding and engagement.

The Two Faces of COP: The Serious side and The Energetic side

COP is a fascinating blend of contrasting energies: The Serious side and the Energetic side.

The Quieter and Serious Side

In this side of the COP you'll find the heart of COP's purpose- Negotiations. Rooms filled with delegates debating how much funding developing countries should receive for mitigation, adaptation, and loss and damage. In COP29, the Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA) made progress by establishing indicators of GGA to assess adaptation actions globally. However, means of implementation particularly through finance still remained a contentious issue.

Another significant step forward was the agreement on the 10-year Gender Action Plan under the Lima Work Programme on Gender (LWPG) to promote gender responsive climate action. Many jargons and acronyms but don't worry you will get used to it. I attended a few of them because most of them were a closed session after week one.



Side events are organized by various organizations to share their experiences, research, and initiatives on climate change impacts. I had the privilege of presenting Nepal's experience on loss and damage along with other South Asian Countries such as India, Bangladesh and Pakistan. These events provide an excellent platform for regional sharing of research and insights of the climate change impacts experienced by countries. The venue includes dedicated workspaces and lounges designed for private meetings, making it convenient to connect, collaborate, and stay productive amidst the bustling atmosphere.

The Energetic and Active Side

This side is electric. From pavilions showcasing innovations, to protests and activism, there's no shortage of energy. 'Fossil of the Day Awards' is a satirical award presented daily by the Climate Action Network to countries failing to take climate actions.



Pavilions are vibrant spaces which host engaging events and creative exhibits by governments, NGOs, INGOs and other organizations. They're fantastic for networking, exchanging ideas, and getting a few cute goodies. I had the honor of presenting Nepal's experiences and challenges on loss and damage in Sharehub pavilion organized by ICCCAD.

Informal gatherings and spontaneous conversations are a hallmark of COP events as it provides good opportunities for networking. These moments allow us to connect with like-minded individuals, partners, and potential collaborators in an organic manner. It was especially rewarding to meet our partners, new people and engage in meaningful discussions with both enthusiastic youths and seasoned professionals gaining fresh perspectives on the challenges and opportunities of climate change.

Key Takeaways on NCQG and Loss and Damage from COP29

- Developed countries have committed to channel at least 300 billion USD a year by 2035 under the NCQG. However, this commitment falls far short of the 1.3 trillion USD a year by 2030, demanded by developing countries to address the climate finance needs.
- The mobilization of climate finance is not clear which leaves the implementation ambiguous and there is overreliance on Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs)
- Loss and Damage is not taken into consideration as a sub-goal in this commitment.

Tips for First-Time COP Participants

As a first-time COP attendee, I learned a lot. Here are a few of my tips to help you make the most of your experience.



Prepare mentally and physically: COP is intense and exhausting. Get ready for long days and lots of walking.



Pack smart: Research the host country's weather and pack accordingly. Comfortable shoes and a reliable backpack are a must.



Stay hydrated and fueled: Bring water and snacks to save money and energy. Food inside the venue can be expensive.



Plan flexibly: Some sessions fill up quickly. Always have a backup plan in case you can't get into a meeting.



Engage and network: Don't be shy. Talk to people, attend side events, and make meaningful connections.



Represent your culture: Traditional dress isn't mandatory, but it's a wonderful way to showcase your identity.



Track your day: Keep notes to streamline reporting and reflect on your experience.



Explore locally: Take time to enjoy the local food and sights, you might never get another chance to visit.

COP is a dance between contrasts- a yin and yang. The quieter, serious side shapes global climate decisions, while the vibrant, energetic side amplifies diverse voices and fosters connections. Together, they create an atmosphere of passion and purpose. While COP outcomes may not always meet expectations, the experience for a first timer is truly enriching. To all the first-time attendees of COP30, dive into the experience wholeheartedly. Learn from every moment, engage actively, and leave your mark on this critical platform for global change.