

Bonn Conference on Climate Change – Heated Debates amidst Heatwaves

June is an important month for environmental action every year; firstly, it hosts the World Environment Day on June 5th and secondly, the annual Bonn Conference on climate change is held in the same month. This year also saw active participation from the governments, public and international organizations in these significant events, amidst reports of historic heatwaves from across the northern hemisphere.

What makes each progressing year different from the previous ones is the trend of new records being set for the hottest months and years ever since temperature measurements started being documented. Climate records from NASA as well as the Europe based Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S) have proved 2023 as the hottest year since global record keeping began in 1850. The last four years were the hottest on record while May 2024 has been the warmest May in history, with June expected to follow track. In the present, we are all living in a climate crisis and every June is a stark reminder that we have not done enough as the guardians of the planet to avert this crisis.

For the unversed, Bonn is the headquarters of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) - the secretariat of the international treaty fighting climate change. Other than the annual Conference of Parties (COP), the Bonn climate change conference is the only global event held by UNFCCC. This is actually the mid-year meeting of the Subsidiary Bodies, convened between two COPs. It is a platform where countries advance their discussions at technical level so that important political decisions can be made at the annual Conference of the Parties (COP) by the end of the year.

This year's discussions at Bonn centered around the financial crisis faced by developing countries to adapt to and mitigate the impacts of climate change. The developed world has failed to meet their commitment of mobilizing USD100 Billion in climate action by 2020, under the Paris Agreement. The developing countries, already struggling under the burden of debt, have called on the Global North to take responsibility for climate change, as major polluters of the past. The COP this year aims to finalize a new global climate-finance goal, which will ensure that all countries have financial resources to meet their Nationally Determined Contribution (NDCs). The deadlock on how to generate funds for drastic climate action still lingers and is expected to be a major point of contention in the upcoming COP.

A lot has been discussed about the land-based adaptation and mitigation to climate change, but the ocean resources remain largely untapped in their potential for blue solutions, especially in the developing countries. The unsustainable use of ocean resources has resulted in degraded coastal ecosystems, which have not only compromised the ability of these ecosystems to mitigate climate change but have also put the coastal communities at increased vulnerability of climate disasters.

The Ocean and Climate Dialogue, which has become a regular feature of the conference since 2020 highlights the importance of oceans in achieving global climate goals and supporting vulnerable coastal communities. It has called for conserving as

well as utilizing ocean resources for climate action like including ocean resources in NDCs and making National Adaptation Plans for oceans and coastal preservation. This year's dialogue's topic on "Technology needs for the ocean – climate action, including finance links" garnered deep interest from the developing world because of their intrinsic financial restraints.

In this backdrop, this year's theme of the World Environment Day, "Land Restoration, Desertification, and Drought Resilience", resonated deeply with Pakistan as we grapple with many environmental challenges related to land degradation, unplanned development and overexploitation of natural resources. However, the challenges like coastal erosion and coastal ecosystem degradation are frequently overlooked in Pakistan. Land degradation in coastal regions, fueled by climate change and human actions, in addition to more storms and higher seas from climate change are leading to coastal erosion. These pressures impact the livelihoods of the coastal communities, who're striving for their mere survival in these delicate ecosystems.

Pakistan has been lauded globally on its achievement of mangrove restoration in the coastal belt leading to an increase in Mangroves cover from 86,000 hectares in 2005 to over 130,000 hectares in 2021 and has further been increasing since. As a responsible nation, Pakistan needs to firmly commit to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which provide a roadmap for a sustainable future. To achieve this, a centralized approach is essential by forming a dedicated task force at national level, aimed at coordinating and directing all efforts to mainstream SDGs in all our policies.

As the global debates at Bonn asserted, developing countries cannot match the pace of developed countries in climate adaptation and SDGs due to fiscal constraints. Nevertheless, SDG 17 is "Revitalizing the global partnership for sustainable development". Developing countries like Pakistan must make use of international financial instruments like "SDG bonds" and "Green bonds" to keep their fight against climate change alive.

The writer holds a PhD in Environmental Sciences/Climate Change and is currently associated with the National Institute of Maritime Affairs (NIMA), Islamabad. She can be reached at fasiha.nima@bahria.edu.pk