

Christian Aid Expectations for COP25

22 November 2019



Key asks

Mitigation

- All countries to recognise the scale of the climate challenge and the need for a fair global effort to achieve the Paris 1.5°C goal.
- The Conference of Parties (COP) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change should deliver a mandate for all countries to enhance the mitigation part of their Nationally-determined contributions (NDCs) in line with the 1.5°C goal.
- The common time frame should be in five-year cycles.
- Long-term strategies should include landscape analyses to plan for nature-based solutions, to increase resilience, and to store and sequester carbon.

Finance

- Adequate climate finance is a prerequisite to greater ambition in poor countries. Developed countries need to step up in providing adequate public finance to both help build resilience, but also to allow clean development and fulfillment – and exceedance - of the conditional parts of the NDCs.

Loss and damage

- The Warsaw International Mechanism on Loss and Damage (WIM) should put greater focus on averting loss and damage than on post-event addressing of it.
- New, additional and adequate sources of climate finance are needed to enhance action.
- The potential of nature-based solutions for resilience should be given greater consideration and implementation priority.

Adaptation

- Developing countries should be supported to complete and implement country-driven, gender-responsive, participatory and transparent adaptation plans.
- The overall financial flows, as well as the proportion of finance for adaptation need to be increased to allow vulnerable people, communities and ecosystems to adapt to the changing climate.

Article 6

- Rather than rely on 'flexibility' mechanisms, countries should instead focus on making transformational changes to their economies.
- Kyoto credits should play no role in any Paris mechanisms.
- Article 6 provisions should be adopted as a package.
- The Article 6 mechanisms should explicitly recognise the non-fungibility of fossil and biological carbon and prevent trade between them.
- Strong social and environmental safeguards are essential to be agreed before use of flexibility mechanisms.

Nature-based solutions

- COP should recognise the potential co-benefits of nature-based solutions, as detailed in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) reports, and agree means to promote their implementation
- Nature-based solutions for mitigation should not be seen as an alternative to ending the use of fossil fuels. It should be seen as an additional and precautionary approach, with other co-benefits, including for resilience.
- Appropriate links with the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)'s provisions should be made, and coherent implementation encouraged.

Gender and Climate

- The revision must ensure that gender balance approaches are adopted under all the bodies of the convention.

Introduction

The past 18 months have seen a flurry of new scientific information on the state of the climate, geosphere, hydrosphere, cryosphere and biosphere through the three interlinked reports of the IPCC and the one by IPBES.

That severe climate impacts already being experienced, and the worst so by the poorest and most vulnerable, indicate how far off track on ambition the world is, both on mitigation action and on provision of the means of implementation to allow poorer countries to prepare for increasing climate impacts and to follow a clean climate-friendly development pathway. Communities and ecosystems are already suffering devastation even at the current 1°C of warming. The fires in the Amazon, Congo and California, the South Asian floods, and other extreme weather events, like cyclones Idai and Fani, point to a climate system already in crisis. The world is in a state of climate emergency.

The science calls for a rapid acceleration and deepening of climate action, including for NDC increases to keep faith in the Paris Agreement. This will require adequate provision of resources by developed countries to support developing countries in their efforts to develop in a sustainable manner and to build their resilience to already locked-in climate impacts. Even, as seems likely, new and enhanced pledges fail to add up to a 1.5°C-consistent pathway, the PA ambition mechanism provides another opportunity to re-evaluate the scale of action needed.

The public is increasingly calling for urgent climate action, in line with the state of emergency we are in, and governments need to respond. The climate talks have, to date, been inadequately effective because, with some exceptions of mostly highly vulnerable countries, each country tries to emphasise their own particular circumstances for why they should not take strong and rapid action to cut their emissions, rather than seeing climate change as a global existential crisis that threatens the very fabric of the planet that we all rely on to survive – for breathable air, for clean water, for food. This needs to change: a threat on the magnitude of climate change needs all to act to the fullest their abilities to create the transformation in our relationship to the planet that will allow us to live in a truly sustainable manner, and Christian Aid calls on the global community to act in solidarity to actually avert “dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system”.

Coalitions of the willing present an opportunity for countries to go beyond what is agreed at the COP (with its limitations caused by laggard countries) to implement ambitious climate actions outside of the formal UNFCCC process. Initiatives such as those from UNCAS should be developed further to allow those that see the climate emergency for what it is and to accelerate, for example, the complete phase out of fossil fuels and otherwise transform the global energy system, setting high green design standards for products, to support initiatives to enhance resilience, to agree regulations for financiers to support a green economy etc. These coalitions need to work as partnerships to help all willing members to act, so that lower income countries can be assisted to be part of the solution.

Ministers other than environment ministers should be included in the high-level discussions. This would present a real opportunity to bring a greater climate focus to ministries that have not tended to see climate as an integral part of their remit. It is essential that finance, agriculture, forestry and energy ministers, among others, mainstream climate action into every aspect of their thinking and doing.

COP25 is an important opportunity to draw upon the new science and to use it as a springboard for ambition. The enhanced understanding of the holistic and interconnected nature of some of the crises we face is an opportunity to embrace a wider way of thinking that can capture co-benefits of integrated actions, that can help bring about the transformational changes that we need to achieve the ultimate objective of the Convention.

Christian Aid regrets the circumstances that have led to the suspension of COP25 in Santiago, Chile. The protests in Chile are an important reminder that transformation must be undertaken to address both inequality and climate crisis, and that climate justice and social justice cannot be treated separately. Christian Aid stands in solidarity with Chilean civil society, which has worked very hard in the past year to enable COP25 to be a space of real climate action, and with the Chilean people who are peacefully expressing their call for a just social and economic system, where democracy and constitutional rights are respected.

Christian Aid welcomes Madrid, Spain, having stepped into the breach. The climate emergency is real and efforts to take action now must be a priority. With issues like loss and damage, of huge importance for vulnerable countries and communities, on this COP's agenda, the loss of negotiating time would have been a major step back. We call on governments to make a step change in their climate ambition and in the support given to help developing countries achieve it.

Mitigation ambition

The Paris Agreement's goal of limiting global heating to 1.5°C should serve as the benchmark for countries revising and enhancing their NDCs: all should have a view to achieving deep emissions reductions in the near term concomitant with achieving global net zero by 2050. Essential to this being achieved will be the mobilization of adequate financial and other resources to allow poor countries to leapfrog dirty technologies and to follow a new climate-friendly paradigm of development. So far, only around 60 countries, mostly highly vulnerable countries, have committed to enhancing or reviewing their NDCs. In Spain, there should be a COP decision calling on all countries to enhance the mitigation sections of their NDC in line with the 1.5°C goal and common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBRDRC).

To ensure dynamism in the UNFCCC that is responsive to the latest scientific evidence, as well as being in line with the political time horizons in many countries, a 5-year common time frame for enhancing ambition should be agreed by Parties. The EU in particular needs to see beyond the parameters of its own current climate policies and be ready to support the 5-years cycles.

Long term strategies hold an opportunity for examination of a country's planned development trajectory. They also offer the chance for each country to examine its land area and to plan for effective nature-based solutions for both resilience and mitigation across the landscape, for instance, helping to conserve or restore high-carbon ecosystems, including forests, to protect watersheds and soils. COP should agree more detailed modalities related to long-term strategies and nature-based solutions.

Finance

Finance, along with other means of implementation, is an essential factor of the overall ambition and fairness equation. Many developing country parties have offered conditional parts to their NDC that rely on external resources being made available, and to unlock these potential emissions reductions and opportunities for clean development, developed countries need to fulfil their financing obligations. Clarity that adequate and predictable finance will be available for developing countries to step up their action is a pre-requisite for strengthening ambition.

Financing should be seen as being beyond an obligation, but as a means to act in global solidarity to tackle the climate crisis, and especially to build the resilience of those most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Financing therefore needs to be adequate, certain and predictable, so that countries can plan their climate action, secure in the knowledge that they will be in a position to implement it.

Climate finance to date has been inadequate to the need and so new and additional sources of public finance are needed to meet and go far beyond the US\$100bn by 2020 promised in the lead up to Copenhagen. A UNEP study in 2016, 'The Adaptation Finance Gap Report', estimated that US\$140 – 300 billion only in adaptation financing will be needed by 2030, with between US\$280 – 500 billion per year needed by 2050. More still is needed to support mitigation action and loss and damage: the WIM's mandate includes 'Enhancing action and support, including finance', for loss and damage. However, the most recent pledging conference for the Green Climate Fund has resulted in less than US\$10 billion until 2023, which falls again much below what was already promised 10 years ago.

Much of the growth in climate finance has been from private sources, but these tend to favour mitigation actions, which more often lead to commercial returns, than for adaptation and loss and damage. They also are more likely to be given as loans, again driven by commercial considerations. Adaptation continues to receive less priority, from an already inadequate pool of funds. With climate impacts already causing considerable harm, including loss of lives, the need or enhancing public finance is obvious.

Loss and damage

The Paris Agreement recognises the importance of "averting, minimizing and addressing loss and damage", and important area for climate justice. To date, the work of the WIM has concentrated on 'addressing' loss and damage through insurance mechanisms, which is but one of the eight areas of cooperation identified by Paris. Looking forward, Christian Aid advocates a greater focus on 'averting' loss and damage. This has two elements. One is greater mitigation ambition. This is by far the best means of minimizing the overall burden of losses and damages from climate impacts, and it is the one that will have global reach. The other is a greater focus on enhancing the resilience of vulnerable people, communities, ecosystems and countries to better cope with both slow and rapid onset events.

To increase resilience, access to information on climate services and associated resilience building advice by the people affected is imperative to allow them to respond. They also need access to the resources that will increase their physical ability to avert losses and damages, as appropriate to their particular circumstances. This will require new and additional finance for early action on top of that already pledged for adaptation and mitigation, and the provision of this needs to be a key consideration of the WIM at COP25. The COP should mandate an assessment of needs for loss and damages under different mitigation scenarios.

In looking at ways to enhance resilience, the WIM should explore the opportunities given by nature-based solutions. Biodiverse ecosystems are inherently more resilient to climate impacts and have the co-benefits of having greater potential to provide a wide range of resources required by those living closest to the land, including timber, food, feed, fibre and other non-forest products – access to such resources itself enhances personal and community resilience, as well as helping to conserve biodiversity. Nature-based solutions can operate at local scales e.g. mangrove conservation and rehabilitation, or at regional scales, such as maintaining the integrity of the Amazon rainforest to produce a significant proportion of South America's rainfall and fresh water supplies.

For an issue as multi-faceted as averting loss and damage, Christian Aid recommends that the WIM also put greater focus on collaboration and coherence with other relevant UN platforms, including the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Convention on Biological Diversity, for nature-based solutions.

Christian Aid believes that the WIM should lie within the remit of the CMA, in order to allow greater speed of implementation of measures, especially those to avert climate impacts.

Adaptation

As well as their mitigation component, NDCs should also factor in adaptation needs. For developing countries, support should be given for the completion and implementation of country-driven, gender-responsive, participatory and transparent adaptation plans that are cognizant of current risks due to historical emissions and future risks due to current emissions.

Overall, there flows of finance have disappointingly failed to achieve the aim of at least half being for adaptation. The overall flows, as well as the proportion of finance for adaptation needs to be increased to allow vulnerable people, communities and ecosystems to adapt to the changing climate. This is an essential precondition for the global goal on adaptation being realized. There is also a need to scale up international cooperation for adaptation innovations and action in response to the climate crisis, and within the timelines for action suggested in the IPCC reports.

Article 6: Flexible Mechanisms

There are 3 flexibility mechanisms under Article 6 of the Paris Agreement, respectively in Articles 6.2, 6.4 and 6.8. They offer countries an opportunity to cooperate with one another when implementing their NDCs. The flexibility mechanisms should be designed to assist governments to achieve – but also to raise - their ambition.

Christian Aid therefore calls on Parties to agree modalities that ensure the mechanisms:

1. avoid double counting;
2. enable effective tracking and assessment of the impact of the crediting system;
3. allow an increase in countries' ambition;
4. and avoid carry over of Kyoto credits.

Any use of flexible mechanisms should only be allowed when there is evidence of clear transformational change towards a near-zero emissions economy within a country. There needs to be evidence of a good faith effort to transform a country's own economy away from reliance on fossil fuels, and to be putting itself on a pathway to very low emissions by 2050 (net zero emissions targets need to be achieved almost exclusively and as far as possible through emissions reductions). Use of flexible mechanisms must not undermine transformational change by any country and must be additional to it – it must be a mechanism of precautionary action, achieving emissions reductions further and faster than a pure 1.5°C-compatible pathway. This is the only way that Paris goal of limiting warming to 1.5°C will be achieved with high probability and to minimize the future impacts of climate change.

Flexible mechanisms have been part of the UNFCCC architecture since the Kyoto Protocol was first negotiated. Experience of the Kyoto mechanisms has been controversial, as projects under the clean development mechanism (CDM) and joint implementation (JI) have variously been criticized for lack of additionality and not actually creating real emissions reductions. In some project types, the CDM served to create a perverse incentive to increase production of harmful F gases to claim credits for 'reducing' them. Much of the emissions 'reductions' under JI were simply hot air, caused by factors prior to Kyoto and unrelated to climate actions. These Kyoto credits should have no role in the post-2020 climate regime.

The Article 6 negotiations need to draw on these lessons and create mechanisms that, where used, uphold climate, environmental and social integrity. They need to represent real emissions reductions, and operate at high enough credit costs to drive high quality climate action in the project's country, rather than the buying country cherry picking cheap credits. This latter circumstance would create a perverse incentive for developing countries in particular to limit the ambition of their NDCs to be able to sell cheap credits instead.

It is imperative that the Article 6 negotiations result in mandatory and comprehensive corresponding adjustments, so that climate action is not double counted. Overall, the accounting and tracking systems set up for the mechanisms need to be highly robust and be capable of identifying which emissions reductions of any country are covered or not by their NDC.

That there are two mechanisms in Article 6 creates complications. The Article 6.4 mechanism requires international agreement to become operational. The Article 6.2 mechanism simply requires bilateral cooperation. This latter mechanism has a high potential of being nothing more than greenwash. Again, the lessons of experience show that such an approach, as exemplified by Japan's bilateral Joint Crediting Mechanism which promoted "clean" coal rather than actual clean energy, leads to a 'Wild West' where anything goes, however detrimental to the climate. At COP25, there should be no agreement on any modalities of the Article 6.2 mechanism until the Article 6.4 modalities have been agreed, to prevent the former mechanism having the chance to gain a deeply undesirable head start.

There also needs to be recognition in the mechanisms' modalities of the fundamental non-fungibility of fossil and biological carbon. Fossil carbon has been securely stored underground for over 300 million years and will remain so if not actively extracted. Biological carbon has fluxes at a far faster rate and is also vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, creating serious questions of permanence (addressed in the CDM by creating 'temporary certified emission reductions', tCERs). Existing mechanisms have raised questions about lack of transparency in their use of the land sector, and also human rights abuses in limiting the access to land of indigenous and other local people. Land-based emissions reductions are better addressed within the framework of national long-term strategies.

Nature-based solutions

Christian Aid recognises that the climate crisis and the biodiversity crisis are intimately linked, and both pose an existential threat to life on Earth. Recent reports by IPBES and the IPCC have demonstrated the strong interlinkages between these issues and therefore also have served to highlight the potential for multiple co-benefits of nature-based solutions (NBSs) – for people, for climate mitigation and resilience building and for nature, on which human life relies.

While Christian Aid strongly supports the use of NBSs, we emphasise that they should in no way be seen as an alternative to reducing consumption in rich countries, for all to consume resources efficiently and to use resources sustainably. Central to solving the climate crisis is ending the fossil-fuelled era and keeping fossil fuels in the ground where they have been securely stored for over 300 million years. Because of their different time cycles – millions of years versus intra-annual fluxes - fossil and biological carbon should not be seen as fungible: the biosphere is itself vulnerable to climate impacts. However, even if emissions reductions are achieved to the maximum extent and at the maximum speed, negative emissions will still be needed to cover a small rump of emissions and to start to draw down the existing carbon loading in the atmosphere. Plants remain the single proven-at-scale means of achieving negative emissions and are an essential element of the 1.5°C goal being achieved, as well as being critical to achieving greater resilience to climate change.

NBSs need to be considered across all types of land use and at regional, national, and local levels. Long-term climate strategies are the best place where such planning should take place at the national level and NBSs should also be integrated into each country's NDC for nearer term implementation actions. Local interventions can be promoted by policies and information sharing with sub-national governments and local people. Where ecosystems cross national boundaries, the governments involved should cooperate to conserve the benefits received from nature.

Opportunities for achieving the goals of other UN Conventions, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity and UN Convention to Combat Desertification, should be taken up, where possible.

Existing natural ecosystems must be conserved and restored, with local communities at the centre of the solution and human rights upheld. There is a wealth of literature that suggests natural ecosystems tend to be carbon richer than their degraded or denuded counterparts, and also more resilient to climate impacts, both resulting from the greater biodiversity of natural ecosystems. For example, the value of mangroves for increasing resilience to storm surges and high tides, as well as storing carbon, being biodiverse and providing timber and non-timber forest product resources is well known. The rights of indigenous peoples to their land should be upheld - evidence shows that they are important and effective stewards of natural systems. Land rights more generally also need to be respected while planning for NBSs.

Degraded natural ecosystems should be appropriately supported to regenerate, whether passively or through active intervention. Where natural ecosystems have been fragmented, there should be a focus on linking them again to reduce the edge effects along boundaries and to allow greater gene flow within species that would otherwise be isolated in the habitat patches.

Agricultural lands should move towards agro-ecological methods which both increase the biodiversity of the land, but also remove the dependence on fossil-based agrichemicals, some of which themselves contribute to global heating and many of which actively seek to reduce biodiversity. Nutrient and carbon cycles must be closed in the agricultural practices to ensure that environmental boundaries of geochemical dynamics are respected, and agricultural soil contributes to store organic carbon instead of releasing it. Agro-ecological methods, like other nature-based solutions have the potential for multiple wins for climate, biodiversity and people, increasing climate resilience and productivity, reduced emissions and more atmospheric carbon being sequestered in soils and trees,

In cities and other built up landscapes, NBSs, such as tree planting, can increase shade and counter the urban heat island effect. Green roofs can improve storm water management by reducing runoff and improving water quality, conserve energy, mitigate the urban heat island, increase longevity of roofing membranes, reduce noise and air pollution, sequester carbon, increase urban biodiversity by providing habitat for wildlife, and provide space for urban agriculture. NBSs have application in all landscapes.

Gender and climate change

The 2014 Lima work program on gender was inaugurated under the UNFCCC to ensure balanced participation across the Convention bodies. It was replaced by the Gender Action Plan (GAP) at COP23 in 2017. The program is under revision between SB50 and COP25 for the next period, with a report on the implementation due at COP25. At the pre-COP in Costa Rica, there was consensus on the necessity of strengthening gender mainstreaming in NDCs' planning and implementation, and better involving the national gender focal points.

The preparation of the next generation of NDCs should be participatory and consultative, and should include adequate consideration of issues related to gender. This gender lens should also be applied to finance processes and development of National Adaptation Plans.

Christian Aid supports the continuation of the Lima Action Plan as a strengthening of the Gender Action Plan elements across the different bodies of the UNFCCC. We consider that the NDC dialogues and actions that are announced in COP25 and onwards by March 2020 should guarantee that gender and balance in participation are adequately taken into account. Gender should also be mainstreamed in adaptation and also in the WIM review. The provision of resources that are needed to implement gender approaches should be accounted under national action, as well as in the UNFCCC bodies.

As well as action to boost gender inclusion and participation, Parties similarly need to implement measures to ensure that indigenous and local communities' rights and interests are also given adequate consideration through participatory processes.

Acronyms

COP - Conference of Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change
NDCs – Nationally-determined contributions (Paris pledges)
WIM – Warsaw International Mechanism on Loss and Damage
IPCC – Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
IPBES - Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services
CBD – Convention on Biological Diversity
UNCCD – UN Convention to Combat Desertification
CBRDRC – common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities
JI – joint implementation
CDM – clean development mechanism
NBSs – nature-based solutions
GAP – gender action plan

Christian Aid is a Christian organisation that insists the world can and must be swiftly changed to one where everyone can live a full life, free from poverty.

We work globally for profound change that eradicates the causes of poverty, striving to achieve equality, dignity and freedom for all, regardless of faith or nationality. We are part of a wider movement for social justice.

We provide urgent, practical and effective assistance where need is great, tackling the effects of poverty as well as its root causes.

christianaid.org.uk

Contact us

Christian Aid
35 Lower Marsh
Waterloo
London
SE1 7RL
T: +44 (0) 20 7620 4444
E: info@christian-aid.org
W: christianaid.org.uk