



## WHAT'S NEW AT COP30 – And How Developing Countries, Especially Pakistan, Can Negotiate More Efficiently

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The Belém COP is unlike any other in recent memory. It is the first climate summit held in the Amazon, the world's most important carbon sink and the most visible reminder that the global climate regime is now operating in a world of overshoot, ecological fragility, and rising geopolitical tension. But what is truly new at COP30 is not the rainforest backdrop or the folkloric charm of Belém. Rather, it is the quiet but consequential shift from negotiating the architecture of the Paris Agreement to negotiating its machinery. Climate diplomacy has moved from designing the “building” to wrestling over the plumbing, wiring, and monthly maintenance fees. For developing countries like Pakistan, which are squeezed between climate impacts, fiscal constraints, and rising green trade barriers, this COP offers both new opportunities and new risks.

To understand what is new at COP30, one must start with the New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) on climate finance. Agreed at COP29 in Baku, the NCQG is the new global finance target that replaces the famous USD 100 billion pledge. It sets USD 300 billion per year in public climate finance by 2035, with an overall expectation of

USD 1.3 trillion annually mobilised for developing countries from all sources. In technical terms, this ushers in the “post-100 billion era” of climate finance. In political terms, it raises the stakes for every developing country delegation: finance is now the yardstick by which mitigation ambition, adaptation progress, and climate diplomacy will be measured. COP30 is the first implementation COP of this new goal, and therefore much of the negotiation energy is directed toward embedding the NCQG into the operational decisions of funds, boards, and transparency frameworks.

One of the central institutional innovations under review is the Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage (FRLD). Last year, the Fund was operationalised alongside the Barbados Implementation Modalities, a set of initial pilot interventions designed to help vulnerable countries respond rapidly to climate disasters. At COP30, the debate is no longer about whether the Fund should exist—this battle was won—but how it should work, how quickly it should disburse funding, and how directly vulnerable countries can access its resources. For developing countries, the demand is clear: the Fund must prioritise direct

access, meaning national agencies in states like Pakistan can apply for support without navigating multilateral intermediaries. This is not a trivial administrative issue. For a country hit by the 2022 & 2025 floods, and recurrent glacial lake outburst floods, delays of even three months can translate into lost crops, disease outbreaks, and irreversible social losses.

Another major negotiation is the Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA) and its associated Baku Adaptation Roadmap (BAR). The GGA aims to establish global benchmarks for adaptation—essentially, a global indicator system to track resilience, vulnerability reduction, and adaptive capacity. The difficulty, of course, is that adaptation needs vary dramatically across countries: the Maldives fears sea level rise, Kenya fears drought, Pakistan fears all hazards in the same week. The tension at COP30 lies between those who want to swiftly adopt a full set of indicators now and those who argue that more technical work is needed to avoid oversimplification. For Pakistan, this negotiation is critical. Poorly designed indicators could gloss over the specific vulnerabilities of the Indus Basin, the Himalayan–Karakoram glacier system, and the agriculture-dependent rural economy. A well-designed set, however, could help Pakistan articulate a more precise, evidence-based case for targeted adaptation financing.

One of the most politically charged debates at COP30 involves Unilateral Trade Measures (UTMs)—a polite UNFCCC term for climate-motivated trade restrictions such as the EU’s Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM). Many developing countries argue that UTMs can impose hidden climate taxes on their exports, undermining competitiveness and violating the principle of Common But Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR). The push in Belém is to establish a formal negotiation space on UTMs to ensure that new trade barriers do not substitute for genuine climate finance and technology support. For Pakistan, this is no academic debate. CBAM-like measures could directly affect textile, steel, and cement exports, sectors that are already struggling with high energy prices and volatile global demand. Efficient negotiation for Pakistan requires linking UTMs firmly to the finance discussions: if the global trading system is imposing new carbon-based restrictions, it must also provide the capital and technology to help countries decarbonise.

Closely connected to this is the debate on Article 2.1(c) of the Paris Agreement, which calls for making all financial flows consistent with climate-resilient, low-emission pathways. At first glance, the objective seems harmless—and even desirable. But without safeguards, Article 2.1(c) could become a backdoor route for imposing new conditionalities on developing countries by rating agencies, IFIs, and private investors. Many developing states worry that misinterpreting “financial alignment” could lead to higher borrowing costs, reduced access to credit, and premature exclusion of transitional energy options such as natural gas. COP30 has seen broad agreement that Article 2.1(c) must be implemented in a bottom-up, nationally determined, and non-punitive manner. This language preserves a critical negotiating line for Pakistan: no international actor should have the discretion to raise Pakistan’s cost of capital on the grounds that its finance flows are insufficiently “aligned.”

Mitigation, always a centrepiece of COPs, has taken on a slightly different flavour this year. The Mitigation Work Programme (MWP)—created to accelerate global emission reductions—has been the site of sharp disagreements. Some parties insist on including explicit references to the 1.5°C temperature limit and on integrating key messages from global dialogues on forests, energy transitions, and industry decarbonisation. Others argue that 1.5°C references are politically sensitive and that sector-specific recommendations risk creating pressure for targets that developing countries have not agreed to. The debate may sound esoteric, but it has real-world implications: if the MWP becomes a tool for naming and shaming, without adequate financial and technological support, it can become a source of diplomatic pressure on countries like Pakistan that are struggling with structural constraints.

To truly understand the new dynamics at COP30, it is useful to examine how the negotiation process itself has evolved. Surprisingly, this COP has been efficient in procedural terms. Agendas were adopted swiftly. Contact groups convened without the usual theatrics. And for issues like the SCF workplan, Article 9.5 finance reporting, or Adaptation Fund reforms, draft decision texts have emerged early in the second week. But efficiency for whom? Developing countries remain concerned that some of the most important issues—Article 9.1 (developed country finance obligations) and UTMs—have been moved into Presidency-led consultations, which are inclusive but politically

softer and lack the legal status of negotiated agenda items. Efficiency in process, therefore, may come at the cost of negotiating leverage for the Global South.

For Pakistan, COP30 presents both an opportunity and a challenge. The opportunity lies in the fact that finance, adaptation, and equity—Pakistan’s long-standing priorities—are at the centre of the agenda. The challenge lies in the fact that negotiating space is compressed, political alliances are fluid, and technical language can obscure power asymmetries. A smart Pakistani strategy must therefore operate on multiple fronts simultaneously. First, Pakistan must anchor every intervention in the NCQG logic: if the world expects greater ambition from developing countries, then finance must flow predictably, accessibly, and without hidden conditions. This means pushing for explicit references to NCQG commitments—particularly the requirement to triple annual outflows from climate funds—in all decisions relating to the GCF, GEF, Adaptation Fund, and Loss and Damage Fund.

Second, Pakistan should treat UTMs and Article 2.1(c) as economic issues, not just environmental ones. This means insisting on language that protects Pakistan from increased borrowing costs, arbitrary trade restrictions, and financial discrimination. It also means proposing a structured forum under the UNFCCC for discussing UTMs in relation to development rights. Pakistan can draw on its own experience: a textile exporter cannot meet CBAM-like requirements without concessional finance for energy efficiency, industrial heat decarbonisation, and renewable integration.

Third, Pakistan must work strategically within the G77, LMDCs, and targeted issue-based alliances. On adaptation, alignment with mountain states—Nepal, Bhutan, and the Mountain Group—can amplify Pakistan’s cryosphere concerns. On loss and damage, coordination with AOSIS and LDCs helps demonstrate that Pakistan’s vulnerabilities mirror those of small islands, even though its geography differs. And on just transition, Pakistan should position itself as a credible case study for coal-to-clean energy repurposing and tariff reform, which could unlock innovative financing partnerships within the Just Transition Work Programme.

Fourth, Pakistan’s negotiators must come prepared with concrete text, not just principles. In

UNFCCC negotiations, the party that proposes text effectively controls the centre of gravity. Whether it is a proposal on access modalities for FRLD, methodological clarification for GGA indicators, or safeguards under Article 2.1(c), proactive drafting creates advantage. Even a simple paragraph can shift negotiations, especially in open consultations where consensus positions are fluid.

Finally, Pakistan must remember that COP30 is not an endpoint but an inflection point. The Belém COP is shaping the operational tools of the climate regime: how money flows, how progress is measured, how markets function, and how trade and climate policies intersect. These tools will define Pakistan’s climate and economic trajectory for the next decade. COP30 is therefore not merely about representing Pakistan’s current interests but about helping design the architecture within which Pakistan must operate for years to come.

In many ways, COP30 reflects the new reality of climate diplomacy: less drama, more spreadsheets; fewer headline announcements, more methodological guidelines; and a shift from promises to pathways. For Pakistan, efficiency will be defined not by the number of speeches delivered but by the precision with which it aligns its negotiating positions with its structural needs—lower cost of capital, resilient infrastructure, equitable trade treatment, and a just transition away from stranded fossil-fuel assets. If Pakistan seizes the moment, COP30 could become a catalyst for domestic reform and international partnerships. If not, it risks being yet another COP where procedural efficiency masks substantive inequity.

As the Amazon humidity settles over the negotiation halls in Belém, one thing is clear: the global climate regime is being rewired in real time. For Pakistan and other developing countries, the task is not just to participate but to shape this emerging order. And if diplomacy is the art of turning constraints into advantages, then COP30 may yet offer a surprisingly fertile ground—no pun intended—for planting the seeds of a fairer climate future.

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