



COP 26: Half empty or half full?

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COP 26 was only starting when many concerns were already being expressed about its effectiveness in limiting global warming to 1.5°C.

The results of COP 26, **even if it confirms a certain amount of progress** (which we will detail below), **are nevertheless well below what is considered necessary by scientists to reach the Paris Agreement goals.**

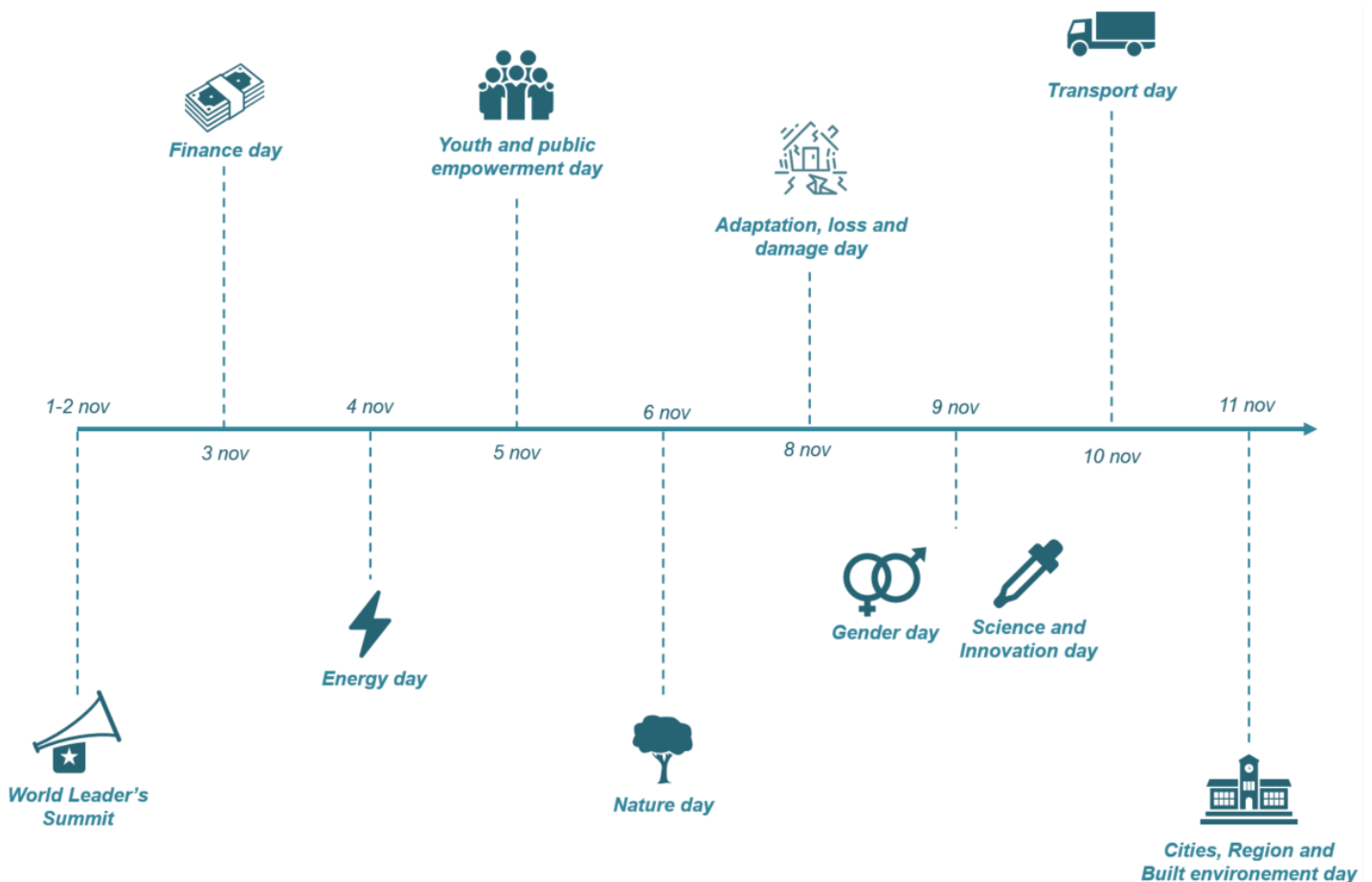
However, it is important to remember **the role that COPs can play in the fight against climate change.** These events are part of a cycle of international negotiations. Delegations from different countries meet to agree on texts discussed beforehand. From a legal point of view, these **texts come under international public law, which is particularly fragile.** There are no authorities to judge States that do not respect their commitments. Thus, in order to ensure that the commitments made by the various States are respected, **it is necessary to ensure that they are then written into the various national laws that govern them.**

Moreover, the operational conditions for the implementation of the various commitments are generally not specified, to rally the support of a large number of countries. This is also justified by the **diversity of national situations**, which may prevent the adoption of concrete actions, apart from major emblematic measures. **It is left to the judgment of each State to organize the implementation and application of the objectives.** All of **these elements can lead to a significant level of frustration** for many observers.

Finally, the complexity and difficulty of the international diplomatic mechanism have, in contrast, highlighted the **strong dynamics of the commitment** of private actors (companies and financial actors) around **international initiatives** (e.g. Science Based Targets) and coalitions of committed players.

However, as geographer Magalie Reghza-Zitt, a member of the French High Council for Climate, reminded us on France Inter (French radio), "**we must not burden the COPs with what they cannot do**". Negotiations with 190 countries are very heavy and although they avoid the creation of direct conflicts, they are not calibrated to concretely help in the fight against climate change. **The COPs are there to draw up objectives and commitments**. Then, at the national and territorial levels, transformation policies must be implemented by all stakeholders. While the COP sets a direction, it is then necessary to determine the actions and financing methods, in a democratic manner.

In this respect, the COPs have an important role to play, apart from their official role. First of all, **they make it possible to make a certain number of key climate issues visible and to encourage a large number of actors from civil society and the economic world to take action**. They are a place for meetings, debates, and conferences as well as a place to demonstrate actions already taken. The **ripple effect** on stakeholders in the fight against climate change can be multiple and very real. In order to encourage the players to get moving, **the British presidency has also organized debates around themed days**.



Organization of the COP 26 by themed day

In this paper, we will try to **deconstruct the events that marked these different days, in order to understand their impact on the different types of players** (companies, investors, public players, civil society).



NEW NATIONAL COMMITMENTS FOR THE CLIMATE



COP 26 was an opportunity to review the various countries' commitments in the fight against climate change, which are formalized through the NDCs (Nationally Determined Contributions). India has announced that it will be carbon neutral by 2070.

However, these commitments remain **insufficient to reach the 1.5°C objective**. If they are properly respected, they would make it possible to limit warming to 2.4°C according to Carbon Brief. To secure the 1.5°C objective, the Glasgow Pact urges the Parties to **strengthen their 2030 objectives** for COP 27.



France's climate objectives are formalized in the **National Low Carbon Strategy** (*Stratégie Nationale Bas Carbone - SNBC*), published in March 2020. However, **this strategy will have to be revised to take into account the new European objectives of a 55% emissions reduction by 2030 compared to 1990**. This new SNBC (planned for 2023) would be an opportunity for the French government to engage all economic players and civil society on a more ambitious climate path.



The commitments made by France in the **SNBC strategy guide public policies**, including the allocation of public subsidies and the calibration of taxes. These economic incentives are a key to the future economic model as they **guide companies' investment policies and consumer behavior**.

They are also **translated at various local levels** (PCAET, SRADDET) which must comply with it. The increase in French ambitions could result in **local public players being obliged to increase their own commitments and review the actions required to achieve them**. It should be noted that for the moment, the majority of these plans are based on the SNBC 1 (and not on the SNBC updated in 2018).



GLASGOW FINANCIAL ALLIANCE FOR NET ZERO



450 financial players from 45 countries, representing 130,000 billion in assets, have pledged to be carbon neutral by 2050. These private financial institutions (banks, insurance companies, asset managers, pension funds, etc.) will have to translate these commitments into precise, **science-based targets that will be reviewed every five years**. The greenhouse gas emissions of investments financed by these institutions will be reported annually to show their progress.



Several major French players are part of this alliance, including Axa, BNP Asset Management, Banque Postale, Crédit Mutuel, Société Générale and Crédit Agricole. This could allow these establishments to **change their policy**, knowing that they are regularly criticized for their financing of activities that emit large amounts of greenhouse gases. In this respect, **the Banque Postale was the first French bank to announce the end of oil and gas expansion before the COP, by 2030**.



This will have a **knock-on effect** on other financial players. In a context where **investors are more demanding** about the emissions generated by the projects they finance, companies will be all the more compelled to set more ambitious emission reduction targets and to implement **evaluation methods** in line with climate ambitions if they want to continue to benefit from market financing. This effect may be counterbalanced by the fact that the targets set are for a fairly long time horizon, which does not allow for a rapid change in the trend.



THE EXIT FROM FOSSIL ENERGIES?



i For the first time, and although the text has been weakened many times, the **Glasgow Pact mentions the progressive reduction of coal use.**

At the same time, a coalition of countries committed **to stop issuing licenses for oil and gas exploration and exploitation.** Some 40 countries have also committed to **moving away from coal by 2040** and 20 have signed an **agreement not to finance fossil fuel projects** abroad without CO2 capture technology.



In order to be consistent with the commitments made at the COP, France will have to drastically reduce its dependence on current fossil energy imports, which in **2019 is 11 Mt for coal, 49.7 Mtoe for crude oil and 630 TWh for natural gas.**

To anticipate this decrease, many prospective studies on the future of the French energy mix are being updated. The **RTE** (France's transmission system operator) **study on Energy Futures 2050** (which focuses on the electricity mix and which is intended to replace a significant portion of the fossil fuels currently used) or the upcoming publication of the **Energy-Resource Outlook by ADEME** (French Agency for Ecological Transition) are very enlightening in this regard.



The **change in the energy mix has repercussions on all sectors of the economy.** All sectors will have to change, either because they will have to decarbonize (transportation, heating systems, industrial activities), or because they will have to meet a new demand (electricity production). In the very short term, this is reflected in **the political choice that must be made on the French nuclear strategy.** Although it allows France to benefit from decarbonized and non-intermittent electricity, there is still a lot of opposition regarding the **safety of the installations and the treatment of waste.** These questions should be addressed in a democratic political debate since they will condition the energy future of our societies for several decades.



CITIES COMMIT TO CARBON NEUTRALITY



In France, the commitment of cities and regions is reflected in the **adoption of PCAET** (*Air Energy Climate Territorial Plans*) and **SRADDET** (*Regional Schemes of Planning, Sustainable Development and Equality of Territories*). These plans condition **all local development and impact the daily lives of citizens.** They must be in line with France's climate objectives, but they can also go further. Some **French local authorities are particularly advanced on these issues, such as Grenoble Alpes Metropole,** the first French metropolis to adopt a PCAET as early as 2005, and whose city of Grenoble will be the European Green Capital in 2022.



A total of **1,049 cities and regions** around the world have joined the UNFCCC's Race to Zero campaign, declaring their goal to **reduce their carbon emissions by 50% by 2030** to reach net zero emissions by 2050.



These different planning tools make it possible to direct regional **or local funding towards climate-friendly activities.** In this respect, the development of the **I4CE methodology** for analyzing the budgetary expenditures of cities and metropolitan areas, which is currently being adapted at the regional level, makes it possible to **operationalize commitments by clearly identifying expenditures that are consistent with climate commitments and those that are not.** The drafting of the PCAETs must also be very operational, with quantified objectives, to ensure concrete impact.



ADAPTATION FUNDS



232 million dollars have been raised for the Adaptation Fund as well as **\$450 million that will be mobilized for local initiatives and programs.**

This figure should be compared with UNEP's estimate of **\$300 billion in annual funding needs by 2030 and \$500 billion by 2050** for adaptation in developing countries alone.

A total of **88 countries** are now covered by adaptation plans at the national level. The Parties have also **established a work program for COP 27 which must identify the objectives, needs and possible solutions to the crises.**



The adaptation policy at the French level is reflected in the National Climate Change Adaptation Plan. As with the SNBC, it **structures the response of the various players** to deal with climate events that are now inevitable. It is the **second pillar of an effective climate policy that truly protects citizens.**

In its latest report, the French High Council for the Climate points out the **lack of ambition in France** in terms of adaptation with a **lack of coordination between territories.** The risk of poor adaptation is real and still poorly addressed by public policies.



The **impact of climate change is now being felt in all economic activities.** It is now essential that companies conduct **vulnerability assessments to determine the physical and transitional risks they face.** The adoption of coherent adaptation plans will allow them to maintain their economic health.

Communities also need to **pay more attention to these issues to ensure the safety and comfort** of their citizens.



COMMITMENTS TO CLEAN TRANSPORTATION



Some 30 countries have signed an agreement to promote clean vehicles (electric or hydrogen) by making them accessible, affordable and sustainable. The goal is to have all new car and light truck sales be zero emission by 2040.

However, **this agreement is at the very minimum and has not been signed by the world's two largest markets, China and the United States.** In addition, the promotion of so-called clean vehicles is also a matter of debate, both on the energy mix that enables hydrogen or electricity to be obtained, and also on the life cycle of these vehicles.



The **European Commission's Fit for 55 plan calls for a ban on traditional petrol and diesel vehicles by 2035.** It also aims to expand the network of charging stations for electric vehicles and other alternative fuels. According to the MTES (French Ministry of Ecological Transition), in France, **transport is the first sector to emit 132 Mt of CO₂ in 2020**, more than half of which is due to private vehicles and one fifth to commercial vehicles. It is therefore urgent to act on these two types of vehicles, both **by improving their energy efficiency and by decarbonizing the energy used.** An important lever for reducing CO₂ emissions also lies in the **rational use of vehicles**, with a reduction in the number of private cars in circulation.



These decisions have important implications for the automotive sector, which is forced to redirect its entire production system. **In France in 2020, electric vehicles will still represent only 11.3% of new car sales.**

Investments must also be redirected to develop the infrastructure needed for recharging in order to encourage sales.

Communities also have an important role to play in limiting the use of cars in dense, urbanized areas. This includes plans to **develop soft transportation and public transport.**



ENDING DEFORESTATION AND LAND DEGRADATION



According to the MTES, **in France, between 20,000 and 30,000 hectares are artificialized each year**, despite the "Zero Net Artificialization" objective of the French Biodiversity Plan. The conservation of natural areas is a major challenge if France wants to achieve the goal of carbon neutrality in 2050. Indeed, **forests and soils account for more than half of the carbon sinks** that should enable France to offset its residual carbon emissions. Natural environments also provide **solutions for adapting to the impacts of climate change**.



More than **140 countries, representing as much as 90% of the world's forest area**, have committed to preserve and restore forests, facilitate non-deforestation practices, implement agricultural policies that promote sustainable agriculture and food security, and make available the necessary financing to meet **international targets for reversing deforestation and land degradation by 2030**. Signatories include Brazil, China, Russia, and France.



To limit artificialization, an important lever is to **control urban expansion**. To do this, local authorities can rely on policies of **intensification of spaces, encouraging urban recycling and mixing the uses of buildings**.

It is also a question of **preserving existing natural areas** by setting up effective protection systems. This policy can be completed by **policies to clean up and restore former natural areas** that have been artificialized.

Companies also have a role to play, in particular by **verifying the origin of the raw materials used**, by ensuring that they come from sustainable farms that are not responsible for deforestation.



TAKING METHANE INTO ACCOUNT



According to CITEPA (non-profit environmental data aggregation organization), **67% of French methane emissions come from the agricultural sector and 25% from waste treatment**. In the agricultural sector, these emissions come mainly from livestock (the digestion process of animals and waste management). The emissions from the waste sector come from the decomposition of waste in landfills. In the industrial sector, they are linked to the incomplete combustion of fossil fuels.

The stakes surrounding methane emissions are high since its global warming power over 20 years is 72, which means that the emission of one ton of methane will contribute 72 times more to global warming in 20 years than one ton of CO₂.



109 countries have committed to reducing global methane emissions by 30% by 2030 compared to 2020. All the signatories represent 50% of global emissions. However, China, India and Russia, which together are responsible for 1/3 of the emissions, are missing.

The fight against methane emissions is also mentioned in the final pact of Glasgow.



Given the importance of livestock farming, particularly cattle farming, in methane emissions, the **fight against these emissions must include a reform of our food system**.

Apart from certain technological innovations (based on food supplements for animals), it is above all on human behavior that we must act, both by **fighting against food waste and by promoting less meat-based diets**.

Education policies as well as the world of advertising have a key role to play here in forging new collective imaginations.

In parallel to these announcements, **numerous issues remained unresolved during this COP 26**. In particular, the **question of financing**, both for the fight against climate change, but also for the damages suffered by the countries most exposed to these changes (mainly Southern countries), on the part of the responsible countries, has not been resolved. These are crucial issues **to ensure a fair and acceptable transition for all**.

*“Moving forward will require a greater emphasis on **international cooperation** for sustainable development, tackling loss and damage issues head-on, and strengthening accountability for commitments made by countries and companies.”*

– Lola Vallejo, Director of IDDRI's climate program, former I Care consultant

Although disappointing, the events that took place during the two weeks of negotiations in Glasgow have at least **highlighted a number of crucial issues in the fight against climate change**. They have allowed all players to **see the role they can play and the place they can take in more virtuous processes**, even if policies do not provide the necessary stimulus. There are many reforms to be undertaken in order to succeed in keeping the warming under 1.5°C, and they will require a certain amount of courage, both on the part of leaders and on the part of all the players who make up the economic world and civil society.

The latter has also managed to make its voice heard during the two weeks of negotiations. During this period, demonstrations and speeches took place in Glasgow and throughout the world. The demands, particularly of youth, were at least as widely covered in the media as the official decisions, and this pressure from civil society on the leaders is important and will be increasingly taken into account in the democratic process.

To go further:

- [“COP26 draft text annotated: what it says and what it means”, The Guardian, November 10th, 2021](#)
- [Official COP26 news](#)
- [IDDRI webinar on the outcome of the COP26 with the participation of Lola Vallejo, former consultant at I Care](#)
- [National French Low Carbon Strategy \(SNBC\)](#)
- [UNEP Adaptation Gap Report 2021](#)
- [UNEP Emissions Gap Report 2021](#)

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