



## COP16 and COP29

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Two global United Nations environmental conferences took place in November 2024. **Cameron Dunn** looks at what the global community is doing to tackle the problem of climate change

Climate change and biodiversity are at critical thresholds. Earth is perilously close to breaching the +1.5°C warming limit and research suggests 30–50% of all species are in decline.

In November 2024, two major conferences took place: the UN Biodiversity Conference of the Parties (COP16) in Cali, Colombia, and the climate change Conference of the Parties of the UNFCCC (COP29) in Baku, Azerbaijan.

### Intertwined problems

Biodiversity loss and climate change go hand-in-hand. The number of humans has grown to over 8 billion the biomass of farm animals has ballooned. Humans have converted ecosystems to farmland and their farm animals drive methane and carbon dioxide emissions. Climate change degrades ecosystems leading to further losses in the wild mammal population.

For at least three decades, arguably since the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, these global environmental problems have been widely understood. Almost everyone now agrees that

action is needed on both issues, yet major global conferences seem painfully slow to agree on – never mind take – action. Why?

### Undue influence?

A criticism of these environmental conferences is that they are heavily influenced by business and industry interests whose agenda is to dilute or delay actions to protect biodiversity or mitigate carbon emissions.

At COP16 in Cali there were over 1,200 delegates from business and industry (agribusiness, agrochemical and food processing) – double the number at COP15 in 2022. At COP29 in Baku there were 1,700 delegates from the fossil fuel industry. The fear is that these delegates lobby government and IGO participants to act in favour of the status quo and against the radical actions needed to slow carbon emissions or protect biodiversity.

### Money troubles

COP16 and COP29 share a roadblock to progress: money. Low-income countries argue they need financial help to protect and conserve ecosystems, transition away from fossil fuels and meet the costs of adapting to climate change.

COP16 ended without any agreement on how to raise the \$200 billion a year, agreed on in 2022, needed to fund biodiversity conservation. COP29 struggled with how to finance the 'Loss and Damage

Fund' agreed at COP28, needed to help developing countries cope with climate change. Estimates of the cost range up to \$1 trillion per year.

Without agreement on a transfer of funds from rich to poor there is a risk that low-income countries perceive wealthy countries as acting unfairly and this undermines the chances of global agreement being reached.

## Uncertainty and division

Figure 1 shows total greenhouse gas emissions in 2023. Ten countries accounted for 65% of all emissions. Action on climate change will come to nothing unless these countries act. Geopolitics gets in the way of agreement. China, India, Russia, Brazil and Iran are all BRICS members whereas the USA, EU and Japan are part of the so-called 'Western alliance'. These two blocs rarely agree on anything, never mind action on climate and conservation. The two blocs also have different political and economic priorities, being high-income democracies versus emerging economy authoritarian states (Brazil and India are democracies). The recent election of Donald Trump in the USA adds to uncertainty because in the past he has stated he would withdraw from the UN climate agreement signed in Paris in 2015.

## Too big to succeed?

Both the conservation and climate COPs have grown over time. Over 50,000 delegates attended COP29 in Baku and 23,000 COP16 in Cali. COPs have become more inclusive and diverse but their sheer scale may mean reaching agreement is increasingly difficult to achieve. While few would question the need for delegates representing indigenous people to attend COPs, the presence of delegates from fossil fuel and agribusiness companies is far more contentious. During COP29 a group of influential scientists and politicians including former UN secretary general Ban Ki-moon stated that 'It is now clear that the COP is no longer fit for purpose. We need a shift from negotiation to implementation.'

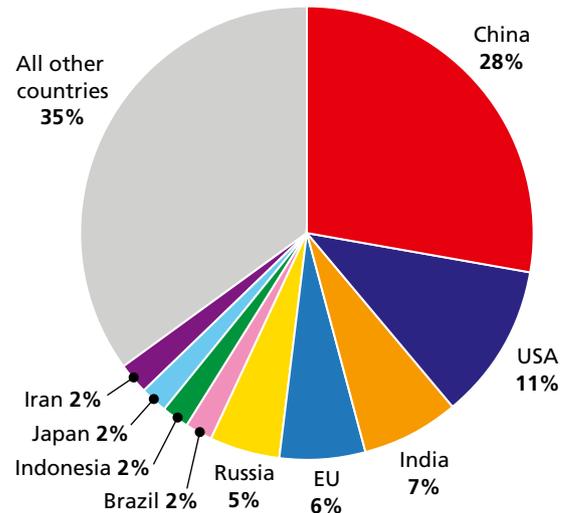


Figure 1 Total greenhouse gas emissions, 2023

## Questions

- 1 Should delegates representing businesses and industry attend climate change and conservation UN COP meetings?
- 2 Do rich countries have an obligation to transfer money to developing countries to help them promote conservation and climate action?
- 3 Would smaller COPs, perhaps only attended by high-level government officials and leaders of global IGOs, have a greater chance of success in terms of negotiation and agreement?

## Further research

The European Commission EDGAR database has an inventory of greenhouse gas emissions by country:

[https://edgar.jrc.ec.europa.eu/report\\_2024](https://edgar.jrc.ec.europa.eu/report_2024)

You can explore the websites of the COP meetings here: [www.cbd.int/conferences/2024](http://www.cbd.int/conferences/2024) (COP16 on biodiversity) and <https://cop29.az/en/home> (COP29 on climate change).

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