Gen. LEO Irabor Early Warning Systems Centre

GLIC COMMENTARY

COP 31; THE CONTINUOS DIALOGUE ON CLIMATE IN A CHANGING WORLD

The Institutional Dilemma: What Is COP for Now?

Conference of the Parties (COP) was created to negotiate climate action. Three decades later, those negotiations have produced an elaborate architecture of agreements, targets and reporting systems. Yet COP31 is being presented as an "Implementation COP." If reviewing implementation and making decisions to promote its effective implementation were part of COP's mandate from the beginning, why does COP31 need to present implementation as a new direction after three decades of climate negotiations?

COP31, the thirty-first Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), will take place in Antalya, Türkiye, from 9 to 20 November 2026. Türkiye will host the conference, while Australia will serve as President of Negotiations. The two presidencies have presented COP31 as part of an implementation-focused approach to transforming existing commitments into measurable, practical results.

The Paris Agreement has established the central framework for international climate action. COP29 also set a new climate-finance goal of at least $300 billion annually for developing countries by 2035, alongside a broader call to scale up climate finance from all sources to $1.3 trillion annually. Yet implementation immediately raises harder questions. Implementation of what? By whom? With what resources? And, perhaps most importantly, how will anyone know whether the promises made in conference rooms are actually producing change beyond them?

COP31 therefore arrives with a problem larger than its agenda. After thirty conferences devoted to negotiating climate action, the institution itself faces a question of purpose: what is COP for now?



What was COP created to do?

To understand why COP31 is facing a question of purpose, it is necessary to return to the institution's beginning. The Conference of the Parties was not created as an annual climate festival, investment forum or showcase for technological solutions. It emerged from a much more specific need, which is to provide governments with a continuing institution through which they could review the implementation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and make decisions necessary to advance it.

The Convention was adopted in 1992, establishing the basic framework for international cooperation on climate change. Three years later, in March 1995, governments gathered in Berlin for the first Conference of the Parties. The UNFCCC describes the COP as the Convention's "supreme decision-making body," responsible not only for making decisions but also for reviewing implementation, including national communications and emissions inventories submitted by Parties.

Its original function is important to the question facing COP31. From the beginning, COP was not simply designed to produce new promises; it was also designed to examine whether existing commitments were being implemented. Yet its history would gradually expand its responsibilities.

From establishing new rules to negotiating emissions commitments, developing the Paris Agreement and, increasingly, confronting the challenge of putting those agreements into practice.



Former UN Climate Change head Christiana Figueres (second left) celebrates the signing of the Paris Agreement on 12 December 2015 with COP21 president Laurent Fabius and former French President Francois Hollande (right) (Photo: UN Climate Change/Flickr*)*

Implementation of What?

If COP31 is to be an "Implementation COP", the first question should not simply be how quickly countries can act. It should be what exactly counts as implementation? After three decades of climate negotiations, the international system already contains agreements, national commitments, reporting requirements, transparency mechanisms and processes for assessing collective progress. The Paris Agreement, for instance, requires countries to prepare, communicate and maintain successive nationally determined contributions (NDCs), while its transparency framework and Global Stocktake are designed to show whether collective action is moving towards its long-term goals.

The danger, therefore, is that implementation becomes another language for announcing action rather than demonstrating it. A new target, investment pledge or partnership may signal progress, but it does not necessarily demonstrate that emissions are falling, communities are becoming more resilient, energy systems are changing or promised finance is reaching the people and countries that need it. COP30's own action-agenda report, for example, emphasised showing how pledges and plans were being turned into delivery across energy, transport, food, finance and other sectors.

This creates a more demanding test for COP31. If implementation is to distinguish this COP from another cycle of promises, progress must become visible and measurable beyond the conference venue. The question is no longer only what governments are willing to promise, but what can be verified afterwards. What changed, who delivered it, what resources made it possible, and who is accountable when the promised change does not occur.

Implementation without the Means to Implement

Implementation is not simply a statement of political will. It is also a question of means. A country may have a national climate target, a transition plan and the political commitment to deliver both, but implementation requires finance, technology, institutional capacity and access to appropriate forms of support.

This is where COP31's implementation agenda encounters a particularly difficult reality for developing countries. The Institute for Security Studies argues that key climate-finance decisions have again been deferred, leaving African countries without the tools required to turn ambitious climate goals into action. The concern is not merely that Africa needs more money. It is that the international climate system can demand faster implementation while leaving unresolved the conditions that make implementation possible.



This distinction matters. Finance can determine whether a climate commitment remains a policy document or becomes a functioning renewable-energy project, a resilient city, an adaptation programme or a just transition for affected workers and communities. The UN climate process itself recognises the importance of implementation support. Its 2025–2026 capacity-building work focuses on helping developing countries turn national climate plans into investable projects and improve access to climate finance.

This creates a tension at the heart of COP31. If implementation is the measure of climate ambition, then the means of implementation must also

become part of the measure. Otherwise, the burden of proving that climate diplomacy works may fall most heavily on countries that have the least financial capacity to demonstrate it.

What Should Success At COP31 Look Like?

If COP31 is serious about making implementation the defining test of climate diplomacy, then its success should be measured differently from the way many previous conferences have been judged. The inquiry should not simply be whether governments reached another historic agreement, announced another target or launched another partnership. It should be whether commitments can be traced to responsibilities, resources and measurable outcomes.



From left to right: UN Climate Change Executive Secretary Simon Stiell, Türkiye's Minister of Environment, Urbanisation and Climate Change and COP31 President-Designate Murat Kurum and COP30 President André Corrêa do Lago during the COP31 preparatory press conference in Istanbul, 12 February 2026.

COP31 therefore has an opportunity to establish a more demanding standard for climate diplomacy. A commitment should be accompanied by a means of delivery; delivery should produce evidence of change; and evidence should make it possible to determine who is responsible for progress or failure. This is particularly important as the COP31 presidency seeks to transform commitments into "measurable and practical results."

The 31st Conference of the Parties (COP31) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) arrives at a defining moment in human history. Following the findings of the first Global Stocktake (GST) and the establishment of the New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) on climate finance, the global community faces a stark reality: current commitments are insufficient to limit global warming to the critical 1.5°C threshold.

For COP31, the challenge is therefore not simply to give the climate process a new slogan. It is to demonstrate that an institution built over three decades can move from producing commitments to making those commitments consequential. COP does not need to cease being a negotiating forum, nor does the presence of businesses, investors and civil society make it inherently less legitimate. However, the wider the process becomes, the more important it is to preserve a clear line of accountability.

The question "What is COP for now?" may therefore have a less dramatic answer than another historic agreement. The Conference of the Parties (COP) serves to transform collective decisions into tangible actions, while also highlighting instances where such actions may be insufficient. COP31 will be judged not only by what happens in Antalya, but by what can still be measured after Antalya is over.

A Defining Moment for Climate Action: What COP31 means for Nigeria

For Nigeria, the 31st session of the Conference of the Parties (COP31), scheduled for 9–20 November 2026 in Antalya, Türkiye, represents far more than another diplomatic gathering. It is a test of whether the multilateral climate system can finally move from pledges to delivery and whether Nigeria can translate its domestic ambitions into tangible results. With the core theme of moving "**from dialogue and commitment to concrete action**," COP31 arrives at a critical juncture for Africa's most populous nation.



Nigeria ranks among the countries most vulnerable to climate change. Across the country, climate change has moved from forecast to fact:

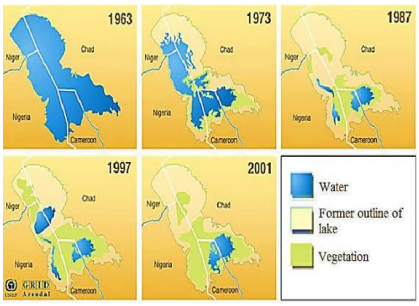
An image of the Sahel Region. Source: Britannica.org

In the North, farmers watch rains arrive late and end early, cutting short planting and harvest windows. Desertification advances southward through the Sahel at about 0.6 kilometers each year. A one-degree rise in temperature reduces maize yields by approximately ten per cent.

An image of Ayetoro town disappearing due to rising Atlantic Ocean Source: The Guardian



In the South, coastal communities steadily lose land to the Atlantic Ocean. Tidal floods push further inland along the Lagos coastline. In the Niger Delta, fishermen haul in smaller catches as saltwater creeps up the creeks.



An image of Lake Chad disappearing. Source: researchgate.net

In the Lake Chad Basin, the lake has lost more than ninety per cent of its surface area since 1963, intensifying competition between herders and farmers.

The economic toll is staggering. The World Bank estimated damage from the 2022 floods at over ₦4.2 trillion. Roads, schools, clinics, and small businesses were destroyed. These are not warnings about a distant future, they are daily realities measured in lost income, higher food prices, and damaged infrastructure.

At COP30 in Belém, Brazil, Nigeria sent a delegation of 749 out of which 423 were government officials, rivaling that of China (789 delegates). Yet beyond the large delegations, facts on ground show that we seriously lag in actions needed to benefit our environment. This lag in implementation has direct consequences:

- Emissions had already risen over 35 per cent above 2010 levels by 2022. If this trend continues, emissions are projected to rise 61–71 per cent higher by 2030.
- Gas flaring persisted at 203.9 billion scf in 2025, 7.54 per cent of total production. Despite a 2030 phase-out pledge.
- Deforestation claims four million hectares annually, threatening mangroves and accelerating land degradation.

Persistent shortfalls in domestic climate action undermine Nigeria's demands for grants and concessional funding

In September 2025, Nigeria submitted its third Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC 3.0) to the UNFCCC. The plan sets ambitious targets:

- ❖ 32 per cent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2035 compared to 2018 levels
- ❖ 29 per cent reduction by 2030 relative to 2018 levels
- ❖ Renewable energy share in electricity generation to increase from 22 to 52 per cent

- Net-zero emissions by 2060
- 250,000 hectares of trees planted annually

The NDC also addresses adaptation more comprehensively than before, covering food security, agriculture, water, sanitation, health, infrastructure, human settlements, ecosystems, livelihoods, and cultural heritage. An estimated $337 billion is needed to fund this transition.

As preparations intensify, Nigeria has articulated clear priorities for Antalya:

1. **Climate Finance**

At COP31, Nigeria may seek $20–25 billion by 2030from the $1.3 trillion global goal, plus direct access for state governments. The country has already unveiled plans to mobilize climate finance through its National Carbon Market Framework and Climate Change Fund.

2. **Loss and Damage Fund**

Nigeria has been vocal in demanding the full operationalization of the Loss and Damage Fund, with officials publicly criticizing its slow progress. At the Fund's ninth Board meeting in Manila (July 2026), Nigeria was among the first four countries to receive proposals alongside Haiti, Jamaica, and Côte d'Ivoire totaling $77.4 million. Yet as one analysis noted, the Fund remains severely underfunded: as of June 2025, 27 countries had pledged about US$789 million, of which only $361 million had been paid.

3. **Adaptation Support**

Minister of Environment Balarabe Abbas Lawal has stressed that developing countries require concrete support to address growing climate impacts while pursuing sustainable development. Nigeria's priorities include accelerated implementation of the Global Goal on Adaptation and enhanced support for adaptation efforts in Africa.

4. **Technology Transfer and Equitable Carbon Markets**

Nigeria is also advocating for stronger technology transfer mechanisms and the promotion of equitable carbon market systems. The country is developing sustainable finance instruments, including the Nigeria Sustainable Finance Taxonomy, to attract public and private sector investments.

5. **South-South Co-operation**

Lawal has advocated strengthened South-South cooperation, describing it as a "valuable mechanism for advancing green industrialization, renewable energy deployment, sustainable agriculture, biodiversity conservation and climate-resilient infrastructure".

For Nigeria, COP31 must be more than another round of declarations. As Minister Lawal urged the international community, the conference should deliver practical support to developing countries rather than imposing new obligations without adequate financing, technology transfer, and capacity-building support.

Yet, Nigeria must also arrive in Antalya with credible evidence of results achieved if it is to benefit from the global climate fund. Persistent shortfalls in domestic climate action undermine demands for grants and concessional funding. Progress on the Energy Transition Plan like solar mini-grids or flare reduction must move from symbolic gestures to verifiable results.

The decisions reached in Antalya will shape Nigeria's budget, agriculture, infrastructure, and health systems for the next decade. For a country pursuing poverty reduction, climate change has become one of the principal sources of economic volatility. COP31 must therefore be approached as a platform for practical outcomes not another round of promises.

References

1. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. “Joint Letter from COP31 President-Designate and President of Negotiations.” Accessed August 13, 2026. https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/JOINT%20LETTER%20FROM%20COP31%20CPD-PON.pdf
2. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. “Article 7: Conference of the Parties.”Accessed August 13, 2026. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
3. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. “History of the Convention.”Accessed August 13, 2026. https://unfccc.int/process/the-convention/history-of-the-convention
4. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. “Global Stocktake.”Accessed August 13, 2026. https://unfccc.int/topics/global-stocktake
5. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. “COP29.”Accessed August 13, 2026.https://unfccc.int/cop29
6. Chase-Lubitz, Jesse. “Could COP31 Be the End of Negotiations?” *Devex*, August 10, 2026. https://www.devex.com/news/could-cop31-be-the-end-of-negotiations-112866
7. Institute for Security Studies. “Without the Right Tools, COP31’s Implementation Promise Will Fail Africa. ”https://issafrica.org/iss-today/without-the-right-tools-cop31-s-implementation-promise-will-fail-africa
8. "2022 Flood Caused N4.2trn Economic Loss To Nigeria – FG", The Tide, January 30, 2023. https://www.thetidenewsonline.com/2023/01/2022-flood-caused-n4-2trn-economic-loss-to-nigeria-fg/
9. "COP30: Presidency, Obi clash over 423-man Nigeria delegation", The Punch, November 17, 2025. https://punchng.com/cop30-presidency-obi-clash-over-423-man-nigeria-delegation/
10. "Nigerians react to COP30 delegation", Daily Trust, November 20, 2025. https://dailytrust.com/nigerians-react-to-cop30-delegation/
11. Climate Analytics, "Current Situation", 1.5°C NDC Pathways. https://1p5ndc-pathways.climateanalytics.org/methodology
12. "Gas flaring hits 203.9 billion scf in 2025 despite high utilisation – NUPRC", Nairametrics, January 30, 2026. https://nairametrics.com/2026/01/30/gas-flaring-hits-203-9-billion-scf-in-2025-despite-high-utilisation-nuprc/

This was compiled by the Gen. LEO Irabor Early Warning Systems Centre, Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA), Lagos, Nigeria.

Olayinka Kazeem, olayinka.effect@yahoo.com (Research Fellow, Unit Head)

Benjamin A. Osazuwa, benjaminosas87@gmail.com (Graduate Research Intern)

Babalola Inioluwa A., babalolainioluwa89@gmail.com (Youth Corper)

Busari O. Mariam, mariam.busari.one@gmail.com (Graduate Research Intern)

GLIC | Gen. LEO Irabor Early Warning Systems Centre

Website: www.niia.gov.ng/early-warning-system-centre

13/15 Kofo Abayomi Road,

Email: earlywarning@niia.gov.ng
LinkedIn
Website: **www.niia.gov.ng**
Victoria Island, Lagos