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THE VOICE OF CONSERVATION IN EAST AFRICA

NEWSLETTER

THE EAST AFRICAN WILD LIFE SOCIETY

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Brief Explainer on COP26

The 26th Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention of Climate Change (COP 26), hosted by the United Kingdom in partnership with Italy, will take place from 31st October to 12th November 2021 in the Scottish Event Campus (SEC) in Glasgow, UK.

In light of the worldwide effects of COVID-19, the COP Bureau of the United Nations Framework Conference Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), with the UK and its Italian partners, decided to re-schedule the conference initially slated for November 2020.

The UNFCCC was established at the first Rio Earth Summit in 1992, the sister Convention to the Convention on Biodiversity. Currently, there are 197 Parties (196 States and one regional economic integration bloc) to UNFCCC. The Parties to the Convention meet every year (with the exception of 2020 due to Covid-19) at the Conference of the Parties (COP).

The UNFCCC established agreements between the Parties to act on climate change. The first agreement was the Kyoto Protocol, which set binding emission reduction targets for 36 industrialised countries and the European Union. Overall, these targets add up to an average of 5 per cent emission reduction compared to 1990 levels over the five-year period of 2008–2012. The second phase ran from 2013 to 2020, with Parties committing to reduce greenhouse gases emissions by at least 18 per cent below 1990 levels. However, fewer countries made commitments to this second phase.

The UNFCCC takes scientific guidance from the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate change (IPCC), who present their Assessment Reports (AR) every five years, with AR6 due out in 2021/22. The IPCC produced a special report on keeping global temperature rise 1.5 degrees Celsius in 2018, showing the significant difference between a 1.5oC rise and a rise of 2oC, and the dramatic risk of exceeding both these goals. It also recommended a global 'net zero' emissions target by 2050.

The 2015 UN climate conference in Paris (COP21) ended with the adoption of the Paris Agreement, a new global accord on tackling climate change. The Paris Agreement, whose measures took effect in 2020, is distinctly different from the Kyoto Protocols in that it calls for action from all signatory countries (Parties) and not just the industrialised nations. In addition to mitigation (cutting greenhouse gas emissions) it also agrees action on adaptation (responding to the impacts of climate change) and loss and damage (response to climate catastrophe). It also agrees that wealthier nations should provide finance and technology to help poor and vulnerable countries to take action.

Greenhouse gases are being emitted into the atmosphere with dire consequences. Here, a factory emits harmful gases.

At Paris, countries made pledges to implement the Paris Agreement through Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), which set national targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions by either 2025 or 2030. These will be reviewed every five years through a stocktaking process.

The official negotiations take place over two weeks. The first week is primarily technical negotiations by government officials. The second week is dominated by the high level Ministerial and Heads of State meetings. The most challenging issues of the negotiations go to the Ministers to make the final negotiated decisions.

There are several technical issues to be finalised at COP26. These include some difficult sticking points which were carried over from COP25 in Madrid in 2019. Issues which will be brought to COP26 include:

- Carbon market mechanisms, which would allow one country to purchase carbon credits (reductions) from another country to allow the purchasing country to continue to emit within its borders. Carbon markets may also include trade in 'negative' emissions such as carbon absorption through forestry.
- Funding for loss and damage: While loss and damage is a core part of the Paris Agreement, there is no mechanism as yet within the UNFCCC to fund responses when vulnerable countries experience loss and damage. This is viewed as a critical factor by the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) to unlock the negotiations but is resisted by many wealthy nations.
- Discussions over the delivery of the $100 billion finance target are likely, and again will be a critical factor for less developed countries. Additionally, COP26 is likely to set the next target for climate finance to be achieved by 2025.
- An increasingly important aspect of the climate debate is around 'nature-based solutions' (NBS). That is how nature (forests, agriculture and ecosystems) can become a climate solution for absorbing carbon and for protecting against climate impacts. COP26 will start to discuss how to integrate NBS into the Paris Agreement implementation strategy.
- The other element of the 'Paris rulebook' which requires agreement is on common timeframes for countries' NDCs - whether those timeframes should be five years or ten years. The shorter timeframe means revision of NDCs more frequently, potentially driving greater ambition than if they were only revised every decade.

Most recent scientific data concludes that climate change is accelerating, demanding an urgent and coordinated response.

UN Report on Climate Change Spells out Humanity's Damage to the Planet

The United Nation's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), a group of scientists whose findings are endorsed by the world's governments, has released its latest assessment on how human activities are dramatically altering the planet's climatic conditions and putting the very survival of humanity in great peril.
Here are some of the highlights from the IPCC's report entitled *Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis:*

Research shows human-caused climate change has worsened the risk of extreme weather events.

The Current State of the Climate

It is unequivocal that human influence has warmed the atmosphere, ocean and land. Widespread and rapid changes in the atmosphere, ocean, cryosphere and biosphere have occurred. The scale of recent changes across the climate system as a whole and the present state of many aspects of the climate system are unprecedented over many centuries to many thousands of years.

Human-induced climate change is already affecting many weather and climate extremes in every region across the globe. Evidence of observed changes in extremes such as heatwaves, heavy precipitation, droughts, and tropical cyclones, and, in particular, their attribution to human influence, has strengthened.

Possible Climate Futures

Global surface temperature will continue to increase until at least the mid-century under all emissions scenarios considered. Global warming of 1.5°C and 2°C will be exceeded during the 21st century unless deep reductions in carbon dioxide (CO^2) and other greenhouse gas emissions occur in the coming decades. Many changes in the climate system become larger in direct relation to increasing global warming. They include increases in the frequency and intensity of hot extremes, marine heatwaves, and heavy precipitation, agricultural and ecological droughts in some regions, and proportion of intense tropical cyclones, as well as reductions in Arctic sea ice, snow cover and permafrost.

Continued global warming is projected to further intensify the global water cycle, including its variability, global monsoon precipitation and the severity of wet and dry events. Under scenarios with increasing CO2 emissions, the ocean and land carbon sinks are projected to be less effective at slowing the accumulation of CO2 in the atmosphere. Many changes due to past and future greenhouse gas emissions are irreversible for centuries to millennia, especially changes in the ocean, ice sheets and global sea level.

Climate Information for Risk Assessment and Regional Adaptation

Natural drivers and internal variability will modulate human-caused changes, especially at regional scales and in the near term, with little effect on centennial global warming. These modulations are important to consider in planning for the full range of possible changes.

With further global warming, every region is projected to increasingly experience

concurrent and multiple changes in climatic impact-drivers. Changes in several climatic impact-drivers would be more widespread at 2°C compared to 1.5°C global warming and even more widespread and/or pronounced for higher warming levels. Low-likelihood outcomes, such as ice sheet collapse, abrupt ocean circulation changes, some compound extreme events and warming substantially larger than the assessed very likely range of future warming cannot be ruled out and are part of risk assessment.

Limiting Future Climate Change

From a physical science perspective, limiting human-induced global warming to a specific level requires limiting cumulative CO^2 emissions, reaching at least net zero CO^2 emissions, along with strong reductions in other greenhouse gas emissions. Strong, rapid and sustained reductions in CH^4 emissions would also limit the warming effect resulting from declining aerosol pollution and would improve air quality.

Scenarios with low or very low greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions lead, within years to discernible effects on greenhouse gas and aerosol concentrations, and air quality, relative to high and very high GHG emissions scenarios. Under these contrasting scenarios, discernible differences in trends of global surface temperature would begin to emerge from natural variability within around 20 years, and over longer time periods for many other climatic impact-drivers.

Kinale forest tree planting effort takes root

The survival rate of 5,000 trees planted in a degraded area of Kinale Forest in Kiambu County in May this year stands at 90 per cent with most of the seedlings having taken root and are thriving. Several private sector companies and conservation organisations, led by the East African Wild Life Society (EAWLS), participated in the tree planting exercise that was funded with proceeds from Forest Challenge 2019.

The red cedar trees planted are expected to help restore the Kinale Forest ecosystem that had suffered decades of degradation through deforestation, according to Jabes Okumu, Programme Manager at East African Wild Life Society.

The Kinale Forest tree-planting exercise was funded with proceeds from the Forest Challenge, an EAWLS-led resource mobilisation initiative that raises funds for forest conservation. Companies and individuals can participate in the Forest Challenge, a competition that entails running through challenging hurdles inside the forest. The event is held annually at Kereita Forest, which forms part of the larger Abardare Forest, a key water catchment area for Kenya.

The Forest Challenge is organised by the East African Wild Life, Kenya Forest Service and the Kijabe Environment Volunteers (KENVO). Forest Challenge 2021 will be held at Kereita Forest, Kiambu County, on 27th November 2021.

BELOW: EAWLS Programmes Manager, Jabes Okumu, and Community Forest Association member, inspects a red cedar tree seedling at Kinale Forest planted during the EAWLS tree planting event held on May 21, 2021.

NEW BOARD MEMBERS

Chairperson Elizabeth Gitari-Mitaru officially welcomes new members to the Board of East African Wild Life Society (EAWLS) on August 12, 2021. They are a great addition to EAWLS as they carry a wealth of knowledge and experience in ecological science, environmental advocacy and financial management.

From Left to Right: Nancy Ogonje, Executive Director EAWLS; Cissy Walker, Vice Chairperson EAWLS Board; Serah Munguti, EAWLS Board Member; Nahashon Maina, EAWLS Board Member; Dr. Elizabeth Migongo – Bake, EAWLS Board Member; Elizabeth Gitari–Mitaru, Chairperson EAWLS Board.


SAVE THE DATE
2021 FOREST CHALLENGE
NOVEMBER 27, 2021 AT KEREITA ABERDARE FOREST
THEME
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www.forestchallenge.com

PHOTO BY JEFFREY WU

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