From Belém to Antalya: Can Climate Diplomacy Deliver?

COP30, the credibility of the Paris process, and a practical agenda for the Arab region ahead of COP31

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Can the UN climate process convert negotiation into finance, implementation and measurable resilience, especially for developing and climate-vulnerable regions?

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The real question is delivery.

The annual climate conference carries an obvious irony: tens of thousands of people travel to negotiate how the world should reduce emissions. That contradiction is real. It is also useful because it opens a larger question. A COP should account honestly for its own carbon footprint, but its political value ultimately depends on whether it unlocks action many times larger than the emissions generated by the event itself.

COP30 in Belém showed both the durability and the limits of multilateral climate diplomacy. Parties adopted a broad package covering just transition, adaptation, finance, gender and technology, while the Action Agenda assembled hundreds of cooperative initiatives. Yet governments did not agree a formal roadmap on transitioning away from fossil fuels or on halting and reversing deforestation. The outcome moved important parts of the institutional machinery, but it did not resolve the central political bargain over who changes, how fast and with whose finance. [3][4][5]

COP31 is therefore arriving at a credibility moment. The official process is presenting Antalya as an "implementation COP," and the incoming Presidency has set out initiatives on electrification, waste, buildings, cities, food systems and other practical themes. These initiatives can help focus attention, but they will be judged by whether they connect negotiated goals to national budgets, institutions, investment pipelines and public accountability, not by the number of announcements made in the conference venue. [11][12][13]

Four messages for policymakers and development institutions

1 INDISPENSABLE, NOT SUFFICIENT The UNFCCC remains the only forum with universal legitimacy, shared rules and a common political language. But legitimacy alone does not ensure delivery.	**2 THE FOOTPRINT IS A SYMBOL** COP30's reported 130,000 tCO_2e gross footprint is worth scrutinizing. Still, the stronger test is whether the summit changes policies, investment and resilience at scale.
3 IMPLEMENTATION IS POLITICAL The gap is not simply technical. It reflects finance shortfalls, power asymmetries, domestic interests, weak capacity and a consensus process that can reward the lowest common denominator.	**4 THE ARAB REGION NEEDS AN AGENDA** Water, heat, adaptation finance, economic diversification, efficient cooling, clean energy, data and regional cooperation should be treated as one integrated development agenda.

A BRIEF EMISSIONS COMPARISON

1 The COP paradox: the carbon cost of climate diplomacy

The carbon cost of the conference should not be dismissed. COP30 reported a gross event footprint of approximately 130,000 tonnes of carbon-dioxide equivalent. Brazil then cancelled an equivalent volume of Certified Emission Reductions, and the conference received carbon-neutrality certification under ISO 14068-1 [1]. In plain terms, the physical emissions did not disappear; they were balanced in the accounting after the event's residual footprint was quantified. [1][2]

For COP31, no official event-level greenhouse-gas forecast was publicly available when this report was finalized. A precise number would therefore create more confidence than the evidence supports. The safer conclusion is that Antalya is likely to sit in the same broad order of magnitude as other recent large COPs, with the final outcome driven mainly by the number and origin of travellers, flight patterns, accommodation and the scale of temporary event infrastructure.

The comparison at a glance

COP 30 - Belem	COP 31 - Antalya
The reported gross footprint amounted for about 130,000 tCO_2e. An equivalent volume of CERs was retired, supporting a certified accounting balance of zero. In simpler terms, Brazil disclosed a headline inventory and an offsetting claim.	With no official forecast identified or targets set, COP31 is likely to be travel-dominated and broadly comparable in scale to other large COPs. The next step for COP accountability is fuller category-level disclosure and clearer evidence of reductions before compensation.

Why the comparison matters, and why it is not enough.

A climate summit can be carbon neutral on paper and still generate substantial physical emissions. It can also carry a sizeable footprint and still be politically worthwhile if it unlocks much larger emissions reductions, adaptation investments or institutional reforms. These statements are not contradictory. The responsible approach is to insist on both: credible event accounting and a serious assessment of political outcomes.

The carbon footprint is a visible test of institutional consistency. The deeper credibility test is whether the conference process asks of itself, and of governments, the same qualities it promotes elsewhere: transparent baselines, priority for real reductions, clear reporting, independent scrutiny and accountability for results.

[1] *Developed in 2023, ISO 14068 provides principles, requirements, and guidance for achieving and demonstrating carbon neutrality. It focuses on quantifying, reducing, and offsetting carbon footprints, utilizing a hierarchical approach prioritizing direct and indirect GHG emission reductions and removal enhancements within the value chain over offsetting.*
Find more info at https://www.iso.org/standard/43279.html

2 What Belém achieved, and what it left for Antalya

Belém was not an empty conference. The COP30 Political Package brought together 29 decisions across mitigation, adaptation, finance, technology, gender and institutional support. Among the most politically significant were the decision to establish a just transition mechanism, agreement on 59 indicators for the Global Goal on Adaptation, a new gender action plan, a technology implementation programme and a call to at least triple adaptation finance by 2035. The Action Agenda added 117 Plans to Accelerate Solutions and more than 480 cooperative initiatives intended to connect diplomacy with implementation. [3][4][5]

At the same time, the conference did not reach consensus on negotiated roadmaps for transitioning away from fossil fuels or for halting and reversing deforestation. Brazil subsequently advanced Presidency-led roadmaps outside the formal package. That kept the issues alive, but it also revealed the familiar boundary of the COP process: a Presidency can create political momentum, yet it cannot substitute for agreement among Parties. [4]

Figure 1. From Belém to Antalya: the political pathway

BELÉM DELIVERED	UNFINISHED POLITICS	ANTALYA MUST TEST
A just transition mechanism; adaptation and finance decisions; 59 indicators for the Global Goal on Adaptation; a gender action plan; and a technology implementation programme.	No negotiated roadmap on transitioning away from fossil fuels or halting and reversing deforestation. Finance access, delivery and burden-sharing remained contested.	Whether political declarations can become funded national programmes, investable projects, accountable delivery systems and fair regional transitions.
The Action Agenda also presented 117 Plans to Accelerate Solutions and more than 480 cooperative initiatives.	Brazil launched Presidency roadmaps outside the formal negotiated package, preserving momentum but not settling the underlying disagreement.	COP31 needs to connect the UN process to governments, development banks, cities, businesses and civil society without fragmenting standards or excluding vulnerable states.

Progress through compromise

The fairest reading is that COP30 produced movement without closure. It strengthened parts of the institutional architecture and broadened the implementation agenda, but it left the hardest questions regarding who and how unresolved. Those questions concern the pace of energy-system change, historical responsibility, development space, the reliability of finance and the domestic costs of transition. They are difficult precisely because climate policy reallocates capital, employment, technology and geopolitical stakes, not merely tonnes of carbon.

For COP31, the risk is that “implementation” becomes a reassuring word that avoids these political choices. Implementation is not a neutral administrative stage after negotiation; it determines whose projects are financed, whose standards shape trade, who controls technology, who carries transition costs and whether vulnerable communities receive protection before climate impacts become irreversible, a heavily politicized process.

3 Indispensable yet insufficient: the UNFCCC's credibility gap

A recent assessment of the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement captures the central tension well: the Convention remains indispensable because no other institution can match its legitimacy, inclusivity and convening power, yet its current institutional form is not sufficient to meet the urgency of the climate challenge. The Paris model succeeded politically by bringing all countries into a common framework. It is less successful at ensuring that national promises are implemented at the required pace. [6]

The UNFCCC has achieved more than its critics sometimes acknowledge. It created a shared climate language, normalized national climate planning, established transparency and stocktake processes, and built mechanisms for finance, technology, adaptation and loss and damage. These are durable public goods. Without them, global climate governance would be more fragmented, less transparent and less attentive to equity. [6]

Its weaknesses are equally clear. National emissions targets are not legally enforceable; compliance relies largely on reporting, peer pressure and domestic political will. Consensus protects participation but can also give any Party a de facto veto and push outcomes toward the lowest common denominator. Negotiating capacity is uneven, and delayed or inaccessible finance turns ambitious plans in developing countries into unfunded aspirations. The result is an implementation gap between the commitments announced internationally and the policies, budgets and infrastructure delivered at home. [6][7][8]

Figure 2. The credibility triangle

LEGITIMACY *Who is represented?*	**DELIVERY** *What changes on the ground?*	**FAIRNESS** *Who pays, and who benefits?*
The UNFCCC's near-universal membership gives its decisions political weight and provides a platform where vulnerable states can be heard.	NDCs, transparency rules and stocktakes matter only when they lead to laws, budgets, infrastructure, finance and measurable emissions or resilience outcomes.	Climate cooperation cannot endure if finance arrives late, debt deepens, adaptation is underfunded or transition costs fall on those most vulnerable and least able to absorb them.

Why the gap is getting harder to manage

The Paris Agreement's five-year ambition cycle assumes that transparency, science and political pressure will encourage countries to strengthen action over time. That logic still matters, but it operates in a more difficult geopolitical environment: debt pressures, conflict, energy-security concerns, technological competition and global public anxiety about living costs all influence national decisions. UNEP's 2025 assessment still placed full implementation of current national pledges on a pathway of roughly 2.3–2.5°C of warming, while current policies pointed closer to 2.8°C. The distance between the diplomatic target and the policy trajectory remains substantial. [8]

4 Reform without breaking multilateralism

The strongest argument is not for abandoning the UNFCCC, but for changing how it works with the wider climate-governance ecosystem. The recent effectiveness paper proposes a hybrid model: internal reform of compliance, scientific review, transparency and emergency coordination, combined with structured relationships with financial, trade, regional and sectoral institutions. This approach preserves the Convention's legitimacy while recognizing that a universal negotiating forum cannot directly manage every investment, sector and local transition. [6]

Table 1. Reform options and the safeguards they require

REFORM DIRECTION	POTENTIAL VALUE	POLITICAL GUARDRAIL
Stronger review and compliance	More rigorous scientific review, public benchmarking and corrective action plans can make the gap between promises and performance harder to ignore.	Accountability should distinguish unwillingness from lack of capacity and should not become a back door for punitive conditionality.
Finance and trade alignment	Development banks, financial regulators and trade institutions can move capital and standards faster than annual negotiations alone.	Climate-linked trade or finance rules must remain transparent, development-sensitive and compatible with equity and differentiated responsibility.
High-ambition coalitions	Sectoral or regional coalitions can test solutions in industry, energy, cities and technology, then feed successful models into the wider system.	Clubs should complement universal multilateralism, not create exclusive rule-making forums that marginalize countries with less market power.
Polycentric action	Cities, businesses, research institutions and civil society can turn broad commitments into local investment, learning and implementation.	Non-state action needs credible reporting and public accountability; voluntary initiatives should not substitute for government responsibility.

Accountability must be firm, and fair

Stronger accountability is necessary, but its design matters. A public scorecard can expose political inaction; the same scorecard can also misrepresent a country that lacks finance, data or institutional capacity. Linking finance to performance may reward delivery; it may also penalize vulnerable countries for constraints they did not create. The appropriate distinction is between unwillingness and inability. Governments that can act but choose not to should face greater scrutiny. Governments ready to act but lacking means should receive faster support.

The same balance applies to climate clubs and carbon-related trade measures. Smaller coalitions can move faster, align standards and test industrial solutions. Yet they can also export rules designed by powerful markets and impose costs on producers in developing economies, CBAM being one such example. The strategic position is neither automatic resistance nor uncritical endorsement. The question is whether such arrangements expand technology, finance and market access, or reinforce existing inequalities under a climate label.

5 Can COP31 become a genuine implementation COP?

The incoming COP31 Presidency has placed implementation at the centre of its public narrative. Its Action Agenda spans ten themes, including resilient cities, food security, clean energy, green industrialization, finance, health and waste. It has also announced Presidency-led targets for 2035, including raising electricity's share of final energy use to 35%, slowing the growth of global waste and reducing the energy intensity of buildings. These are useful signals of direction, but they are not substitutes for negotiated commitments or funded delivery plans. [11][12]

The political setting will not be easy. The June 2026 Bonn climate meetings exposed continued divisions on mitigation, adaptation, finance and just transition, with several issues moving forward only slowly. Antalya will therefore inherit not only the Belém agenda, but also the unresolved questions that technical negotiations could not settle before ministers arrive. [13]

Implementation is four questions, not one slogan.

01 WHO PAYS?

Are grants, concessional finance, guarantees and risk-sharing available at the speed and scale required?

02 WHO DELIVERS?

Do ministries, cities, utilities, banks and businesses have clear mandates, capable institutions and implementable pipelines?

03 HOW IS PROGRESS MEASURED?

Are targets linked to transparent baselines, public data, independent review and practical milestones?

04 WHAT HAPPENS WHEN DELIVERY LAGS?

Can peer review, finance incentives, corrective plans and public scrutiny strengthen accountability without punishing vulnerable countries?

From conference declarations to delivery systems

A credible implementation COP would spend less political energy celebrating pledges and more energy improving the systems that make plans executable. That means stronger project preparation, clearer institutional ownership, better public data, reliable finance, procurement capacity and milestones that allow governments and citizens to see whether progress is real. It also means confronting domestic political economy: workers, consumers and regions that fear transition costs need a visible stake in the new economy.

COP31 can add value by creating practical interfaces between negotiators and implementers. Ministers of finance, development banks, city leaders, utilities, regulators, businesses and civil-society organizations should not appear as parallel constituencies orbiting the negotiations. Their commitments should be connected to national plans, compatible reporting standards and a clear division of responsibility. Otherwise, the Action Agenda risks becoming a crowded marketplace of initiatives whose aggregate impact is difficult to verify.

6 What the Arab region should seek from COP31

The Arab region enters COP31 with high exposure and very different national circumstances. The World Meteorological Organization reports that 2024 was the region's hottest year on record and that the Arab region is warming at roughly twice the global average. Fifteen of the world's most water-scarce countries are in the region, while multi-hazard early-warning coverage remains incomplete. These pressures meet economies that range from major hydrocarbon exporters to fragile states, least-developed countries and highly indebted middle-income economies. A single transition template would be neither realistic nor fair. [14]

Figure 3. A practical Arab regional agenda for Antalya

01 ADAPTATION, WATER & EARLY WARNING

Put water security, heat resilience, drought management and universal multi-hazard early warning at the centre of the implementation agenda.

02 ACCESSIBLE, DEBT-SENSITIVE FINANCE

Prioritize grants and highly concessional instruments for adaptation and loss and damage, while simplifying access and strengthening regional project preparation.

03 A JUST TRANSITION FOR DIVERSE ECONOMIES

Protect jobs and energy security while supporting economic diversification. The pathway of an oil exporter, a fragile state and a water-stressed middle-income economy cannot be identical.

04 CLEAN ENERGY, GRIDS, COOLING & INDUSTRY

Connect renewable energy ambition to grids, storage, efficient cooling, buildings, low-carbon industry and regional power cooperation.

05 DATA, TRANSPARENCY & IMPLEMENTATION PIPELINES

Turn NDCs and adaptation plans into costed programmes with credible data, responsible institutions, bankable projects and measurable delivery milestones.

06 REGIONAL COOPERATION & KNOWLEDGE

Use regional institutions, cities, universities and civil society to share evidence, standards and practical solutions, especially where national capacity is uneven.

From a negotiating position to an implementation platform

The region's influence will depend on how well it connects political priorities to practical delivery. Water and adaptation proposals should arrive with data, institutions and investable programmes. Energy-transition positions should include plans for jobs, industrial competitiveness, grids, cooling and economic diversification. Calls for finance should specify the mix of grants, concessional lending, guarantees, insurance and private investment required, and should identify where debt sustainability or perceived risk blocks otherwise viable projects. [10][15]

Regional knowledge institutions have a distinct role. CEDARE can help translate global decisions into regionally and nationally relevant tools, compare implementation experience, convene public and private actors, strengthen climate data and support the development of project pipelines. That role is particularly valuable between COPs, when pledges and declarations either become programmes, or quietly fade from view.

7 What success at COP31 should look like

COP31 cannot resolve every weakness of the climate regime. It can, however, show whether the system is learning. A credible outcome would combine political direction with mechanisms that improve delivery, support and scrutiny. The following tests are more meaningful than the volume of announcements or the length of the final decision text.

ANTALYA TEST	WHAT CREDIBLE PROGRESS WOULD LOOK LIKE
Financeable implementation	A clear route from national plans to costed programmes, project preparation, blended finance and predictable public support, especially for adaptation.
A workable just transition	Operational guidance and support that reflect development needs, employment, affordability, energy security and different national starting points.
Honest mitigation politics	A transparent process for advancing the energy-transition commitments agreed in Dubai and the roadmaps initiated in Belém, with clearer milestones and follow-through.
Adaptation with measurable outcomes	Practical use of the Global Goal on Adaptation indicators, stronger national systems and a credible pathway to more accessible adaptation finance.
Accountability that improves delivery	Better data, stronger peer review, public benchmarking and corrective action, paired with capacity-building rather than one-size-fits-all penalties.
A coordinated climate ecosystem	Stronger links between the UNFCCC, development banks, regional institutions, cities, businesses and civil society, with common standards and less duplication.

Conclusion: from consent to delivery

The carbon footprint of COP30, and the still-unknown footprint of COP31, deserves transparent accounting. Climate institutions should model the behaviour they ask of others. Yet the greatest risk to the credibility of the COP process is not the emissions generated by bringing negotiators together. It is the possibility that the world continues to meet, agree and report while implementation remains slower than the climate crisis.

Belém demonstrated that multilateralism can still produce institutional progress in a fractured international environment. It also showed the limits of consensus when the discussion reaches energy, finance and responsibility. Antalya will inherit that tension. Its success will depend on whether it can turn the language of implementation into financeable programmes, credible accountability and fair support for countries and communities facing the sharpest constraints.

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