POLICY COMMENTARY

HOW THE GLOBAL CLIMATE REGIME CHANGED AFTER THE BELÉM COP

Eugene N Nforngwa
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How the global climate regime changed after the Belém COP

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BELÉM DID NOT rewrite the world's climate rulebook. But it quietly shifted where power sits inside the regime, away from routine negotiations and towards implementation clubs, finance roadmaps and "just transition" platforms. For Africa, the architecture is finally being built for trillions of dollars in climate investments and transition support, but on timelines and terms that could once again leave the continent on the margins if it does not move fast to shape them.

From grand bargains to permanent implementation

At COP30 in Belém, negotiators avoided drama and produced what looks at first glance like another cautious UN compromise. The global *mutirão* decision restated the goal of keeping 1.5°C "within reach", acknowledged that the world is likely to overshoot that threshold, and called for tripling adaptation finance by 2035. It also formally launched the Global Implementation Accelerator and the Belém Mission to 1.5°C to help countries turn their national climate plans into investment pipelines and real projects.

Missing, however, was a roadmap to phase out fossil fuels or halt deforestation, which were blocked by an alliance of oil producers and some emerging economies. The text makes no explicit reference to coal, oil or gas, despite intense pressure from some vulnerable countries and their allies.

Yet beneath this apparent timidity the global climate regime is morphing from a negotiation-centric system, in which the drama is in the annual COP text, into a more diffuse ecosystem of implementation platforms, technical work programmes and finance compacts.

The Global Implementation Accelerator and Belém Mission to 1.5°C sit partly inside, partly outside, the formal UN process. They invite countries, financial institutions and businesses to coordinate how NDCs and national adaptation plans are implemented, rather than simply negotiated. In parallel, the Belém Action

[1] *Eugene N Nforngwa, Director of Programs and Research at the African Coalition for Sustainable Energy and Access, is a Public Policy Analyst specialised in Climate, Energy and Development Policy | +237675114396 | eugene@acsea545.org*

Mechanism on Just Transition (BAM), agreed under the UAE Just Transition Work Programme, promises structured support for countries designing equitable transition strategies.

Taken together, this is a quiet regime change. The centre of gravity is shifting from legal wording to delivery coalitions; from UN meeting rooms to country platforms, Multilateral Development Bank (MDB) boards and G20-style forums. The risk for Africa is that power tends to follow capital, and most capital is still controlled elsewhere.

Finance 2.0: big numbers, late delivery

The second axis of regime change is finance. In Belém, parties consolidated the "Baku-to-Belém Roadmap" towards a new global climate finance goal of US$1.3 trillion per year for developing countries by 2035, building on last year's breakthrough on the New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG).

They also agreed that adaptation finance should at least triple by 2035 and be doubled by 2025. Even though this is still short of what is needed, it is a step beyond the Glasgow commitment. The Belem COP also stabilised the loss-and-damage architecture around three pillars: the Warsaw Mechanism, the Santiago Network and the new Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage, now operational with agreed replenishment cycles.

On paper, this looks like a long-awaited correction. UNEP's 2025 Adaptation Gap Report estimates developing countries will need US$310–365 billion a year in adaptation finance by the mid-2030s, yet international public flows were only US$26 billion in 2023, that is around one-tenth of what is required. Belém at least brings the political numbers closer to the scientific ones.

But the fine print matters. Most of the new figures are framed as "indicative" and "collective", with no binding burden-sharing formula. Timelines stretch to 2035, conveniently beyond current electoral cycles in many rich countries. And the door remains wide open for counting a wide array of private flows, loans and risk-sharing instruments as "climate finance", even when they increase debt burdens.

For Africa, which currently attracts roughly US$44 billion a year in climate finance (about 12–17% of what it needs to stay on track with its NDCs) this is a critical fault line. Unless the NCQG's rules and metrics are shaped with African realities in mind, including the cost of capital, debt distress and the need for grant-like instruments, the continent could once again watch large numbers being announced while very little changes on the ground.

Just transition goes mainstream, but on whose terms?

If there was one genuine bright spot in Belém, it was just transition. Under the UAE Just Transition Work Programme, countries agreed to establish the Belém Action Mechanism (BAM), a vehicle to coordinate support for just transition strategies, from social protection measures for affected workers to industrial diversification, skills and regional development plans.

For African actors who have long argued that "just transition" must mean a transition into prosperity, not simply away from fossil fuels, this institutionalisation is overdue. It legitimises questions that African negotiators have raised for years: Who pays for stranded assets? How are workers retrained? How do coal, oil and gas-dependent regions diversify without collapsing public finances? How do we expand clean energy while closing energy access gaps?

Yet the politics here are delicate. Some industrialised countries see just transition mainly as a way to soften domestic opposition to coal or oil phase-out. Others, including several in Africa, view it as a shield against demands for rapid fossil fuel exit before alternative development pathways are financed.

Belém's ambiguity on fossil fuels, with no formal commitment to phase them out, but new implementation platforms that can, in theory, support such a shift, reflects this tension. For Africa, the prize is to use BAM and related processes to operationalise a balanced position: accelerate renewables and energy efficiency, leverage some gas as a transition fuel where it clearly displaces dirtier options and supports industrialisation, and insist that any global "transition plan" comes with concessional capital, technology access and industrial policy space.

An African continent still paying for others' emissions

The structural injustice remains stark. Africa contributes less than 4% of global greenhouse-gas emissions but already loses an estimated US$7–15 billion annually to climate impacts. This figure that could reach US$50 billion a year by 2050 without stronger action.

Meanwhile, climate finance flows to the continent are both insufficient and uneven. A handful of countries (Morocco, Nigeria, Kenya, Ethiopia and South Africa) attract a disproportionate share while many fragile and low-income states receive crumbs. Paradoxically, less than 2% of global clean-energy investment currently finds its way to Africa, even though it holds some of the best solar and wind resources on earth and much of the world's critical minerals.

Belém does not fix this. But by tying the new finance targets, implementation accelerator and just transition mechanism to national investment plans, it does

change where African leaders can fight for a fairer deal.

The emerging climate regime is no longer just about what is written in COP decisions. It is now also about how African ministries of finance and planning design integrated climate-development strategies; how they engage with MDBs and private investors; and how they use platforms like the G20 to push for systemic reforms on debt, Special Drawing Rights (SDR) rechannelling and risk guarantees.

Forests, land and loss & damage: a broader but messier agenda

Hosting COP30 in the Amazon inevitably pushed forests, land and Indigenous rights up the agenda. The outcome on forests fell short of a binding deforestation phase-out, but it did bring sizable pledges for the Tropical Forests Forever Facility and for Indigenous land rights, alongside new bioeconomy initiatives.

For Africa's Congo Basin and dryland regions, this is a double-edged development. On the one hand, a more structured global regime for forest finance and nature-based solutions could unlock resources for community-based conservation, resilient agriculture and landscape restoration. On the other, there is a serious risk of entrenching the new scramble for African land through carbon markets, poorly regulated offsets and opaque jurisdictional deals.

Belém's consolidation of the loss-and-damage architecture, with the Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage now linked to wider finance goals and replenishment cycles, offers a precedent. It shows that, with sustained pressure, vulnerable countries can stabilise institutional arrangements and secure dedicated finance channels. Africa's negotiators will need to apply similar discipline to forest and carbon-market reforms by demanding transparency, community consent and national ownership; resisting efforts to use carbon credits as a substitute for emission cuts; and ensuring that revenues flow to local people, not just intermediaries.

So, what must Africa do in this new regime?

The message from Belém is that the rules of the game are changing, but not automatically in Africa's favour. The climate regime is becoming more polycentric, spread across the UNFCCC, G20, MDBs, club initiatives and national investment platforms. For a continent whose interests have often been diluted in consensus-based forums, this can be a chance to gain leverage if it is used strategically.

Five moves stand out.

1. *Treat Belém's numbers as a floor, not a ceiling.* African leaders should welcome the US$1.3 trillion and adaptation-tripling targets as political benchmarks, then immediately argue that delivery must start now, not in 2035, and that a clear share of this finance must be ring-fenced for Africa in the NCQG negotiations based on vulnerability, population and mitigation potential.
2. *Shape the rules of the new implementation clubs*. The Global Implementation Accelerator, Belém Mission to 1.5°C and BAM will quickly become important convening spaces for investors and policymakers. African countries and regional bodies, from Regional Economic Communities and the AU to AfDB and regional power pools, should move early to co-lead workstreams on energy access, grids, just transition and critical minerals, making sure that African priorities define the agendas rather than merely feature on the margins.
3. *Re-anchor climate in development planning, not just environment ministries.* Belém explicitly invites countries to align NDCs with their broader economic strategies. For Africa this means integrating climate into industrial policy (for green manufacturing and mineral processing), rural development (for climate-smart agriculture) and urbanisation strategies (for resilient cities), rather than treating it as a donor-driven add-on.
4. *Insist on fair finance terms and debt relief as part of the climate bargain.* With public adaptation finance covering barely a tenth of developing countries' needs, and African climate finance flows representing only a small fraction of requirements, the fight now is partly about instruments: grant-equivalent finance, guarantees that lower the cost of capital, and debt swaps that free fiscal space. Negotiators and finance ministers must treat climate talks and debt talks as two sides of the same coin.
5. *Define just transition in African terms and defend that definition.* Through BAM and allied platforms, Africa can codify a narrative of transition into prosperity: energy access as a climate goal; gas as a limited, clearly defined bridge where it displaces dirtier fuels and underpins industrialisation; renewables as the backbone of a new economic model; and decent work and social protection as core indicators of success. This will require uncomfortable domestic conversations about subsidies, governance and corruption but without such clarity, others will fill the vacuum.

Clearly, Belém has not delivered the transformational COP many hoped for. It has, however, accelerated a subtle but significant regime change. Climate politics is now less about single moments of high drama and

more about a rolling struggle over investment plans, finance rules and transition institutions.

For Africa, that may be no bad thing. A continent that has often been outnumbered in negotiating rooms may find more room to manoeuvre in coalitions, platforms and performance-driven finance deals. But this advantage will not materialise automatically. It depends on whether African governments, regional bodies and civil society decide to treat the new climate regime not as a distant architecture to complain about, but as a system they can and must re-engineer, from Belém onwards, to serve their people's right to both climate safety and shared prosperity.

Here is a curated list of further readings and key sources to deepen your understanding of the post-COP30 / Belém COP climate regime — particularly from an African perspective. These cover official outcomes, analytic assessments, finance-gap studies, and critical commentary.

Further Reading

Official outcomes and summaries of COP30 / Belém

- "COP30: Key outcomes agreed at the UN climate talks in Belém" — a summary of the main COP30 decisions including adaptation-finance, mitigation, implementation measures, and statements on fossil fuels. (Carbon Brief)
- Belém Political Package: The full set of COP30 decisions and adopted texts. Fundamental for anyone tracking formal commitments and timelines. (UNFCCC)
- "COP30: Key outcomes for food, forests, land and nature at the UN climate talks in Belém" — overview of the land/forest/nature-related decisions, which will matter for forest-rich regions such as Africa's Congo Basin. (Carbon Brief)
- "COP30 in Belém: collective effort, constrained ambition": Independent commentary that captures the political tradeoffs and the sense that COP30 delivered frameworks rather than binding commitments. (SEI)

Climate-finance and adaptation-gap reports (global & Africa-specific)

- UNEP Adaptation Gap Report 2025: The most recent global assessment of adaptation needs vs actual flows. Provides up-to-date data on financing shortfalls for developing countries. (UNEP - UN Environment Programme)
- State and Trends in Adaptation 2023 (by Global Centre on Adaptation (GCA) + Climate Policy Initiative (CPI)): Gives a robust diagnosis of adaptation finance flows and gaps globally and highlights the growing stress for vulnerable regions. (Global Center on Adaptation)
- Landscape of Climate Finance in Africa 2024 (CPI): A critical resource for understanding baseline financing trends, patterns of investment (mitigation vs adaptation), and regional disaggregation for Africa. (CPI)
- "Accelerating Adaptation Finance – Africa and Global" (CPI / GCA) — explains structural barriers, financing gaps, and what scaling adaptation finance for Africa would require under realistic and optimistic assumptions. (CPI)

Critical assessments and commentary on COP30 outcomes and risks for implementation

- "COP30 Outcome: slow progress, but insufficient to meet climate-crisis urgency": A critique of the Belém outcome that points out the gaps between ambition and science, especially on mitigation and fossil-fuel phaseout. (European Parliament)
- "What happened at COP30?" (Global Landscapes Forum): Reflects on what COP30 achieved politically, emphasising that the success lies in preserving multilateralism and moving into implementation mode. (#ThinkLandscape)
- "WHAT HAPPENED ON LOSS AND AT COP 30?" (Loss & Damage Collaboration): Shines a light on the limitations of COP30's decisions on adaptation and loss/damage, cautioning about delays, non-binding texts, and unresolved debt implications for developing countries. (Loss and Damage Collaboration)
- "COP30: Outcomes, Disappointments, and What's Next" (Climate think-tank report): Offers a forward-looking evaluation, especially useful to anticipate how implementation and finance negotiations might unfold after Belém. (World Resources Institute)

Thematic and structural context: Just Transition, implementation mechanisms, climate-finance architecture

- "Belém Action Mechanism on Just Transition (BAM)": Outlines the institutional framework created at COP30 to support just transition through labour rights, social protection, and inclusive governance. Particularly relevant for

Africa's energy and industrial transitions. (ituc-csi.org)

- "COP 30 Outcome: What it means and what's next" (IISD Insight): Analyses the shift from negotiation-centred COPs toward finance, implementation, and accountability mechanisms. Useful for understanding how power is redistributed in the new regime. (IISD)

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