

COP26 Closed with “Glasgow Climate Pact” Adopted

Ken Koyama, PhD
Chief Economist, Managing Director
The Institute of Energy Economics, Japan

The 26th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, known as COP26, adopted the Glasgow Climate Pact to enhance climate change countermeasures before its closure on November 13.

COP26 took place in Glasgow, the United Kingdom, from October 31 as a large-scale event attended by U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson, U.S. President Joe Biden, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and other top national leaders, environment and other ministers, nongovernment organizations and media organizations from nearly 200 countries. The conference was extended for one day to compile the Glasgow Climate Pact. Participants reached the pact as a result of coordination and compromise, ending the conference late night on November 13.

The wide-ranging Glasgow Climate Pact attracted global attention by (1) reaffirming the goal of limiting global temperature rise to 1.5°C from pre-industrial levels and (2) urging the parties to the Paris Agreement to reaffirm or strengthen 2030 greenhouse gas emission reduction goals known as nationally determined contributions as necessary to align with the Paris Agreement temperature goal by the end of 2022. It also called for achieving the goal of \$100 billion in annual aid from developed countries to developing countries by 2025, for phasing down unabated coal-fired power plants and for phasing out inefficient fossil fuel subsidies. Until the end of COP26, whether any agreement would be reached on rules for implementing the Paris Agreement’s Article 6 regarding a market mechanism for credit trading had been attracting attention. The conference eventually achieved an agreement on a framework to support the expansion of the emissions credit market while avoiding double-counting of credits.

In this way, COP26 compiled the pact covering various fields and measures for climate change prevention through two weeks of negotiations. At a time when the enhancement of climate change prevention initiatives has become a global trend, COP26 can be viewed as having made some achievements by compiling the abovementioned deals. At the same time, however, details of the pact and negotiations toward the pact indicate various challenges and difficulties regarding the enhancement of climate change countermeasures and the implementation of relevant international initiatives.

The most essential challenge is that the Glasgow Climate Pact, while reaffirming the 1.5°C goal, fell short of indicating concrete pathways to the realization of the goal or leading such pathways to be shared among participants. How to realize the goal has been left uncertain. It is also important that COP26 has demonstrated discord and differences between the Paris Agreement parties on how to enhance climate change prevention initiatives at a time when initiatives to achieve the 1.5°C goal have become a key future challenge.

In 2020, advanced economies and China offered their respective net-zero GHG emission goals for 2050 or 2060 (for China). In the run-up to COP26, Indonesia, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Australia and others came up with such goals. At COP26, India, the third largest GHG emitter in the world, declared it would pursue net-zero emissions in 2070. Toward COP26, the global momentum for enhancing climate change countermeasures accelerated. Nevertheless, target years for net-zero emissions vary, demonstrating uncertainties about the achievement of the 1.5°C goal.

Furthermore, only a few among major countries that have announced net-zero emission goals have released comprehensive and consistent energy supply and demand outlooks that secure the achievement of the goals or indicate pathways to the goals. Most of them have only declared their net-zero emission goals in 2050 or later years without indicating comprehensive energy outlook/scenario on how to achieve the goals. Symbolic among them is the United States that has turned positive about climate change countermeasures under the Biden administration but failed to give any energy supply and demand outlook for realizing the 2050 carbon neutrality goal (or the 2030 goal of cutting GHG emissions by 50-52%).

Even energy supply and demand scenarios given by a few (including the European Union, the United Kingdom, France, Germany and China) to realize net-zero emissions are uncertain to be realized. As the world enters a stage to promote specific decarbonization measures while reaffirming the 1.5°C goal based on the Glasgow Climate Pact, how countries would specify and materialize initiatives to realize the 1.5°C goal will be tested.

In this sense, COP26 talks indicated that the Paris Agreement parties, though sharing the direction of enhancing emission reduction measures amid growing momentum for enhancing decarbonization initiatives, face their differences and discord and have difficulties in forming consensus as emission reduction measures become stricter.

Symbolizing this were negotiations on the revision of a written agreement on coal-fired power generation. An original draft agreement to phase out unabated coal-fired power plants faced opposition from India and was revised into a pact to phase down such power plants. The COP26 host and other European countries remained unsatisfied with the weakened the language on coal power generation but had no choice but to concede it by giving priority to forming a consensus, according to media reports. India for its part might have thought that it could enhance global warming prevention measures and seek to achieve net-zero emissions by 2070 in cooperation with the international community but should refrain from allowing the phase-out of unabated coal-fired power generation as its current main power source to be put into any written agreement in consideration of Indian economic and energy realities.

I think that the Paris Agreement on which COP26 talks were based features a key point in addition to the temperature goal. That is the adoption of the bottom-up approach where parties to the agreement would pledge and implement voluntary emission reduction goals. Countries shared a perception that it would be difficult to produce any agreement under a top-down approach used for the Kyoto Protocol and adopted the bottom-up approach as a means to prevent the escalation of the north-south confrontation accompanying the climate change issue. This allowed nearly 200 countries to join the arrangement to pursue global interests while avoiding the north-south confrontation. If developed countries increase pressure on developing countries to seek net-zero emissions amid a trend for enhancing emission reduction goals and strongly urge them to specify when and how to realize net-zero emissions, however, developing countries may grow discontent and hold developed

countries responsible for global warming again. This is the reason developed countries' greater assistance to developing countries is increasingly requested and given priority. The Glasgow Climate Pact has become a milestone for enhancing climate change countermeasures but demonstrated various challenges to be overcome for further steps from the milestone. How to overcome these challenges would become a top future priority.

Contact: report@tky.iecej.or.jp

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