



AGENDA 7: LOSS AND DAMAGE

POLLUTER DOESN'T REALLY PAY

1970-2019 saw 11,000 climate-related disasters, with 2 million deaths and losses worth US \$3.6 trillion

But the loss and damage faced by poor nations due to high emissions by rich ones is not a basis for compensation

CoP26 should make loss and damage a permanent agenda and compensate the victim nations

NEARLY 20 years after the Alliance of Small Island States demanded a mechanism within the global climate deal to compensate countries affected by sea level rise due to climate change, loss and damage has emerged as the “third pillar” of climate action after adaptation and mitigation. The 2021 UN climate change conference (CoP26) should

make loss and damage a permanent agenda for discussion and commit scaled-up resources to the victims as “compensation”.

Article 8 of the Paris Agreement “recognises the importance of averting, minimising and addressing loss and damage associated with adverse effects of climate change, including extreme weather events and slow onset events”.

It also says that countries should “enhance understanding, action and support to address loss and damage”. But a fatal flaw creeps in when it goes on to say that “Parties agree that Article 8 of the Agreement does not involve or provide a basis for any liability or compensation”. In other words, the huge losses and damages being inflicted on the poor because of the stock of emissions in the atmosphere—emitted by a handful of countries—cannot be the basis of seeking claims. It puts the polluter pays principle to shame.

This is when losses are mounting because of extreme weather events (see ‘Key threats’). According to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), over the past decade, extreme weather and climate-related disasters have killed more than 410,000 people and affected 1.7 billion around the world. According to the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), between 1970 and 2019, there were more than 11,000 disasters attributed to weather,

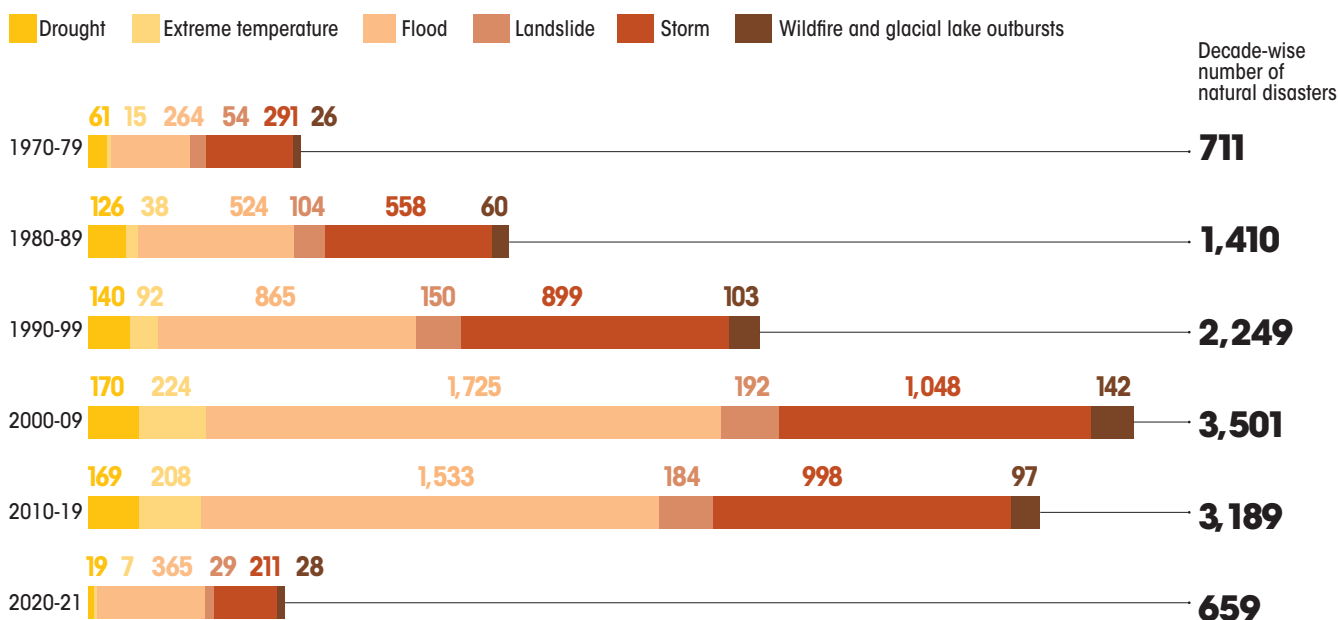
climate and water-related hazards, which accounted for just over 2 million deaths and US \$3.64 trillion in losses. *Atlas of Mortality and Economic Losses from Weather, Climate and Water Extremes* by WMO says, “A disaster related to either a weather, climate or water hazard occurred every day on average over the 50 years, killing 115 people and causing \$202 million in losses daily.”

The discussions go back to 2010, when during COP16, a “loss and damage work programme” was started. This led to the creation of the Warsaw International Mechanism on Loss and Damage (WIM) in 2013 during COP19. In 2015, under the Paris Agreement, WIM was tasked with specific roles under Article 8. The key roles of WIM include enhancing action and support through finance for loss and damage, building the right technology regime to gauge climate change’s impacts and also capacity-building of members.

The “enhanced action and support” is the WIM’s fifth strategic role as mentioned in its five-

KEY THREATS

Floods and storms accounted for almost 80 per cent of the natural disasters between 1970 and 2021



Source: EM-DAT database, as on October 19, 2021

The discussions go back to 2010, when during CoP16, a “loss and damage work programme” was started. This led to the creation of the Warsaw International Mechanism on Loss and Damage in 2013

year rolling work plan. But as the working of the body shows, there is no progress at all in this role. What it has done instead in 2019 is create a network (called the Santiago Network on Loss and Damage) to facilitate interactions, technical assistance and resources. The network has so far only set up its website. UNFCCC has also set up the Fiji Clearing House for Risk Transfer—as a repository of information on what countries are doing on insurance.

Loss and damage is not even on the formal agenda for COP26. This when the Sixth Assessment Report of the IPCC, the first part of which was released in August 2021, says without hesitation that not only is the climate crisis caused by human activities, but that scientists can now “attribute” climate change to specific extreme

weather impacts. This is important because till now we have only been able to understand climate change impacts in terms of the increased frequency of such events in the world. Now, we know with greater certainty the role of climate change in specific weather events. This should make it clear that extreme weather events, which cause losses and damages to the poorest in the world, destroy their economies and make them more vulnerable and insecure, are the direct outcome of climate change.

It's time the agenda of loss and damage was prioritised. Countries and communities need more than networks, information and knowledge. They need resources—human and financial—to cope with extreme weather events. Words will no longer be enough, not even close.

RICH AND RESILIENT

Even though the Americas experienced many more natural disasters than Africa, the region reported substantially lower deaths in 1970-2021

