World leaders fail climate action, leaving vulnerable communities to shoulder the burden of the climate crisis alone

Antalya, 22 November – Governments at the UN climate summit COP31 failed to reach an agreement, exposing a stark lack of political leadership as the climate crisis intensifies, leaving millions of people to face its devastating consequences largely on their own.

Billed as an "implementation COP", the conference ended with little concrete action, with no credible pathway providing adaptation finance and no mention of phasing out of fossil fuels, the root cause of the climate crisis, in its final decisions. Once again, self-interest and unilateralism have prevailed over the urgent need to protect lives and livelihoods.

From Latin America to the Horn of Africa to South Asia across the globe, communities are fighting to protect their crops, secure water and rebuild after devastating droughts and floods, with women and girls often bearing the heaviest burden. Their resilience cannot substitute for political responsibility.

Multilateral cooperation remains essential, but its credibility depends on world leaders honouring their commitments. The true measure of COP31 is not the agreement reached on paper, but whether governments deliver the resources and action needed to protect those least responsible for the crisis.

Marlene Achoki, Global Policy Lead Climate and Resilience

"A profound lack of political ambition for climate action from world leaders has defined the outcomes of COP31, exposing the failure of the dual COP Presidencies to deliver on the promise of an 'Implementation COP.' Developed countries came to the negotiations empty-handed, unwilling to put forward the finance needed to support adaptation and loss and damage in climate-vulnerable countries. At a time when the world is overshooting temperature limits, climate impacts are intensifying and communities are already paying the price, leaders with the greatest responsibility and capacity to act have failed to rise to the moment."

Obed Koringo, Climate Policy Adviser - CARE Denmark

"COP31 promised delivery. All it delivered was more delays. With pledges to the Adaptation Fund falling far short of what is needed and no credible pathway to triple adaptation finance by 2035, vulnerable communities are once again being left to face escalating climate disasters without adequate support. Promises will not protect crops from drought or homes from floods. As COP32 heads to Africa, governments must stop talking about adaptation and start paying for it, with predictable, accessible and grant-based finance that reaches those who need it most."

John Nordbo, Senior Climate Adviser - CARE Denmark

“Developed countries are leaving COP31 with no credible plan to deliver the climate finance they have already promised. Meanwhile, more than 90% of the most climate-vulnerable countries are in or at significant risk of debt distress, spending far more on debt repayments than on climate action. Within a decade, developing countries could be paying back more on climate loans than they receive in new lending. This is climate finance in reverse: the countries least responsible for the crisis are being handed the bill. They need grants, not more debt.”

Rosa van Driel, Policy Adviser Climate Justice

“The devastating floods in Nepal and the destruction they cause are a stark reminder of why loss and damage finance cannot wait. Yet the international support available remains a tiny fraction of what is needed. When disasters strike, communities cannot be left to rebuild alone or forced deeper into debt. Loss and damage finance is not charity: it is a matter of climate justice and responsibility. The Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage needs to be filled at once.”

Kerime van Opijnen, Policy Advisor Gender Equality and Climate Justice - CARE Netherlands

“Governments at COP31 spent more time defending their red lines than protecting the lives on the line. With no meaningful progress on a just transition and no concrete figure for tripling adaptation finance, communities are once again being left to confront the climate crisis without the resources they desperately need. By sidelining gender equality and inclusion, world leaders have also turned their backs on those already bearing the heaviest burden. This is not climate justice.”

Mrityunjoy Das, Deputy Director – Humanitarian and Resilient Futures - CARE Bangladesh

“COP31 falls short of confronting the near-term overshoot of 1.5°C, offering no plan to limit the peak and no commitment to a ‘decline trajectory’ that brings temperatures back to or below 1.5°C by the end of the century. The only encouraging sign is the target of 35% electricity in final energy demand by 2035, alongside tripling renewables and doubling energy efficiency by 2030. Yet how will such a shift benefit the most vulnerable people without just transition pathways that deliver decent work, finance and technology?”

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Note to editors

- CARE's recent *Climate Finance Boomerang* report exposes how climate loans are forcing developing countries to repay billions more than they receive, deepening the very inequalities climate finance is supposed to address.
- The UNEP Adaptation Gap Report 2026 estimates that developing countries will need around USD 305 billion annually for adaptation by 2035. Yet international public adaptation finance reached only USD 28.2–31.7 billion in 2024, and even tripling these flows by 2035 would cover just 20–29% of estimated needs.
- The UN Environment Programme's (UNEP) Limiting Overshoot Report 2026 warns that the world is no longer on track to limit global warming to 1.5°C, underscores the urgency of accelerating emissions reductions, as every fraction of a degree of additional warming increases the risks of extreme weather, food insecurity, displacement and irreversible climate damage.
- CARE International's COP31 policy paper "From Promise to Delivery: Scaling up Adaptation Finance for Those Most at Risk" is available in English, Arabic, French, and Spanish.

About CARE International

CARE International is a leading humanitarian and development organization fighting global poverty and inequality, with a particular focus on women and girls. CARE works with communities and local partners to respond to humanitarian crises and to strengthen their resilience and adaptive capacities to the effects of climate change.

CARE Climate Change