

EmiratesGBC 2023 Congress Briefing

Pathway to COP28: The Role of Sustainable Built Environment in Accelerating Climate Action

Panel 1 Briefing: Lessons Learnt from COP27 and Expectations from COP28

"Lessons Learnt from COP27 and Expectations from COP28" panel discussion aim was to reflect on the valuable insights and experiences gained from COP27, examine the progress made towards climate goals, and set forth expectations for COP28, fostering a platform for dialogue and knowledge exchange to enhance global efforts in addressing climate change and advancing sustainable practices.

Speakers

Audrey Nugent, Director of Global Advocacy, World Green Building Council

Dr Salah ElHagggar, Chairman of Egypt Green Building Council

Farah Yassine, Team Leader – Sustainability, Resilience and ESG, GHD

Dr Nada Chami, Regional Head of Sustainability, Saint Gobain, as moderator

Sharing their assessment of the overall progress of the Conference of Parties (COPs) to date, in the panel on "Lessons Learnt from COP27 and Expectations from COP28", the panelists expressed optimism regarding the substantial progress anticipated at COP 28 while highlighting the importance of building upon achievements from previous COPs. They pointed out that the Paris Agreement had a transformative impact since its inception, bringing nations together on a binding agreement to reduce carbon emissions, thus, setting high expectations worldwide. The Paris Agreement signaled to the private sector that countries are committed to combating climate change. It also ignited a green economy movement, and introduced Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), outlining the climate actions and goals each participating country pledges to undertake.

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Since the implementation of the Paris Agreement, there has been an upsurge in enthusiasm, movements, and progress toward achieving climate goals. The panel brought up the significant progress achieved during subsequent COPs. For example, in COP 26, at Glasgow, 5 years after the Paris Agreement, countries announced their updated NDCs, reinforcing their commitment to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius. Furthermore, COP26 mentioned fossil fuels for the first time. Additionally, COP 27, held in Sharm El Sheikh, witnessed significant achievements in climate finance. The establishment of a loss and damage fund and changes in the architecture of climate finance represented notable progress toward addressing the financial implications of climate change. Moreover, while the panelists acknowledged the substantial progress achieved, they emphasized the need for an accelerated pace and the need for each COP to be a pivotal COP.

For COP27 specifically, one of the lessons learnt locally by the EgyptGBC was the necessity to well-define Net Zero, highlighting its benefits to ease the dissipation of the concept to the public and private sector. With that necessity in mind, EgyptGBC developed Tarsheed Net Zero Certificate. Unlike LEED, which is considered expensive for the Egyptian community, Tarsheed rating system focuses on net zero and cost-effectiveness. It was designed to be practical, innovative, and cost-effective. This approach has helped people better understand the Tarsheed green building concept, through further recommendations available by an action plan and a roadmap for climate change by EgyptGBC. Tarsheed Net zero certificate was announced during the “Net Zero international conference” organized by Egypt GBC and the American University in Cairo (AUC) during 26 - 28 May 2023 at AUC under the auspices of H.E. Dr. Mostafa Madbouly, Prime minister of Egypt.

Another lesson learnt from COP27, was the need to strengthen the presence of the built environment, where the construction sector contributes to 40% of greenhouse gas emissions. The World Green Building Council (World GBC) highlighted its role in the Building to COP Coalition, a collaborative effort that emerged prior to COP26, comprising of organizations representing stakeholders in the built environment. Leveraging on collaboration between the different stakeholders from COP26, WorldGBC was present in COP27, sharing valuable knowledge on the significance of buildings in addressing climate change through organizing more than 200 events at the Building Pavilion.

Moreover, building on their experience from COP 27, GHD highlighted the inclusive nature of the event during the negotiations. While official negotiation rooms were limited to specific delegates, there were additional opportunities for civil society members and academia to engage through world cafes and Q&A sessions, and this inclusivity is expected to set the stage for an inclusive COP28.

Collectively, sharing their expectation for COP28, the panelists find it crucial to emphasize the pivotal role of the built environment and elevate it within the agenda. Recognizing the importance of buildings is essential in effectively achieving objectives related to nature and energy transition, and that is why it is crucial to portray the importance of the role of buildings in COP 28. Furthermore, it was pointed out that while sectors like energy and transportation have received significant attention, the emissions originating from the built environment are equally significant. Due to that, a diverse community of stakeholders are willing to collaborate and showcase excellent initiatives, technologies, and innovations in the sector. Green buildings were highlighted as low-hanging fruits for climate action, particularly in regions like the UAE, due to a large amount of knowledge and expertise already existing about decarbonizing buildings and the decarbonization missions that have already been undertaken.

COP 28 is expected to mobilize and catalyze progress made during COP27, such as the establishment of the loss and damage fund with a particular focus on mitigation. The panel concluded that the built environment sector offers cross-sector opportunities as all businesses require buildings to operate. Existing buildings present numerous possibilities for decarbonization, while designing new buildings with NetZero principles provides a proactive approach. The collective efforts in reducing energy and water consumption not only benefit individual buildings but also impact the infrastructure and lower utility bills for end users and developers.