

**Egypt's International Commitments to the Environment:
Between Global Diplomacy and Domestic Implementation**
الالتزامات الدولية لمصر تجاه البيئة: بين الدبلوماسية العالمية والتنفيذ المحلي

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Abstract:

This paper explores Egypt's evolving role in global environmental governance, focusing on its international commitments and their domestic implications. Through an analysis of Egypt's participation in climate diplomacy, ratification of key agreements such as the Paris Agreement, and hosting of COP27, the study highlights Egypt's strategic positioning as both a climate-vulnerable and regionally influential actor. It also examines the translation of these commitments into national policies, including reporting mechanisms and legal reforms. Finally, the paper addresses the impact of foreign funding on policy ownership, raising questions about autonomy and sustainability. The findings emphasize the need for stronger institutional capacity and inclusive governance to bridge the gap between global obligations and local implementation.

Keywords: Environmental Governance, International Commitments, Climate Diplomacy, Foreign Funding, National Ownership.

المستخلص

تتناول هذه الورقة البحثية الدور المتطور لمصر في الحوكمة البيئية العالمية، مع التركيز على التزاماتها الدولية وانعكاساتها المحلية. ومن خلال تحليل مشاركة مصر في الدبلوماسية المناخية، وتصديقها على اتفاقيات رئيسية مثل اتفاق باريس، واستضافتها لمؤتمر الأطراف COP27، تسلط الدراسة الضوء على موقع مصر الاستراتيجي كدولة معرضة لتغير المناخ وذات تأثير إقليمي. كما تستعرض الورقة كيفية ترجمة هذه الالتزامات إلى سياسات وطنية، بما في ذلك آليات الإبلاغ والإصلاحات القانونية. وتناقش كذلك تأثير التمويل الأجنبي على ملكية السياسات، مما يؤثر تساؤلات حول الاستقلالية والاستدامة. وتخلص النتائج إلى ضرورة تعزيز القدرات المؤسسية وتوسيع نطاق الحوكمة التشاركية لسد الفجوة بين الالتزامات العالمية والتنفيذ المحلي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الحوكمة البيئية، الإلتزامات الدولية، الدبلوماسية المناخية، تمويل خارجي، الملكية الوطنية

Introduction

In recent years, Egypt has emerged as a key player in international climate diplomacy, actively engaging in global environmental agreements and initiatives. From ratifying the Paris Agreement to hosting COP27, Egypt has positioned itself as both a climate-vulnerable nation and a regional leader in sustainability efforts. However, the translation of these international commitments into effective domestic policies remains a complex challenge. This paper investigates the

alignment between Egypt's global environmental obligations and its national implementation strategies, with a particular focus on institutional capacity, legal frameworks, and the role of foreign funding.

Research Problem

Despite Egypt's increasing engagement in international environmental diplomacy, there remains a persistent gap between its international commitments and domestic implementation. While Egypt has positioned itself as a regional leader in climate negotiations, the translation of these commitments into national policies is often hindered by institutional fragmentation, limited public participation, and dependency on foreign funding. This raises critical questions about the coherence, ownership, and sustainability of Egypt's environmental governance framework. The research seeks to explore this disconnect and assess the extent to which global environmental obligations are effectively integrated into Egypt's national policy landscape.

Research Questions

1. How has Egypt's engagement in international climate agreements, such as the Paris Agreement and COP27, shaped its environmental policy discourse and global positioning?
2. To what extent are Egypt's international environmental commitments reflected in its domestic legal frameworks, reporting mechanisms, and institutional reforms?

Research Argument

Egypt's climate diplomacy has elevated its international profile and positioned it as a regional leader, yet institutional fragmentation, reliance on foreign funding, and limited public participation continue to hinder the realization of its environmental goals at the national level. This research argues that although Egypt's international commitments have catalyzed important legal and policy reforms, the sustainability and ownership of these reforms remain contingent on strengthening domestic institutions, ensuring policy coherence, and reducing dependency on external actors.

Research Objectives

1. To examine how Egypt's participation in international climate agreements has influenced its environmental policy discourse and global positioning.
2. To assess the extent to which Egypt's international environmental commitments are reflected in its domestic legal frameworks, reporting mechanisms, and institutional reforms.
3. To analyze the role of foreign funding in shaping Egypt's environmental agenda and its implications for national policy ownership and sustainability.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative and interpretive research design, grounded in a narrative and critical literature review. This approach is well suited to the nature of the research questions,

which seek to uncover the normative assumptions, practical challenges, and contextual variables that shape participatory governance across different settings.

Paper Division

The paper is structured into three main sections. The first examines how Egypt's engagement in international climate agreements has shaped its external discourse, global image, and regional leadership in climate diplomacy. It highlights the narrative Egypt projects internationally and how this has contributed to its diplomatic visibility and perceived legitimacy on environmental issues. The second section analyzes the extent to which these international commitments are reflected within Egypt's domestic legal and institutional landscape. It assesses national policy documents, reporting mechanisms, and legal reforms to determine how far global obligations have been translated into actionable frameworks at the national level. The third section investigates the role of foreign funding and international actors in supporting Egypt's environmental agenda. It explores how external financial and technical assistance has facilitated progress while also raising questions about policy ownership, institutional dependency, and long-term sustainability. The final section offers a synthesis of findings and presents recommendations for enhancing the coherence, autonomy, and effectiveness of Egypt's environmental governance.

Egypt's Engagement in International Climate Agreements

The development of Egypt's environmental policy can be attributed to following its international commitments until it has become and presents itself as a regional leader in addressing climate change. The starting point dates to the year 1994 when Egypt first joined the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The UNFCCC presents itself as the core foundational document on climate change mitigation. Furthermore, it establishes the concept of country obligations to report its harmful emissionsⁱ.

Egypt accounts to only 0.6% of the global emissions of carbon dioxide gas, yet it is becoming increasingly affected by extreme weather conditions. Additionally, it ranks 83rd in terms of vulnerability when it comes to facing climate threats and 63rd in terms of preparedness to face climate challengesⁱⁱ. This is why Egypt counts as a Non-Annex I party to the UNFCCC, who are unlike the Annex I, historically less responsible for GHG emissions and they have fewer commitments, the Non-Annex I parties are to focus on adaptation and mitigation effects to be supported by developed countries.

Having ratified the Paris Agreement in 2017, Egypt has shown extreme willingness to commit to climate action and fulfilling the SDGs. The agreement sets a guide for all 196 ratifying states to limit global greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) to mitigate the risks of climate change, to periodically assess the

progress towards achieving the long-term plans of the agreement, and to provide financing and strengthen resilience to improve the adaptability mechanisms of developing countriesⁱⁱⁱ.

However, the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR) entails that Egypt is not expected to carry the same responsibility as more developed countries which have historically contributed to GHG emissions^{iv}, ¹, an idea that was further institutionalized when Egypt hosted COP27. The CBDR appeared for the first time in principle 7 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development which reads as: "In view of the different contributions to global environmental degradation, States have common but differentiated responsibilities. The developed countries acknowledge the responsibility that they bear in the international pursuit of sustainable development in view of the pressures their societies place on the global environment and of the technologies and financial resources they command"^v.

Among Egypt's latest efforts to show international solidarity on environmental issues, it has submitted its GHG emissions report to the UNFCCC in 2015 in part of fulfilling its duties under the Paris Agreement to help analyse the impacts of mitigation and adaptation measures^{vi}. Following COP21 in Paris,

¹ Rajamani, Lavanya. "The Principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and the Balance of Commitments under the Climate Regime." *Review of European Community & International Environmental Law* 17, no. 2 (2008): 120–131. P.120-121.

196 parties embraced the Paris Agreement. Through Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), each state has specified its responsibilities by pursuing certain steps that would limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius. In 2017, Egypt has filed its first NDCs, to be activated in 2020 and renewed every five years. The NDCs included a concrete list of actions to address the challenges posed by climate change, more details to follow in the next section. However, according to Mohieldin Mahmoud and Ahmed Elmassa, they lacked 'definitive means of implementation'^{vii}.

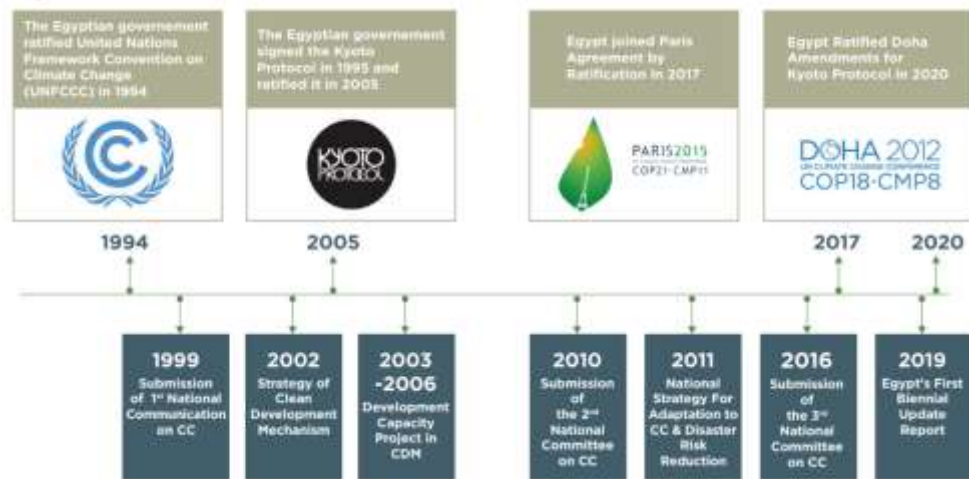
An updated NDC was released in 2022 to tackle the problems encountered problems with the purpose of showing Egypt's full potential and commitment to fix arising issues from its environmental policy conduct.

Other international conventions, Egypt is a signatory to include:

- The Environmental Modification Convention
- The African Convention on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources
- The Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer
- The Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships
- The Barcelona Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea Against Pollution
- The Brussels Convention on Civil Liability for Oil Pollution Damage

- The Moscow Treaty for Nuclear Weapon Tests in the Atmosphere
- The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)
- The Stockholm Convention on prohibited chemicals and waste management

Figure (1)^{viii}: Egypt's Main International Commitments from 1994 until 2020



Egypt has displayed an important commitment to uphold and mainstream the climate agenda when it hosted the United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP27). In this historical event, Egypt presented itself as a climate-vulnerable underdeveloped country, and at the same time an active actor within the realm of climate diplomacy. This dual role marked a historically remarkable shift in the global discourse on climate change when president AbdelFattah El Sisi shed light on

the needs of the countries in global south to be compensated of the climate consequences they suffer from despite minimally contributing to them^{ix}.

Regionally, Egypt co-chairs the African Group of Negotiators (AGN) with Kenya. It is an African group representing African interests under the framework of the UNFCCC. The group comprises all the 54 African Union (AU) members, and together, Egypt and Kenya work towards advocating for Africa's shared climate grievances like adaptation, financing, and resilience. This fosters Egypt global image as regional pioneer within the realm of climate policy^x.

On a more practical and policy-oriented level, Egypt is a main supporter and contributor of the African Adaptation Initiative (AAI) which was launched by the AU in 2015. The main purpose of this initiative is to enhance technological transfer and foster capacity building among the AU countries to mitigate the negative effects of climate change in Africa. Its main scope of collaborative work is to overcome events that are common to the continent's geographical position like water scarcity, starvation, desertification, and extreme weather, phenomena that are common to Africa^{xi}.

Furthermore, Egypt is an active member of the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment (CAMRE), which is a knowledge sharing platform established under the auspices of the League of the Arab States (LAS) to harmonize

environmental policies, promote the SDGs, and address common environmental grievances^{xii}.

Domestic Reflections of International Commitments

An important aspect of showing willingness to uphold international principles of environmental protection and climate change mitigation does not lie only in upholding climate diplomacy and ratifying international treaties, it strongly manifests itself into translating these commitments into domestic legislation and laws.

Under the UNFCCC, Egypt is obligated to report its progress on all the relevant measures it has upheld in order to fulfill its climate obligations. These measures include a general explanation of the current economic, social, demographic, and any contextual circumstances that may affect its climate efforts. Furthermore, it is a requirement to report on all mitigation measures in reference to current measures of emissions, the status of any assistance possibly delivered by any international organisations, and any effort conducted in the realms of education and raising awareness. The purpose of these 'communications' is to foster accountability and transparency, and to provide sufficient evidence and a basis for international support^{xiii}.

To this end, Egypt has issued three 'national communications' (NCs) in 1999, 2010, and 2016. It is irrelevant to the context of the present study to detail the contributions of the three reports. However, an important pattern should be highlighted.

Given the intersectoral integration and the development of more efficient monitoring mechanisms, discussed in the section above, it is clear that, over the course of this time frame, Egypt has improved its methodologies for data collection which transitioned its isolationist policy-making mechanisms towards more integrated strategies, resulting in comprehensive and integrated national policies and strategies, which provided improved prospects for international donor funding^{xiv}.

As a Non-Annex I country, Egypt is required to submit the Biennial Update Report (BUR). This reports is like a more detailed extension to the NCs with a focus on recent data and actions taken in this regard^{xv}. Egypt has submitted its first BUR to the UNFCCC in 2019. However, this reporting mechanism was replaced under the Paris Agreement with the Biennial Transparency Report (BTR) which was introduced by the Enhanced Transparency Framework. Egypt submitted its first BTR in 2024 abiding by the new reporting requirements and mechanisms under the Paris Agreement^{xvi}. In this context, Egypt submitted its first NDC in 2017 and the second was submitted in 2022. The first submission was merely an outline of Egypt's efforts in mitigating climate change, but it lacked quantifiable and specified targets to reduce emissions. Egypt has presented itself in this report as climate-vulnerable country^{xvii}.

However, the second report marks a remarkable shift in Egypt's presentation and rhetoric. It marked the first time that

Egypt has produced quantifiable targets for the reduction of emissions. Yet, the accomplishments of these targets is contingent upon international assistance in terms of funding, access to technology, and long-term capacity-building abilities^{xviii}. This development and ‘maturity’ in the second report are co-incidental with the emerging leadership role Egypt is playing by hosting COP27, and the improvement of its institutional capacity for monitoring and implementation. This reflects and aligns with Egypt’s discourse shift from being a climate-vulnerable country towards assuming a regional leadership based on its adoption of advanced and policy-oriented methodologies.

The timeline below illustrates the harmony between Egypt’s international commitments and their reflection within its domestic policy making.

Figure(2)^{xix}: Timeline of Egypt’s International Commitments reflected into National Strategies

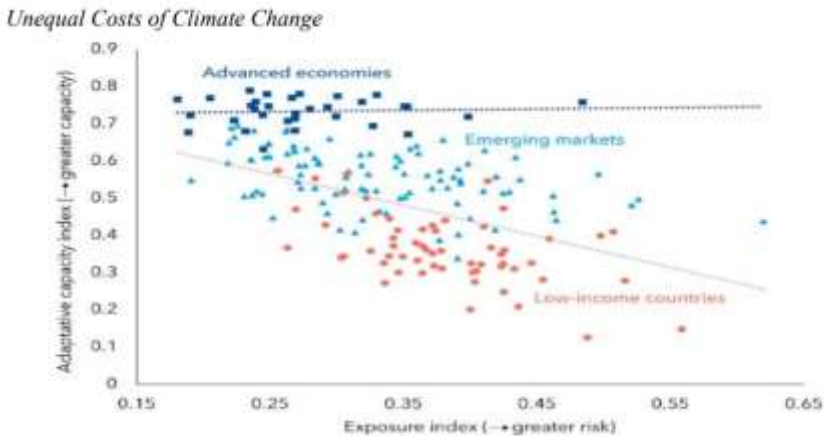


Foreign Funding and National Ownership

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) warns that developing countries continue to pay the higher price of climate change, even though their emissions remain much lower than those of developed countries. Accordingly, providing these suffering countries with aid and support to adapt to these challenges remains a top priority for donor institutions. The following lines explore the contribution of different-tier countries to CO2 emissions against its impact on them. This is followed by exploring Egypt's relationship with donor institutions and whether this clashes with its sovereignty over its environmental policy-making schemes.

This figure represents how different countries categorized in terms of being advanced economies, emerging markets, and low-income countries are unequally and unevenly affected by climate change.

Figure(3)^{xx}: Uneven costs of climate change



The figure exposes the gap between high-income and low-income countries in terms of their contribution to the emission of CO₂. By 2019, high-income economies had CO₂ emissions of 9.612 metric tons per capita, while this ratio was only 0.277 metric tons per capita for the low-income economies.

Despite the instrumentality of various International Financial Institutions (IFOs) in advancing Egypt's environmental infrastructure, these dependencies often raise questions and debates about the state's autonomy within environmental decision-making. For example, the IMF has urged Egypt to integrate adaptation and mitigation strategies of climate change in its planning processes with regards to budgeting and portfolio management decisions. These recommendations, while beneficial, at the same time, they do indicate a level of external influence on internal decision making^{xxi}.

Several international actors, states and IFPOs, have agreed to lend Egypt money to finance either its mitigation efforts or towards climate change or its overall SDGs strategies and projects. For example, in 2022, the World Bank (WB) has approved a \$400m loan to fund a railway connection between Cairo and Alexandria to reduce GHG emissions between Egypt's two main cities^{xxii}. In 2024, Egypt has managed to secure around \$16b from the IMF and the European Union (EU) to fund different projects in the sectors of energy and trade that would

eventually contribute to fulfilling Egypt's developmental goals^{xxiii}.

Conditionalities from such loans may divert the government's efforts from implementing the projects in favour of exhausting more resources towards reporting and aligning their objectives with international standards and fulfilling requirements like reform and transparency, which are extremely important but require extensive resources^{xxiv}. Furthermore, some lenders might skew the national policy making process in favor of mitigating climate change over adaptation strategies or vice-versa. Likewise, some donors need to fulfill their own agendas and prioritize spending in a certain sector over other sectors that might be more locally needed. Finally, the accumulation of debts by the government would make the government put first 'debt servicing' over adequately financing environmental initiatives. Studies suggest that the economic burdens of a state compromise its ability to fulfill its environmental and sustainability goals policy making process in favor of mitigating climate change over adaptation strategies or vice-versa. Likewise, some donors need to fulfill their own agendas and prioritize spending in a certain sector over other sectors that might be more locally needed.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the evolving relationship between Egypt's international climate commitments and its domestic environmental governance. Egypt has successfully positioned

itself as a regional climate leader, using its participation in global agreements and high-profile events to enhance its diplomatic standing and attract international recognition. These engagements have catalyzed important shifts in national discourse and contributed to a growing emphasis on environmental policy at the state level.

However, the translation of international commitments into coherent and sustainable domestic action remains uneven. While there have been notable reforms in legal frameworks and institutional arrangements, the implementation of these commitments is still constrained by fragmentation, weak coordination, and limited channels for public participation. In many cases, national reforms appear more externally driven than internally owned, raising concerns about long-term sustainability.

The analysis also reveals that Egypt's reliance on foreign funding, while instrumental in advancing certain projects and capacities, has introduced significant dependencies that may undermine policy autonomy. Without a strategic plan to localize ownership of the environmental agenda, financially, institutionally, and socially, the risk remains that climate policy will be perceived as an external obligation rather than a nationally integrated priority.

To move forward, Egypt must invest in building stronger institutional coherence, reducing dependency on international donors, and fostering inclusive, participatory mechanisms that

embed environmental responsibility across society. Only through a grounded, internally supported approach can Egypt's global climate leadership translate into meaningful and lasting transformation at the national level.

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