

# Cop27 first-timers from Pakistan, Nigeria and Spain share their experiences

Tuesday 22 November 2022, by [DICKSON Goodness](#), [GROS BRETO Marina](#), [LAKHANI Nina](#), [TARIQ Farooq](#) (Date first published: 18 November 2022).

## Cop27 attendees who fought hard to be heard share their highs and lows from Egypt

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With about 35,000 delegates from almost 200 countries attending [Cop27](#), navigating the sprawling poorly signposted conference centre in Sharm el-Sheikh has been a huge challenge for grassroots activists, and so has finding a way to participate meaningfully within the confines of the UN rules and a repressive state.

Days are long and intense, the negotiations full of legalese and acronyms, and on top of that a lack of affordable food and overzealous security presence has intensified the pressure. But with so much at stake, community leaders have fought hard to be heard and here Cop first-timers from three of the countries most affected by climate disasters this year – Spain, [Pakistan](#), and Nigeria – share their highs and lows from Egypt.

### **‘There’s been a lot of greenwashing’: Farooq Tariq, Pakistan**

Tariq, 67, is general secretary of Pakistan Kissan Rabita committee, a network of 27 small farmers’ organisations based in Lahore. He has been organising landless peasants for 30 years.

“This year has been one of the worst because of the floods and the devastating rains, and I thought I should come here to raise the issue of reparations and put pressure on the decision makers in Pakistan and the rest of the world,” he said.

“I was invited to the first climate justice protest last week, and as I spoke about the devastation in Pakistan, I decided to lie on the ground in solidarity with those who have died. It wasn’t planned, it was spontaneous, and the two-minute video was taken by the media in Pakistan, so that was a really good thing as being at this platform helped elevate my voice and convey our message.

“I’ve attended several side events including one in the Pakistan pavilion when I was able to speak with the climate change minister, Sherry Rehman, and raised the issue of reparations, which we believe the Pakistani government must push harder on. I also met with senators, and such meetings would be very difficult in Pakistan.

“There has been a lot of greenwashing in the talks, and I don’t see many real policy changes from

the decision makers but I was happy to hear our prime minister for the first time reference the debt trap - a term that goes back many years in the climate justice movement and shows that we make a difference.

“The best thing has been making connections with other like minded activists and organisations who are also talking about system change, land rights and food sovereignty like Debt Justice [from the UK] and the Global Campaign to Demand Climate Justice, as well as groups from Pakistan I hadn't met in person until now. The networking is the most positive aspect and it's why I would like to attend again.

“For me the low point is been not being able to speak out for the Egyptian people. I have been arrested 12 times, jailed under false terrorism charges and forced into exile for eight years for speaking out against the Pakistani military dictatorship, but my friends advised me from speaking out against Sisi. I feel really suppressed in that sense.”

### **‘We need trillions’: Goodness Dickson, Nigeria**

Dickson, 29, from Abuja, [Nigeria](#), is the founder of the Eco Clean Active Initiative, a youth-led nonprofit working on improving grassroots climate mitigation, and an organiser for Fridays for Future in Africa. He was unable to attend Cop26 due to Britain's vaccine rules.

“I am privileged to have knowledge about the climate crisis, so came here to seek justice for the communities in my country who are mostly impacted, especially the young people who make up 16.8% of our population. Getting to know other activists whom I'd only known on social media has been special.

“I was very, very happy to meet [Vanessa Nakate](#) because she has been an inspiration and we have been working together for the past three years, so it was a joy to finally talk in person. Also Licypriya Kangujam, the 11-year-old activist from India. I've also had the opportunity of meeting political leaders like our environment minister, and I called his attention to how young people are suffering in our country, and that we grassroots leaders need support to develop our communities.

“Getting access to such personalities in Nigeria is quite difficult. I was also invited to a meeting with other youth leaders with the European delegation, and I am hopeful that something will come from sharing about my community.

“My highlight has been meeting Al Gore, this was a great privilege for me because his organisation trained me in 2020 as a climate leader. Meeting him and expressing myself about our challenges is something I will never forget. He shook my hand and said he has been following the floods in Nigeria which have killed 600 people and affected 2 million, and that as climate leaders we all have to work together to address the crisis.

“The most disappointing thing is that so many African activists were denied access because they couldn't fund it, but also hearing the US president committing \$150m to help [Africa](#) adapt to the climate crisis. This won't do anything, we need trillions. It's my first Cop, so it has not been easy following the negotiations, and as an observer with a yellow badge I can't access the meeting rooms. It's also very tiring. We're here all day without eating because the food is so expensive. But I have gained a lot of experience and knowledge so hopefully at the next Cop in Dubai I can be even more active.”

## **‘Negotiations are not ambitious enough’: Marina Gros Breto, Spain**

Gros Breto, 27, from Aragón, leads the Truth about Gas campaign at Ecologists in Action in [Spain](#) which this year experienced the hottest summer on record, drought, and the worst forest fires in Europe.

“Being here has shown me that countries like Spain must be more empathetic to the suffering of vulnerable populations, inside and outside their territories, and that the negotiations are not ambitious enough. I’ve seen how important it is to separate the real solutions from the greenwashing in the pavilions, but it’s really hard when the mainstream press is more concerned about covering speeches from personalities rather than really following the negotiations and seeking counter-information from civil society. We were able to meet with the EU and Spanish delegations, but I don’t think this was enough. We observers should have more regular access to negotiators, it would help their work and ours.

“An event that has stuck with me was at the German pavilion where Sanaa Seif, the sister of Alaa, and Hossam Bahgat [an Egyptian human rights defender], spoke about the criminalisation of human and environmental rights defenders in Egypt, political prisoners and the sale of arms from the EU, specifically Germany, to the regime. But it was painful to feel cut off from the rest of Egyptian civil society who were denied a voice, and the security situation made it difficult to be an activist.

“We saw plainclothes policemen in practically every bus we took, and every time we had a meeting or a conversation someone stopped to listen. We could only carry out actions [protests] inside the summit space with prior authorisation, and without naming countries or companies directly, which reduced the impact.

“A highlight for me was the ‘No Fossil Fuels Here, There, Anywhere’ protest where representatives of communities affected by fossil fuel exports and imports came together from across the world to send a common message: we will not continue to pay with our health and lives. The phasing out of fossil fuels has to be in the final text but let’s see what happens.

“I do feel my voice was partially heard, and would like to attend Cop28 next year to continue delving into the negotiations on LNG [liquified natural gas] and mitigation and because Spain will preside over the EU negotiations we will have more opportunities to influence things. But also we must be there to give a voice to the activists in the UAE, learn about their situation, and try to ensure that crimes against human rights do not go unpunished.”

**Nina Lakhani** in Sharm el-Sheikh  
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### **P.S.**

\* The Guardian. Sun 18 Nov 2022 07.00 GMT:  
<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/nov/18/cop27-first-timers-from-pakist>

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