

Reflections on the COP 23

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In a nutshell, the message I got by attending the COP23 in Bonn, is that there is a need to accelerate climate action and already numerous entities are working towards implementing the Paris Agreement, with the, WE ARE STILL IN campaign giving hope that the United States commitments will be met. These coupled with seeing Fletcher Alumni in action negotiating for their countries, gave me renewed affirmation that I am on the right track. However, I need to fine tune my area of focus and advance in it, as opposed to remaining in the general climate change spectrum. That will definitely give me a cutting edge in my future career.

Introduction

Preparing and attending a conference takes a lot of energy, time, and resource. Luckily for me, I was awarded a travel scholarship by CIERP, of Fletcher School to meet some of the expenses. More so the official Tufts University delegation took me under their wings despite that I got accreditation from my home University. This took off the pre-travel planning logistics weight off my shoulders and I really appreciate the two institutions for their immense contribution. The COP 23 attracted over 25,000 participant from diverse entities and bearing varying interests thus, I set out with two main objectives for my time there. These objectives were, to attend climate adaptation finance forums and to network with experts in the climate adaptation diplomacy and in particular those working with Adaptation Funds in the hope of conducting interviews with them for a research I am working on at CIERP. This reflection will be written in these two main themes.



Figure 1: The tufts team attending week two of the COP 23

Attending Forums

The COP was divided into 2 zones of Bonn and Bula and I had access to both sides. While that gave me the privilege to attend the negotiations as an observer, it also meant I had to spend a lot of time travelling in between the two zones. Nevertheless, I was able to plan my day such that I attended the Observations in the morning hours and move to informal side in the afternoon hours. I had keen interest in the Adaptation Fund, being one of the most successful funds whose future was not so clear. There were suggestions that the fund should be merged with the Green Climate Fund to serve the Paris Agreement but in the proceedings I attended, I observed the fund justify why they should continue their activities autonomously. The fund held several meetings, press briefings and also side events some of which were held outside the two official COP zones to enable members of the public to attend. What struck me was that the fund's continuous resource mobilization and lobbying despite their future being unknown and on the line. It was however interesting to speak to Dr. Ndiaye of the fund and he reiterated that the fund was actually preparing itself to serve the Paris Agreement as it waits for the final decision to be made. The delay in making the decision is the divide between the developing and developed countries on the benefits they derive from the fund. While the developing countries, who are the main beneficiaries of the fund feel that it should continue existing, the developed countries feel that the fund should just finish its mandate and end with the Kyoto protocol in 2020. The debate was very heated and at some point the meeting became closed door with observers, like myself being told to leave the room.



Figure 2: Adaptation Fund press conference on its future

Apart from following the Adaptation Funds meetings, I also attended events in the US pavilion which was dubbed "WE ARE STILL IN". The pavilion held talks, discussions and exhibitions with the message that the citizens, institutions of higher learning and corporates were still committed to contributing towards achieving the Paris Agreement despite the federal government retracting from it. Particularly, I attended the Engine of Ambition: University Research and Engagement to Support Climate Action which the CIERP director, Prof. Kelly Gallagher was among the panelists. Here, I learnt that we need to ask our governments what research needs they have, so that we, as higher institutes of education can fulfill them in a collaborative manner. It was interesting to hear Prof. Shrag of Harvard University say that four years is a short time, thus the US may not actually drop out of the Paris Agreement as currently feared by many.

In addition, I attended the Climate Diplomacy; how to prevent climate security risks forum at the German Pavilion. The meeting had panelist from the Small Island States and the German Government. My take away was that we cannot wish resilience away because the effects of climate change are been felt even now. What struck me is the massive loss and damages that the recent hurricanes had caused. Some islands like The Dominican Republic were said to have had a 200 % loss in their GDP. There were calls for less diplomacy and more action to start addressing the issue of resilience. There was emotions and firmness in the voices which made hopeful that the decision makers had heard it too and would act.



Figure 3: The engine of ambition: University Research and Engagement to Support Climate Action

Figure 4: Small Island States Panel Discussion



Networking

The COP is usually the hub of all experts in the field of climate change and this one was no different. I was keen on meeting practitioners in climate adaptation finance, research institutions and think tanks. One of the easiest ways to meet people is to be at an exhibition booth or tent. Thus, I volunteered some hours to man a stand at the US climate pavilion. Here, I was able to meet professors, students and research staff from educational institutions like Yale, Harvard, and University of Maryland, Michigan State University, Minnesota State University among others. Other non-educational contacts established while manning the booth were from the institute of global environmental strategies in Japan. I have kept in contact with the lady from this institute and we are already talking about what we can do together upon my graduation.

Away from the booth, I established contact with Envi Plast, an Indonesian organization that is making shopping bags from cassava and have linked the person to a contact in Kenya, where there has been a recent ban on plastic bags. Another notable contact was with the Director of Kenya Climate Innovation Center, which deals with climate initiatives from the youth especially those in educational institutions.

In addition to getting contacts by manning the booth, I attended networking events, one being the Colleges United for Climate Action, which was co-hosted by Tufts University and University of Connecticut. Here, I was able to interact with students and faculty from several universities and got informed on the various actions they were taking to reduce emissions. The Fletcher alumni event was



Figure 5: During a break from manning the booth

another event where I met and interacted with several alumni who are currently practicing diplomacy in Japan, Germany and Korea. It was interesting to hear how they carved a niche for themselves after graduating, some as recently as in 2015. That gave me positive energy and hope that I will also secure employment upon graduation. Apart from the Fletcher alumni, I was able to interact in a deeper way with the current Fletcher students and exchanged ideas and debates on various aspects of climate change. I specifically remember having a discussion on what the term adaptation is and how it should be applied in the field.

Conclusion

Overall, I was able to meet most of my objectives at the conference save for holding interviews for the research I am currently working on at CIERP. The 2nd week at the COP is characterized with the arrival of ministers and presidents. This comes with a lot of high level segments which are closed to observers and all my potential respondents were out of reach. However, I was able to mention the research I am doing and asking if they are willing to be respondents at a later date when the COP is over. I received favorable responses and I count that as one of my immediate benefits together with the immense knowledge, information and networks established.

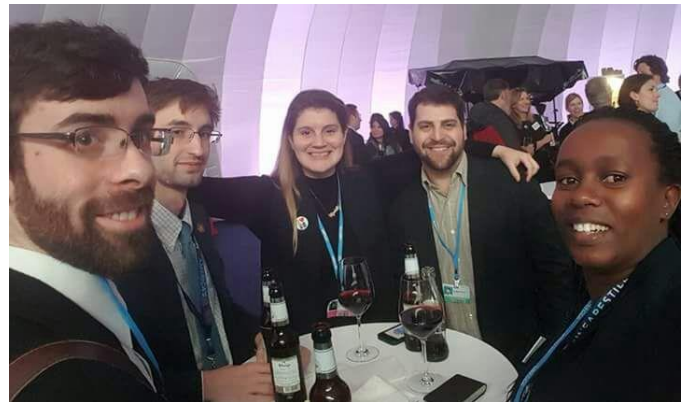


Figure 6: With Fletcher Colleagues before the alumni event

I am very grateful to the CIERP travel grant for funding my travel costs to attend the COP 23, it was an amazing and wonderful experience that will never fade away from my memory. Asante