International Relations · GS - II

Comment on the limitations of consensus-based multilateralism in addressing the urgency of global climate change, in the light of the COP31 outcome.

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
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MARKS	WORD LIMIT
15	~250 words

Answer Hint

Consensus, UNFCCC, climate diplomacy, fossil fuel transition, climate finance, common but differentiated responsibilities, climate justice, multilateral cooperation

Model Answer

COP31 in Antalya, Türkiye, exposed the growing gap between the urgency of climate action and the ability of multilateral institutions to secure collective decisions.

Why negotiations faltered

1. **Fossil fuel disagreement:** Several oil- and gas-producing countries resisted explicit references to fossil fuels in the proposed final text. The removal of such references from a later draft led the European Union, Panama and other countries to reject it.
2. **Climate finance disputes:** Developing and climate-vulnerable countries demanded stronger financial support for adaptation and resilience, while disagreements over responsibility and funding commitments persisted.
3. **Consensus constraints:** The requirement to build broad agreement gives every party considerable negotiating influence. Consequently, a small group can obstruct an ambitious outcome even when many

countries support it.

4. **Trust deficit:** Vulnerable countries increasingly question whether major emitters and wealthy nations are translating climate commitments into adequate financial and practical support.

An important distinction

COP31 did not produce no outcomes whatsoever. Negotiators advanced certain initiatives, including a just-transition package and electrification-related efforts. However, failure to adopt the overarching Antalya pact demonstrated the weakness of collective climate diplomacy.

The larger institutional dilemma

Consensus protects sovereign equality and ensures that decisions have broad legitimacy. Replacing it entirely with majority voting could marginalise smaller or developing countries. Yet, retaining an inflexible approach risks allowing reluctant parties to dilute global ambition.

The way forward lies in stronger pre-negotiation diplomacy, transparent climate-finance commitments, implementation-focused coalitions and accountability for national pledges.

Ultimately, multilateral climate institutions must preserve inclusiveness while becoming more capable of delivering timely and meaningful collective action.

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