**Meliora Podcast: Good COP, Bad COP?**

**Introduction**

**Simon Kemp**: Hello and welcome to this COP28 episode of the Meliora podcast from the Sustainability and Resilience Institute at the University of Southampton. This is a podcast where we explore the challenges of sustainability through the work being conducted by our academics, students, alumni, and other partners, internal and external, at the University of Southampton and beyond. I am your host, Simon Kemp, Professor of Sustainability Education and Deputy Director of the Sustainability and Resilience Institute at the University.

**COP28 Overview**

Today, we are picking over the bones of the UNFCCC Conference of Parties 2023, otherwise known as COP28. We are looking at the main outcomes from the agreement that was approved just this morning, Wednesday 13th December, and providing our commentary on whether this agreement is sufficient for our collective futures.

**Guests Introduction**

For this special episode, we are joined by a number of guests:

* Grace Compton, Specialist Policy Officer in our SRI and Public Policy Southampton
* Professor Craig Hutton, who is the Director of the SRI
* Lily Kilner, BSc Environmental Science student and podcast editor
* Sophie Green, BSc Geography student and podcast editor

In this episode, we are looking to provide a balanced analysis of COP28. It’s not going to be all doom and gloom, hopefully. We are going to look at the positives, as well as looking at what some people would consider to be the negatives. As part of this, we are going through the ‘good cop’ and ‘bad cop’ model. Grace has kindly volunteered to take on the role of ‘good cop’ to provide an array of sunshine. Craig has opted to take the role of ‘bad cop’, warning us of the ferocity of the storm clouds ahead. Then, at the end, Sophie and Lily are going to provide the voices of the younger generation and judge as to whether they believe COP28 offers them hope for the future. So, hopefully that’s okay with everyone. So, welcome Grace, welcome Craig, welcome Sophie, welcome Lily. Are we ready to go? Let’s go for it.

**Discussion on Loss and Damage Fund**

So we mentioned in the COP28 halfway point episode that right at the start of the conference there was the announcement of the Loss and Damage Fund. This was potentially a strong opening to COP28 and it’s good to get that sense of momentum from the start. That actual agreement for a Loss and Damage Fund, that’s something that’s been argued for, for a very long time. So it was positive that it’s actually made it into the proper text now, rather than it being a suggestion for the future. That was signed off. However, as soon as the analysis of the outcome came about, people looked into it and found that the initial pledges to the fund were calculated to be around $725 million, which sounds like a lot of money. But some of the studies estimate that the loss and damage in the less economically resilient countries is already greater than $400 billion a year and is projected to grow, unsurprisingly, with the future effects from climate change. So how do you feel about this particular so-called strong start to the conference? Craig, if you’d like to go first.

**Bad Cop Perspective**

**Craig Hutton**: I’m playing bad cop, but I think there is bad cop in this. Yes, it’s valuable that it’s occurred. I think that’s, I mean, we should just accept that, that there is a value in it occurring. But if you look at the adaptation funds that were meant to be $100 billion and how long it took, even though we agreed to build up to that, this seems, one, unambitious. I mean, funding-wise, that is unambitious. And even then, the timeframe and the commitment to that timeframe. And even if you say that is your timeframe, will we even get close to that? So it’s a mixed bag, actually. It’s on the agenda. So that’s got to be valuable. But I really think we need to be more ambitious if we’re going to tackle this in any meaningful way. I don’t know if it’s just to do with the reticence that some, particularly Western nations might feel about it being a tacit agreement that there is liability. And I’ve wondered if there is a kind of, because is that for them the thin end of the wedge? That at some point somebody can say, well, yes, it’s loss and damage. But we know that it’s leading towards the R word, the reparation. So I do wonder if there is a sort of dampening of that because of the thin end of the wedge, because I think they fear that could lead to vast legal cases. So that may be why it’s sort of lacks ambition. But at least it’s there.

**Simon Kemp**: That’s a good point. Now, thank you. Grace, what are your thoughts from the Good Cop perspective?

**Good Cop Perspective**

**Grace Compton**: I think to echo Craig, at least it’s there. Having a mechanism set up and it actually being operationalised is really positive. I think it’s easier to campaign for more funding with a mechanism that’s there and hopefully also to demonstrate some of the impact of that funding will help to build momentum to more pledges from other countries. And for me, there’s a mechanism through which to direct the requests now. There’s a secretariat for the fund and there is kind of protocol in place for distributing it. So that’s a positive. But I would have to agree that it’s not enough.

**Simon Kemp**: Yeah, I think it’s difficult to argue with that point, really. I think you’re right, though, in that first of all, you’ve got to have infrastructure and at least now the infrastructure is being stated and it’s being put into place. We’ve got something we can actually work with. And hopefully there can be progressions. There will be more pledges in the future. Whether that’ll take place or not, we don’t know because we haven’t got the best of records when it comes to climate finance through the more economically resilient countries. So, for example, back in 2009 with Copenhagen, with that COP, there was the pledge that there was going to be 100 billion dollars of climate finance or funds to be provided for the most economically threatened countries. That was said at that COP15. That target has never been reached. Each year we fail to reach that target. So does that really give us the confidence that we need in terms of the loss and damage fund? I mean, OECD data reported that that funding had actually reached 89.6 billion in 2021, up from 83.3 billion in 2020. And then even mooted about the idea of a target of one trillion dollars per year in COP27. That was discussed and then it just disappeared. So if we can’t get that climate finance and funding for infrastructure in place, are we really going to meet the loss and damage fund? So when it comes down to how this links in with the rest of the agreement as well, this links into one of the main outcomes from the global stock tick, which is, as we know, the biggest, most important part of COP28. And it did say within there that they recognised that the current levels of finance given by richer countries to help less economically resilient countries cope with climate change and move to renewables has been lacking. But there is no stated requirement in the global stock tick that the richest nations should do more to tackle this. And there’s no firm financial commitments at all. So this doesn’t just go into lots of different agreements within COP, but even the other agreements are linking back in through that global stock tick. So, Grace, coming to you first, does that resonate with what you’ve heard previously about climate finance?

**Grace Compton**: I’ve definitely been hearing lots from campaign organisations for this COP about the demand for tripling of current levels of finance provided for climate change. And that hasn’t been part of the final agreement. So it definitely feels like the requests and the calls for climate finance are still far higher than what is actually being provided. I find as someone that tries to read about this from both personal and professional interest, it’s also just hard to keep track of what’s been promised and what’s new versus what already exists. I think it’s a classic trick of politicians and governments to announce big numbers when actually a lot of that money’s already been pledged. So there’s a lot of numbers being talked about in announcements coming out of COP, both in millions, hundreds of millions. I was saying to Craig earlier, unless it starts talking about billions, it really feels like it’s not touching the sides on a lot of these issues we’re talking about. And it feels like the time for millions is over, particularly when someone like the UK government is pledging 10 million towards something that’s not doing anything on a national basis, let alone an international basis. Again, I think I’m meant to be good cop. I think what there is, though, is a really strong call and signal from people that are campaigning and different organizations that aren’t these parties that are part of the main process for more funding and really clear and confident calls for more funding and so much evidence now to back up why that funding is needed and where it is needed and best practice on how to use that funding when it is agreed that all of the mechanisms for having an impact are in place. We just need nations to step up and commit more. Absolutely. Thank you. Craig, what are your thoughts on climate finance?

**Craig Hutton**: Well, a couple of things there. I mean, just handing over money concerns me anyway, because there are issues with government efficiencies, a nice word for corruption as well.