

From intention to action at COP26

Evidence of the devastation that awaits us if we fail to address climate change continues to mount. Recent catastrophic flooding in Asia and Western Europe, record-shattering temperatures in North America, and raging wildfires in southern Europe — all of which mirror disasters that developing countries have faced in recent years — remind us that no country is safe. The future of each one depends on the actions of all.

The scientific perspective is bleak. In May, the World Meteorological Organization warned that there is a 40 percent chance that the annual average global temperature will exceed 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, at least temporarily, in the next five years — and the odds continue to rise. This could trigger potentially disastrous tipping points.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is now putting the finishing touches on its next major climate-change report, to be issued prior to the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) in Glasgow. Each successive IPCC report has been starker than the last, and there is no reason to think the next one will break this pattern.

After all, the world is not on track to meet the Paris climate agreement's goal of limiting the



By Patricia Espinosa

Project Syndicate/New York

Executive secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

global temperature rise to 2 degrees above pre-industrial levels — let alone its “ideal” target of 1.5 degrees — by the end of the century. On the contrary, as last February's preliminary issue of the synthesis report of all nationally determined contributions (NDCs) showed, we are headed toward a rise of 3 degrees, or even more, by 2100.

Yet all hope is not lost. While we are moving toward the point of no return, it is not too late to change course, moving onto a more sustainable pathway that enables us to forest all the worst impacts of climate change. And, in the Paris climate agreement, we already have a comprehensive road map in place.

A map that is not followed, however, means little. For the Paris climate agreement to lead us to the necessary transformation, all countries must cooperate in implementing it. That means fulfilling their individual commitments and working to slash carbon emissions by 45 percent by 2030 (from 2010 levels), and to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050. This is the timeline the

IPCC recommends for staying below the 1.5 degrees threshold. It also means pursuing adaptation and strengthening resilience to future climate-related challenges.

This is a tall order. But there is reason to believe the world can fulfill it. For example, recent virtual sessions of the subsidiary bodies of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change were encouraging. Delegates engaged effectively on a wide range of crucial topics and, while agreement on several key issues remained out of reach, progress was made.

One key lesson of those discussions was that, to move the agenda forward, political guidance is essential. This message was put across forcefully at the ministerial meeting recently convened by the COP26 president designate, Alok Sharma. Ministers and high-level representatives from countries in all key negotiating groups were in attendance.

Every COP has been significant. But escalating environmental challenges mean that each has been more consequential

than the last. COP26 is no exception. On the contrary, given the COVID-19 pandemic's devastating impact on societies worldwide and its disruptive effects on our process, the stakes have risen exponentially. But this crisis also represents a powerful opportunity for progress, as countries seek to “build back better.”

The world must make COP26 a success. Our only chance of getting onto a path that would keep us below the 1.5 degrees threshold, it is a crucial credibility test for the global fight against climate change. If we pass that test, confidence in our collective ability to address borderless challenges — such as pandemics — will be strengthened.

To this end, there are many important issues that must be resolved at COP26. But four priorities stand out.

First, past promises must be kept. Demonstrating that commitments made up to 2020 have been fulfilled is essential to build trust among countries. This includes, for example, the goal of mobilizing US\$100 billion annually by 2020 to aid developing economies in the green transition, and offering support in the form of capacity-building and technology transfer.

Developed countries have mobilized vast resources to support their economies during the COVID-19 pandemic. They must

show a similar level of commitment to driving the transition toward a more sustainable and climate-resilient future — and that means ensuring that their developing counterparts have the needed support.

Second, outstanding disagreements on finance, transparency, adaptation and resilience, loss and damage, and technical support and guidance for developing countries must be resolved, so that the Paris climate agreement can be fully implemented.

Protecting people and the planet is more important than any technical disagreement, however complex or contentious it may be.

Third, ambitions must be raised. Countries must commit to do much more in all three key areas of the climate agenda: mitigation, adaptation, and finance. The next NDC synthesis report, to be delivered prior to COP26, will give a more complete picture of progress so far, as it will include more major emitters. Whatever that report shows, there is no doubt that more ambitious, resolute plans from both government and business will be essential to move the world onto the 1.5 degrees pathway.

Finally, no voice can remain unheard, and no proposal unattended. In addressing a crisis as profound as climate change, everyone has a role to play. That is

why balanced representation of all regions and groups is essential to a successful COP26, with observers and other non-party stakeholders, including the nine NGO constituencies, engaging positively in the process.

Initiatives such as the Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action and the Race to Zero campaign should make meaningful contributions to climate action and promote climate ambition globally.

The bottom line is that two or three “big” announcements will not make for a successful COP26. Only a balanced package of decisions and actions reflecting the expectations, concerns, and needs of all stakeholders — not to mention ramped up ambition — can do that.

It has become something of a cliché to say that global problems require global solutions. And yet, as recent crises have shown, this could not be more true. From COVID-19 to climate change, no one is safe until everyone is safe.

Runaway climate change is not inevitable, but if we do not act fast, it will be. We proved up to the tasks of figuring out its drivers and devising a comprehensive global strategy for addressing it. Now, it is up to our governments to lead, our businesses to innovate, and our societies to come together, in service of a common cause: building a sustainable future.

Malaria vaccine: Vital breakthrough but no magic bullet

By Bobby Ramakant

New Delhi

A World Health Organization director general's WNTD awardee 2008 and part of Citizen News Service and Asha Parivar teams

It is indeed a breakthrough scientific achievement that we now have the first-ever and only malaria vaccine to prevent malaria in children. This is an important (and long-awaited) addition to existing range of scientifically proven effective methods to prevent malaria.

While we celebrate this moment of yet another milestone scientific feat we must remind ourselves that this new and only vaccine is a complementary malaria control tool which needs to be added to the already proven measures for malaria prevention. Malaria vaccine is a vital addition to malaria prevention options such as routine use of insecticide-treated bed nets, indoor spraying with insecticides, and the timely use of malaria testing and treatment.

But we have to also acknowledge that access to these proven methods to save lives from malaria has been far from satisfactory, as a result of which, as per the latest data, 229 million people got malaria in 2019 (compared to 228 million in 2018), and 409,000 died of malaria in 2019 — most of them children (compared to 411,000 deaths in 2018).

Children under 5 are at greatest risk of its life-threatening malaria complications. Despite unprecedented progress in the recent two decades in the fight against this ancient disease, malaria remains one of the world's leading killers, claiming the life of one child every two minutes; and most of these deaths are in Africa.

Let us celebrate this turning point — as there is no doubt that malaria vaccine is going to be one of the blessings in the global fight to end malaria by 2030. Clock is ticking! As 110 months are left to end malaria worldwide, let us also make doubly sure we scale up the rollout and access to all the science-backed methods to save lives from malaria.

This malaria vaccine (RTS,S/AS01) is the first, and to date the only, vaccine that has demonstrated it can significantly reduce malaria in children.

The scientific research for this malaria vaccine has been going on since past 30 years. Phase-3 clinical studies were conducted between 2009 and 2014 in African nations. Children receiving 4 doses of this vaccine, experienced significant reductions in malaria and malaria-related complications in comparison to those who did not receive the vaccine.

In clinical studies, the vaccine was found to prevent 4 in 10 malaria cases, including 3 in 10 cases of life-threatening severe malaria. In addition, the vaccine also prevented 6 in 10 cases of severe malaria anemia, the most com-

mon reason children die from malaria.

Significant reductions were also seen in overall hospital admissions and the need for blood transfusions, which are required to treat severe malaria anemia. These and other benefits were in addition to those already seen through the use of insecticide-treated bed nets, prompt diagnosis, and effective antimalarial treatment.

This malaria vaccine (RTS,S/AS01) is to be provided in 4 doses to children from 5 months of age up to 2 years. First 3 doses are given between 6 to 9 months of age, and 4th dose is given at 2 years of age.

The pilot of this malaria vaccine has been going on in Ghana, Kenya and Malawi since 2019. The pilot has proven that:

- Feasible to deliver: Vaccine introduction is feasible, improves health and saves lives, with good and equitable coverage of RTS,S seen through routine immunization systems. This occurred even in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - Reaching the unreached: RTS,S increases equity in access to malaria prevention. Data from the pilot program showed that more than two-thirds of children in the 3 countries who are not sleeping under a bed net are benefitting from the RTS,S vaccine.
 - Layering the tools results in over 90 percent of children benefitting from at least one preventive intervention (insecticide treated bed nets or the malaria vaccine).
 - Strong safety profile: To date, more than 2.3 million doses of the vaccine have been administered in 3 African countries — the vaccine has a favorable safety profile.
 - No negative impact on uptake of bed nets, other childhood vaccinations, or health seeking behavior for febrile illness. In areas where the vaccine has been introduced, there has been no decrease in the use of insecticide-treated bed nets, uptake of other childhood vaccinations or health seeking behavior for febrile illness.
 - High impact in real-life childhood vaccination settings: Significant reduction (30 percent) in deadly severe malaria, even when introduced in areas where insecticide-treated bed nets are widely used and there is good access to diagnosis and treatment.
- Let us hope this malaria vaccine along with all proven methods to save lives of malaria will be fully rolled out without any delay in every part of the world, driven by the local needs, contexts, and national/subnational strategies to end malaria.



AFP/Hoshang Hashimi

Checkpoint: Taliban fighters check commuters along a road in Kunduz on Sunday. The Taliban regained control of Afghanistan after the United States withdrew its troops in August.

Afghanistan, Biden's strategy and Indonesia's interests

The fall of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan on Aug. 15 to the hands of the Taliban following the exit of the United States and allied forces marked a new beginning for Afghanistan and the country's strategic impacts on international security in the coming years.

Three general historical patterns are obvious with regard to Afghanistan. First, the land, which connects Eurasia, has been continuously contested by foreign and global powers. Second, the tribal inhabitants are prone to fighting each other. And third, no clear unifying ideology exists to integrate different tribes, as even the religious-political ideologies have failed to sustain their unity as a nation and country.

That said, no global powers stay there for a long time since their periodic presence in Afghanistan is only measured by Afghanistan's temporary influence on their national interests.

The future of Afghanistan under the Taliban hinges on their capability of coping with human, national and global security issues. The international community has noted that the Taliban have still not fulfilled many of their promises, including — but not limited to — redressing the warlord-dominated Cabinet and discrimination against women.

First, it remains uncertain whether the Taliban can provide human security throughout the country according to the universal standard of the Human Rights and Human Security Indexes. Many say it is Taliban, rather than the Afghan people, who have the upper hand in changing the destiny of Afghanistan. This is the inverse logic of founding a state, in which citizens are the main subject of national development.

Second, there is no clear picture of the Taliban's ability to protect Afghanistan's territory or to create a secure, just and prosperous Afghan nation. The Taliban are likely to transform Afghanistan into a police state that



By Wibawanto Nugroho Widodo

Jakarta

Deputy chair of defense and security affairs at the Association of National Resilience Institute Alumni (KANAL) Strategic Centre and international director at the Democracy and Integrity for Peace (DIP) Institute. The views expressed are his own.

emphasizes achieving national security at the cost of human security while at the same time being unable to provide basic services and public goods to the Afghan people.

Third, the international community doubts that the Taliban regime can or will avoid creating international security problems.

So far only Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Pakistan that have acknowledged the Taliban's rule in Afghanistan, with Qatar, Iran, China and Russia predicted to follow suit. In principle, these states assume, and make their own justifications, that the Taliban are indeed central to regional stability.

President Joe Biden's assumptions regarding Afghanistan and global security are neo-Kantian: That modern affairs are driven mainly by democratization and economic growth rather than stressful security affairs; that the primary instruments are democratic institutions and economic instruments instead of military power; that the geographic focus is on Indo-Pacific and other regions instead of the Greater Middle East; and that the main foreign policy goal shall be democracy and economic growth instead of stable security affairs.

For Biden and his administration, although it was a fiasco to establish an inherent political system in Afghanistan (with an average 70 percent of the Afghan state budget backed by the US), the US national security objectives during its presence in Af-

ghanistan from 2001 until 2021 have been achieved to a certain extent, such as overthrowing the Taliban government that led to the capture of Osama Bin Laden and getting the Taliban's promise not to attack the US or the post-World War II world order, so that the overall benefits are assumed to be bigger than the costs.

The Biden administration does not see the withdrawal from Afghanistan as a defeat. Reflecting on the US forces' pullout of Vietnam in 1973, which led to the collapse of Soviet Union communism in 1991. Biden's strategic logic assumes that religious extremism and violent movements instigated and promulgated by the Taliban will be defeated and reduced in years ahead.

Consequently, in the coming years, the US national security strategy with respect to the Greater Middle East and Afghanistan will be overhauled and shift toward progressive multilateral approaches, where modes of action at least will be more indirect instead of direct, multilateral instead of unilateral and covert instead of overt, by orchestrating more on non-US governmental actors and on governmental nonmilitary instruments of power that include intelligence, information, diplomacy and economic policy.

In terms of strategic approaches, the US national security strategy with respect to Afghanistan is also shifting toward more observing, accommodating, shaping, persuading, enabling and induc-

ing, instead of coercing, subduing and eradicating. In short, Biden's post-Afghanistan strategy will draw more from the experiences of how the US defeated communism in the post-Vietnam War era, 18 years after their withdrawal from the lower Mekong.

As for Indonesia, we will observe the developments in Afghanistan strategically and determine whether we need to acknowledge the Taliban government.

First, the geopolitical implications for Indonesia are not direct but still significant. These include the ideologies of hardline Islamist political movements inspired by the Taliban's return to power, which contradict Pancasila values as our center of gravity, strategic culture and way of life, as well as the possible exodus of Afghan people to Indonesia, ASEAN and Australia.

Second, Indonesia needs a global and proactive counterterrorism strategy and the application of Pancasila as a working ideology in the lives of Indonesians to counterbalance the ideological warfare fought on the global level between key players involved in the affairs of the post-US-era Afghanistan.

Third, Indonesia needs to have access to the Middle East's major stakeholders: Jews, Arabs and Persians. Such access is a key asset for Indonesia to monitor and influence the situation in Afghanistan in line with Indonesia's national interests.

Fourth, Indonesia should consider the shifting of US security policy and resources from Afghanistan to the South China Sea and, therefore, review our strategic assumptions and geostrategy accordingly.

These four policy orientations are not a panacea, but at least they are the determining ingredients to leverage Indonesia's freedom of interests to protect and advance national security interests in the contemporary international security environment.