COP31 Presidency's Observer Forum on Access to Climate Finance – particularly for SIDS and LDCs

30 September 2026

Summary Report

Recording link : https://www.youtube.com/live/nnrFTOqRKBg

I. Background

The Observer Forum is a COP31 Presidency initiative designed to provide dedicated space for engagement between Parties, accredited UNFCCC observers and international organisations on COP31 priorities. The forums are intended to facilitate the exchange of views, capture practical experiences and identify opportunities for collaboration and action in the lead-up to COP31. This Access to Climate Finance Observer Forum was the first forum convened under this initiative.

The Access to Climate Finance Observer Forum focused on one of the COP31 Presidency's priority areas: improving access to climate finance for developing countries, particularly Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS). The discussion formed part of the Presidency's broader work on access to finance, including the proposed Access to Climate Finance for SIDS and LDCs Statement and Action Plan. Participants were invited to reflect on barriers to accessing climate finance, share practical experiences and identify actionable solutions that could help improve the accessibility, predictability and effectiveness of climate finance systems while strengthening country ownership and supporting delivery on the ground.

II. Opening statements

The COP31 Presidency highlighted access to finance as a key priority and one of the most persistent implementation challenges facing developing countries. This focus reflects consistent feedback from SIDS, LDCs and other developing countries that barriers to accessing climate finance often limit the delivery of climate action as much as overall financing levels
While significant efforts have been made to increase the volume of climate finance available globally, countries continue to face obstacles in accessing and deploying resources efficiently and effectively.

The Presidency emphasised the importance of identifying practical, action-oriented solutions that strengthen the connection between national priorities, implementation and access to finance. Discussion focused on both near-term operational improvements and longer-term reforms aimed at simplifying processes, strengthening country ownership, reducing transaction costs and improving the delivery of climate finance.

The Presidency also introduced the proposed Access to Climate Finance for SIDS and LDCs Statement and Action Plan, being developed with Pacific partners, as an initiative intended to support practical action on access challenges. In addition, the Presidency highlighted the Climate Implementation Bridge as an effort to better connect country priorities with implementation pathways and existing sources of finance and support.

III. Panel Perspectives

Ruel Yamuna – Pacific COP31 Envoy for Access to Finance

Ruel Yamuna emphasised the critical role that observer organisations play in advancing climate action through their technical expertise, practical experience, innovation and accountability. Drawing on Pacific perspectives, he highlighted that climate finance must ultimately support resilience, livelihoods, essential services and the long-term wellbeing of communities. He underscored the persistent gap between broad international agreement on climate finance objectives and the delivery of tangible outcomes on the ground, calling for finance that is more accessible, predictable and responsive to the realities of Pacific Small Island Developing States. He also pointed to regionally led solutions, including the Pacific Resilience Facility, as examples of practical approaches designed around Pacific needs and priorities.

Chavi Meattle – Climate Policy Initiative

Chavi Meattle presented the global climate finance landscape, noting that while total flows approached US$2 trillion in 2024, only a small proportion reached Least Developed Countries, with flows declining in recent years despite growing investment needs. She argued that headline finance figures often mask important questions about who receives funding, from whom, and on what terms. From this perspective, access to finance should be judged by recipient countries and whether existing systems genuinely reduce barriers or instead add complexity through multiple intermediaries, consultants and overlapping requirements. She highlighted the importance of strengthening capacity, predictability, transparency and process efficiency to ensure finance reaches countries in a timely and effective manner.

Kunal Singh – Pacific Community

Building on the broader discussion of global finance flows, Kunal Singh focused on the specific challenges facing Pacific Small Island Developing States in accessing climate finance. He emphasised that long-term institutional capacity building is essential to enable countries to manage and access finance effectively, rather than relying on one-off technical assistance. He highlighted the value of regional approaches that aggregate smaller projects and investment opportunities, helping to overcome scale constraints and attract larger sources of funding. Examples included the Unlocking Pacific Blue Prosperity initiative and regional programmatic approaches through the Green Climate Fund, which aim to blend grant and non-grant finance, mobilise greater investment and reduce transaction costs for smaller Pacific states.

IV. Key Discussion Themes

The Observer Forum featured interventions from those speaking on behalf of observer constituencies, parties and international organisations. A total of eight speakers on behalf of observer constituencies, three representatives from Parties, as well as one international organisation, contributed to the discussion.

Access and delivery remain the central challenge

Many participants noted that growing climate finance volumes have not necessarily translated into improved access for developing countries. Discussions highlighted a persistent gap

between commitments and delivery, with participants emphasising that success should be measured not only by finance mobilised, but by whether resources reach countries and communities in a timely, predictable and effective manner. Participants cited lengthy approval processes, extensive documentation requirements, delays in disbursement and fragmented funding arrangements as some key barriers that continue to constrain delivery. Other participants also noted that access challenges can be compounded by debt burdens and increasing climate impacts and vulnerabilities.

Public finance remains foundational

Many participants highlighted the continuing importance of public finance, particularly for adaptation, resilience-building and support for vulnerable countries and communities. Several observers stressed the role of concessional and grant-based finance in addressing needs that may not be met through commercial investment alone, while noting that public finance can help mobilise broader investment and support long-term development outcomes.

Simpler systems and stronger country ownership

Most participants identified complexity within the climate finance architecture as a significant barrier to access. Discussions focused on reducing administrative burden, streamlining processes and improving coordination across institutions. There was broad support for approaches that strengthen country ownership and many highlighted the value of strengthening national institutions and systems to enable countries to identify priorities, coordinate support and manage finance effectively.

Discussion underscored the importance of simplifying procedures where possible, improving coherence across climate finance providers and reducing unnecessary transaction costs. Participants noted that streamlined and more predictable processes could help improve accessibility while allowing countries to focus resources on implementation.

Building capacity and improving equitable access

Many participants stressed that improving access requires sustained investment in institutional capability, national systems and project development capacity. Several noted that countries facing the greatest climate vulnerabilities, particularly LDCs and SIDS, often continue to face the greatest barriers to accessing finance, highlighting the need for approaches that better reflect differing national circumstances and capacities.

Most participants focused on practical approaches that could help address these challenges, including enhanced readiness support, targeted capacity-building initiatives and more tailored approaches to finance delivery that reflect different national circumstances and capacities.

Regional solutions and system-wide reform

Many participants highlighted the value of regional and programmatic approaches in reducing transaction costs, strengthening capacity and mobilising finance at scale, particularly for smaller and more vulnerable countries. Some participants also noted that climate finance access is linked to broader challenges within the international financial system, including debt,

borrowing costs and investment risks, and emphasised the importance of complementary reforms that improve affordability and access to finance.

Conclusion and Looking Ahead

The discussion highlighted a broad degree of alignment around the need for practical, implementation-focused reforms to improve access to climate finance, reduce complexity and support country-led approaches.

While perspectives differed regarding specific financing instruments and institutional approaches, participants identified considerable common ground on the need for climate finance systems to become more responsive, accessible and effective. Across constituencies, there was strong interest in continued dialogue on practical solutions that can help ensure climate finance reaches countries and communities more efficiently and supports the delivery of climate action on the ground.