Harder, Better, Faster, Stronger

As Wednesday’s stocktaking made clear, all Parties agree we need to do quite a bit of work to get the ambitious, equitable and comprehensive climate deal the world needs. As one French group (no, not the incoming Presidency) puts it; we need to work harder, better, faster, stronger.

Progress is needed today to develop constructive bridging proposals on concepts and text. The challenge is no mean feat; it is an international agreement we’re trying to get, after all. So the ADP co-chairs, co-facilitators, and all Parties need to work harder, better and faster to craft a concise, well-organised text. We’ll need a text that is stronger, with options for a truly ambitious outcome, that lets us start real negotiations when we next meet in Bonn in October.

Over the next six weeks, there are a series of important political discussions that can inject political momentum into October’s negotiations. These include this coming week’s ministerial consultations in Paris, the September 27th leaders’ climate luncheon in New York, and the early October finance ministers meeting in Lima.

ECO reminds Parties that we must leave the last ADP meeting before Paris with a manageable set of textual options on the political issues ministers will have to resolve.

We have full confidence that the Peruvian and French presidencies will continue building trust and understanding among ministers, identifying possible resolutions for key issues well before crunch time in Paris.

If we follow this roadmap, and Parties work intensively in a spirit of compromise, we can achieve the deal we need in Paris – a hopeful outcome with avenues to ramp up ambition while safeguarding vulnerable communities around the world. But there is no more time to lose… and hence the need for harder, better, faster stronger efforts.

Let’s Be Clear

Being clear helps better direct policy and allocate resources appropriately. So ECO also wants to be clear. Paris needs to improve transparency and accountability on many different fronts: mitigation and adaptation actions and means of implementation. And to be even clearer, it does not mean additional burden. And importantly, improved transparency and accountability will build trust.

Let’s start with guiding principles and rules to count emissions and preserve environmental integrity of commitments. We also need to assess the quality of information and scale of countries’ actions, as well as a credible process to support compliance and effective implementation.

Of course, we’re not starting from scratch. Let’s build on the MRV experience of mitigation: measurement (collection of information domestically), reporting (provision of this information internationally), and verification (checking by independent experts). It is critical to track whether the collective effort is enough to keep emission levels below the 1.5°C warming trajectory that we need to avoid the worst impacts of climate change. Sharing information on current or planned domestic laws, standards, or other enforceable provisions also helps identify where international cooperation, support, or capacity building might be most helpful.

Without transparency, we cannot understand country pledges, avoid double-counting of efforts, or facilitate compliance. Unless stakeholders perceive transparency provisions as fair, with continuous improvement of support, broader negotiations will stall.

The transparency system must be evolving, flexible and recognise that Parties are starting from different points and have varying levels of responsibility and capability. Flexibility can be framed in terms of scope, level and type of actions, methodological tiers, and frequency of reporting – all leading to continuous improvement. It is clear that Parties’ MRV obligations should not be less stringent than in the past or present.

Ahead of Paris, Parties can agree on the objective, scope and guiding principles, laying the foundation of an enhanced MRV regime that allows for improvement of data quality, and informs how actions and support can be scaled up over time. Middle ground options can then be made clear and detailed work programs enabled in COP decisions for elaborating and reviewing rules and guidelines. That way, we can leave Bonn with a clear direction on where we are going.
Let’s Get Ethical

FYI: ECO is highly principled, and believes that a key role of the Paris agreement will be to enshrine durable principles. Specifically for carbon markets, the following principles should be inscribed:

Real: unless the emissions reductions have actually occurred, and are not an accountancy trick, what’s the point of a market?
Supplemental: a failure of carbon markets has been the result of inadequate levels of ambition to drive the market. Only countries with targets that represent their fair share of effort towards the 1.5°C goal should be allowed to trade, and then only for levels of ambition above that fair share.
Addional: any credits that are traded need to represent emissions reductions achieved above a credible baseline.
Internationally verifiable: for those participating in the market, confidence in the quality of the credits is paramount. Alas, only through transparency will this confidence be achieved.
Permanent emissions reductions: having the emissions reappear at a later date makes the credits a mere accountancy trick.
Avoid double counting: despite getting a Fossil on this, Brazil still does not understand that this is an issue. Counting a single credit twice as contributing towards action misses the whole point.
Deliver sustainable development co-benefits: there are many other environmental, developmental and human rights issues that at worst credits and markets should not undermine, and at best should actively contribute to improving.

Transport Needs to Get Moving

Delegates, are you also hoping that soon you'll be able to come to Bonn in super-efficient aircraft, helping to solve the problem of emissions from international aviation? ECO is guessing that the answer is a resounding: “Yes!”

Unless we take action now, that scenario is looking less and less likely. A report this week from the International Council on Clean Transportation has found that fuel-burn efficiency improvements for new aircraft have fallen to 1.1% per year, against the industry target of 2% per year. With passenger numbers increasing every year, aviation emissions are expected to grow by up to 300% by 2050. Yes, you read that right. This would be a huge blow to our efforts to limit global temperature increase to 1.5°C.
The International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) needs to step up its climate efforts. Parties to ICAO must adopt a meaningful CO2 standard for new aircraft—incredibly, none currently exist—and agree to a market-based mechanism to close the remaining gap between aircraft efficiency and passenger growth.
The situation is also dire with international shipping. The International Maritime Organisation (IMO) is refusing to set an emissions target at all. The transport sector needs to get moving on mitigation. The wording in Part III of the co-chairs’ tool on ICAO and IMO taking action to reduce emissions needs to be firmly placed in the agreement. Otherwise these sectors risk undermining other efforts to reduce emissions.

Caring for Land, Securing our Food

Does anyone really question whether land is central to what we’re all trying to do here in the UNFCCC? No, didn’t think so. Not only is the land sector critical to our mitigation efforts, but one of the key reasons we so urgently need to stop climate change is to still be able to use it to grow food and, um, eat, in a few decades’ time.

It’s obvious that to help us stay below 1.5°C temperature rise, some types of land must act as sinks and carbon stores. We need to do everything we can to protect, maintain and restore critical ecosystems such as natural forests, grasslands and degraded peatlands. Our survival, and most of the living species we share our planet with, depend on it. In fact, we need the work on land to come on top of everything else we can do to reduce our emissions from other sectors, particularly industry and energy. So let’s be honest; land cannot be used to lower ambition elsewhere.

At the same time, let’s not get carried away in our enthusiasm for mitigation in the land sector. Countries need to avoid any perverse incentives that conflict with food production, destroy natural ecosystems, threaten indigenous peoples’ rights, drive land grabs, increase hunger, harm animal welfare, or make life even tougher for vulnerable communities. ECO suggests a rather elegant solution: Parties should be as clear as possible in the text about the kinds of lands and mitigation actions that should be prioritised, and that peoples’ rights must be protected.

With this in mind, ECO hopes that there will be resounding support for the Parties that have introduced text to ensure food security and social and environmental protections into the General Objective of the new agreement.

Addressing land properly in the new agreement presents an exciting opportunity to fix the gaps in the old regime, step up ambition, and protect our future food security. We’re all hungry for change.

Enabling Clarity on “Enabling Environments”

All week, the expression “enabling environments” kept coming back into use during the finance sessions. Several Parties raised questions about what it actually means. ECO has a few worries of its own. Since this week has been about gathering feedback and building convergence, a bit more clarity on this term needs to be enabled.

Will developing countries need to establish some sort of “appropriate conditions” in order to attract greater flows of private finance? And what would those conditions be? Surely countries would not be required to relax their environmental or labour regulations just to allow the private sector to extract extra profit. Right?
And would the expansion of “enabling environments” reduce developed countries’ obligations to provide adequate levels of public climate finance to support extra action in vulnerable developing countries. Surely not.

These are just some of the questions that strike ECO upon hearing the echoes of “enabling environments”. It would be both a shame and slightly ironic if these concerns rang true, making the overall environments even less enabled to address the needs of affected people, ecosystems(?) and communities.

ECO totally supports the shift of overall financial flows and investments away from high-carbon to low-carbon and climate resilient activity. But that should happen alongside continued provisions of public finance, part of which is crucial to support ambitious policies and targets, strong and effective country institutions, and informed and empowered policymakers and civil society.

Maybe “enabling environments” will turn out to be more than a buzzword, but this can only happen if negotiators enable an environment for discussions and clarity on the type of policies, targets and institutions it should include.