

ECO



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Long-term Strategies: The Time is Now!

It is no secret that, while Parties' NDC's represent an improvement over business-as-usual trajectories, they fall short of meeting the Paris Agreement's temperature goals. Moreover, global emissions are not on track to peak by 2020, let alone steep reductions thereafter. According to the UNEP Emissions Gap Report, to have a likely chance of limiting warming to 2 °C, carbon dioxide emissions need to drop to net zero between 2060 and 2075. To limit warming to 1.5 °C, carbon dioxide emissions need to drop to net zero 15 years earlier, between 2045 and 2050. This will require significant transformation at an unprecedented scale and pace.

If our global community is to have a fighting chance of meeting these temperature goals, we urgently need to embrace more long-term and holistic strategies for our global development. Failure to do so risks driving investments towards incremental improvements: like replacing coal with natural gas or improving efficiency of fossil-fueled vehicles and appliances. These improvements, while sufficient to achieve NDC targets, are not sufficient to achieve the transformative changes, like transitioning to zero-carbon energy and electrifying vehicles, necessary to decarbonize the economy.

The Paris Agreement and its associated decisions recognize this need and invite Parties to submit mid-century, long-term low-greenhouse gas emissions development strategies. Such long-term strategies can help countries save money by avoiding investments that are not consistent with achieving net-zero emissions and climate resilient development. They can also send necessary long-term signals to the private sector, thereby fostering innovation and allowing companies to reap the benefits of early action.

Long-term planning also offers an important opportunity to integrate the consideration of multiple development objectives. The solutions to climate change are often also the solutions to other sustainable development goals. The New Climate Economy, for example, has demonstrated that climate action and economic growth go hand-in-hand, but trade-offs need to be identified and managed. The development of long-term strategies provides an opportunity to bring all relevant ministries, different governance levels (cities, regions), as well as a broad array of stakeholders together to plan and prepare accordingly.

We are encouraged by the countries that have already communicated their long-term strategies to the UNFCCC. We hope that others will do so soon, so that the strategies can guide implementation and the next NDCs. The perfect need not be the enemy of the good — in fact all of the long-term strategies submitted so far are intended to be updated (and we hope revised upwards) periodically. But it's critical that we don't delay their development, given that they can help direct investments towards clean renewable energy options, and sustainable long-term planning, in line with the necessary transformation to zero carbon economies and societies.

Let's Talk About Adaptation Communication

Last week, Parties spent a lot of time and energy discussing adaptation communication under Article 7.10 of the Paris Agreement, as well as Article 13, related to transparency of actions. ECO is pleased with this and sees it as a step towards an effort to allocate adaptation an equal status with mitigation in the Paris Agreement.

The adaptation communications also provide a welcome opportunity for countries to share their adaptation efforts, achievements, and good practices, as well as challenges and gaps in a coherent and coordinated way. A new adaptation registry could serve as an entry point for the learning and sharing of best practices and results to help improve the impact of adaptation efforts.

After this week's negotiations, a consensus is emerging on the purposes and elements of the adaptation communications and we are indeed pleased to see many delegations recognizing its usefulness. The talks seemed to be stuck, for some time, on the issue of flexibility: some countries seem to suggest that flexibility means no guidance on the elements and information that should be part of the adaptation communication. ECO believes there should be agreement on common elements to be addressed, leaving enough flexibility for Parties to provide the information that is available and useful to communicate.

This will also make the task easier for governments when they consult with civil society and institutions on what to present in a communication. Without any guidance — so-called "maximum flexibility" — there is the risk of losing the opportunity to effectively synthesize and aggregate information, which could inform the Global Stocktake on progress towards the Global Goal on Adaptation and the decisions that Parties will take upon these.

A structure for what elements and information should be part of the adaptation communications will be useful. Most of the information will already be available in other documents: NDCs, National Adaptation Plans, the sustainable development indicators, and national communications. Agreeing on purpose and elements for the communications will make the data more easily accessible. Countries with lower capacity should be supported with capacity-building and finance.

Adaptation principles from Article 7.5 have not been mentioned much in this forum. We hope that silence means consent in a good way: adaptation actions must be country-driven, gender responsive, participatory, and fully transparent...and based on available science and... knowledge of indigenous peoples ... (we will not repeat it all). Almost 150 countries have already ratified these principles, and providing information in the communications on how these are addressed will be to the benefit of all.

How UNFCCC Can Co-pilot Aviation's Climate Deal

Airlines face a big problem with numbers when it comes to the sector's Carbon Offset and Reduction System for International Aviation (CORSIA) — the planned global measure to offset the sector's emissions growth above 2020 levels.

That's because we're not quite sure how CORSIA's numbers will add up. As airline emissions continue to grow, airlines will need to buy an increasing number of offsets from other sectors. But the Paris Agreement makes this tricky, as all states have submitted pledges which aim to be economy-wide, and increase in ambition over time. So, when an airline buys an offset, how can it be sure that the emission reduction isn't being claimed by a state or someone else?

There are many ways that CORSIA can screw up the numbers: for example, if the same emission reduction is sold to two different airlines, or sold once but claimed elsewhere. This is worrying because: given the sector's major and growing climate impact, it badly needs a working mitigation measure that can assure who should claim what reduction.

The good news is that states, airlines, and civil society are hard at work trying to fix this problem. However, the UN agency running this measure, ICAO, can't solve this problem on its own. That's why we need UNFCCC and its APA to come to the rescue! ECO reckons it knows a thing or two about carbon markets and emissions counting, and so it should pitch in to help airlines out.

How? By remembering the aviation sector when drafting its rules, especially for accounting (Article 4.13), markets (Article 6), and transparency (Article 13). Aviation is going to be a big buyer of offsets. If UNFCCC parties don't add back into their emissions inventories an amount of emissions equal to the credits they "export" to international aviation, both the Parties and the airlines will be trafficking in hot air.

So come on UNFCCC, will you be the perfect co-pilot to ICAO's CORSIA?

Text or Bust

There comes a time, in every round of negotiations, when a clamour builds for a negotiating text. The decision to shift into textual negotiations is not to be taken lightly. ECO knows well the impact on our dear negotiators of the first glimpse of square brackets on the screen. It inevitably triggers polarization, and retreat into single-minded defence of every one of their valued textual creations.

But sooner or later, on the way to the 2018 package, negotiators have to bite the bullet and dive into textual negotiating mode. There seems to be a surge of enthusiasm for doing this during COP23 in November. ECO would strongly argue that it is necessary to reach a text at COP23. Being mindful of this, the submissions and workshops need to help countries make the leap forward towards text.

Reflecting the submissions and the workshop, the Pre-COP should gather key political questions, such as flexibility and differentiation, for Ministers to provide clear guidance to their negotiators.

There is also the question of what kind of text will emerge at COP23 and how to generate its elements. Will the paragraphs be full-blown legal text? Or should the first step be a more descriptive text that would be converted into legal text at a later date? Also, will the different elements move forward in parallel in the different groups, or will there be one consolidated draft text for the rulebook? ECO doesn't have strong views regarding these two options, but Parties should leave Bonn this week with a clear idea, to guide their preparations for a productive COP23.

Bring Climate-Induced Migration Issues to the Table!

The fact that COP23 will be the first COP under the presidency of a small island state, Fiji, draws particular attention to the plight of those that are most vulnerable to the effects of climate change. One of the starkest impacts will be the forced migration of millions of people, as sea levels rise and natural disasters grow more frequent.

As recently as this past Wednesday, Vanuatu was hit by cyclone Donna, and cyclone Ella also came close to striking Fiji. As climate change progresses, these extreme events will only intensify, along with other effects such as desertification, sea level rise, and soil erosion. These phenomena will drive millions of people away from their homes, often with no hope of return. The International Displacement Monitoring Centre estimates that roughly 22.5 million persons are already displaced each year because of climate change. Future forecasts indicate that there may be as many as 200 million to 1 billion climate migrants by 2050. These climate change induced migrations will affect developing countries, as well as developed countries. However, not all people have the same capacity or economic ability to resettle.

In light of this, the UNFCCC climate talks must be an arena to discuss the important issue of climate-induced displacement, especially now that the Paris Agreement has explicitly connected climate change to human rights. The rights of displaced people should be a key topic of discussion, leading to the framing of a better governance structure to help countries cope. Effective adaptation measures and climate change resilience building, as well as careful planning and support for relocation and resettlement, are essential to help countries limit forced migration.

The issue of climate-induced migration requires political attention and careful negotiation that considers cross-disciplinary issues such as human rights; women's rights; preservation of culture and traditions; and food security. With a small island state that is particularly vulnerable to climate induced migration presiding over COP 23, it would only be appropriate that Parties take collective responsibility for highlighting the challenges faced by climate migrants, and the need for measures to protect their rights – both under the UNFCCC and in ongoing UN processes related to migration.

Bringing Science to the Spotlight

On Saturday, ECO expressed its expectations on the Facilitative Dialogue (FD 2018), highlighting it as the next big opportunity.

One important contribution to make FD 2018 a big opportunity will come from the Special Report of IPCC on 1.5 degrees, which is expected to be adopted in September 2018. We remember the positive experiences with the Structured Expert Dialogue (SED), which was the delivery vehicle of the results of IPCC AR5 to the UNFCCC. The SED helped to communicate the new scientific background to the delegates. So what is the best way to bring the results of IPCC SR1.5 to FD 2018?

As the Second Periodical Review will begin its work only in 2019, another procedure is necessary to extract the relevant results of IPCC SR1.5, and summarize them in a report which should be presented to FD 2018.

To make this happen, ECO appeals to the Fijian Presidency to have this issue discussed at COP 23; and suggests that the design of FD2018, to be adopted in COP23, should allow the space for sound scientific inputs from the IPCC SR1.5, taking into account lessons from the Structured Expert Dialogue. In the open-ended informal consultations on FD2018, many constructive propositions were tabled, notably from South Korea on behalf of EIG, on how FD 2018 could benefit from IPCC SR1.5.

But that's not enough. Remember the successful INDC Forum in Rabat before COP 21? It would be helpful if a similar, transparent forum was organised on the results of IPCC SR1.5. Parties and non-party stakeholders could get insights from the modelled impacts of the 1.5 degree development pathways and what is required to stop warming at 1.5 degrees in preparation for FD 2018 at COP 24.