



BLOG POST November 2nd 2017

Safeguarding the spirit of Paris: where do we stand and what is at stake at COP23?

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 Reading time: 5 min



COP23 follows another year of extreme weather events, with some impacts once again breaking historic records—massive floods in Central and South Asia, or the recent series of hurricanes in North America and the Caribbean. For the first time, an Island Nation, the Republic of Fiji, is presiding over the COP. Given the particular context coupled with uncertainty on future financial flows, we can expect Fiji to focus on issues dear to coalitions such as the Climate Vulnerable Forum, advocating for a “solidarity package”, encompassing intertwined issues such as finance, adaptation, capacity building and loss and damage. Beyond the symbol of solidarity, the Fijian presidency will have the difficult task to keep the constructive

spirit and unity patchwork behind the Paris Agreement (PA) despite the temptation of some to give ground to old divisions. This task hinges on careful climate diplomacy, also by the European Union, since building bridges and enhancing trust between vulnerable developing countries and developed countries is key to higher ambition.

State of play

Even if it did not come as a surprise, the announcement of the US to withdraw from the PA was a shock that extended far beyond the climate community and actually played a mobilizing and even catalyzing role for climate action by all sorts of stakeholders, from Nations to individuals, from cities to companies. While most countries stood together refusing to re-negotiate and reaffirming the need for strong climate action and global governance, it remains to be seen how the first COP after the US withdrawal announcement will digest and translate these statements of goodwill into actual climate action. Let us just hope that Donald Trump did not lower the bar to the point where being “ambitious” is now just staying part of the Paris Agreement. Because what science keeps telling us over and over again is that it is far from being enough if we want to keep our temperature goals in reach.

The lack of expected deliverables at COP23 will undoubtedly shift the world’s attention from what happens in the Bula zone (Blue zone)—dedicated to the negotiations—to the Bonn zone (or Green zone)—where the Global Climate Action Agenda will be the focus, more than in previous instances. This year, key signals on the advancement of global climate policies might not come from intergovernmental debates but rather from voluntary coalitions of governments, civil society and economic players. Everyone will be on the lookout for climate leadership to re-emerge, but in a distributed fashion, as countries are not their sole embodiment anymore.

The EU has been more active around the Action Agenda than in the negotiation space, although one of its Member States (Poland) will again be taking the COP presidency next year. Subnational leaders are front and center, as California Governor Jerry Brown, former New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg, and the ‘We are still in’ coalition demonstrate by pursuing embattled climate action in the US. Whether this leadership actually translates into further action on the ground remains to be seen. There will be a myriad of opportunities to showcase climate action giving a chance to assess the dynamics of the Global Climate Action Agenda and the progress it can deliver.

COP 23 negotiations

Upcoming negotiations have two important tasks to fulfil: to advance the current skeleton of the Paris rulebook and the design of the Facilitative Dialogue. While many expect a technical COP—negotiators pondering on consensual wording of the rulebook—it will achieve another outcome, which will not be negotiated per se: the design of the Facilitative Dialogue where Parties, next year, will take stock of their collective climate efforts, which, if designed in a robust and sensible manner, can already help building the conditions for Parties to review their climate ambition upwards.

Rulebook

On the rulebook, headway at preceding climate conferences was small but incremental where remaining issues to resolve include, among other things: the transparency framework, adaptation communication, NDCs guidelines, or the design of the Global Stocktake as well as questions relative to implementation and compliance.^[1] Although the rulebook will not be finalized before COP24, success will be assessed based on progress along a set of common

rules for all with built-in flexibility based on countries' capacities.

Facilitative Dialogue

The Fiji Presidency, after extensive consultations with Parties and non-Parties alike, has the pressing task to propose the design of a dialogue, a process that will not be limited to a single moment at COP24. It will likely consist of a preparatory phase during the next Bonn session in early 2018, and a political phase taking place at COP24. To achieve the progress needed, the Fijian Presidency introduced the *Talanoa* concept referring to a rich conversation where ideas are shared and trust is built through mutual understanding and empathy. Recalling that current ambition levels are far from being sufficient, it is urgent that the right incentives be in place so that Parties *want* to revise their NDCs, and the right opportunities made available so they *can* actually submit more ambitious ones ahead of 2020.

Beyond COP23, the road for ambition

Overall this COP will likely be much more important and symbolic than many acknowledge yet, as it opens a three-year political sequence during which other climate summits will burgeon: only a few weeks after COP23 will President Macron invite the world to Paris, on December 12, to celebrate the two-year anniversary of the PA, and mobilize climate finance towards a real and profound resilient and low-carbon transformation. Less than a year later and just a couple of month before COP24, California Governor Jerry Brown aims at reassuring the world that US climate ambition has not fell but been transferred from the federal to the State and local level. And the UN Secretary General is promising yet another one in 2019. This profusion of meetings will make clear the inadequacy of existing efforts^[2] and create momentum towards additional “ambition”. But the notion of ambition itself, often restricted to countries' aggregate emission levels, suffers from a lack of a comprehensive recognition, which would enable countries to engage in a constructive discussion.^[3] Only by adopting a broader lens—and a richer, more operational and thus more effective view—can policymakers enhance their level of ambition, by considering the long-term sectoral transformation needed to drive decarbonization.^[4] COP23 seems to be the time to address this and start thinking about ambition in a multi-dimensional way. Ahead of COP23, IDDRI has put forward analyses and recommendations on how to foster sectoral climate action as a means to enhancing domestic and collective ambition. Furthermore, IDDRI will be organizing, participating and contributing to several events in Bonn.

^[1] Biniarz, S. (2017). [Elaborating Article 15 of the Paris Agreement: Facilitating Implementation and Promoting Compliance](#). IDDRI, *Policy Briefs* N°10/17. ^[2] UNEP (2017). [The Emissions Gap Report 2017 - A UN Environment Synthesis Report](#). United Nations Environment Programme. ^[3] Levai, D., Baron, R. (2017). [Beyond emission targets: ambition in the context of the 2018 Facilitative Dialogue](#). IDDRI, *Policy Briefs* N°12/17. ^[4] Transports Deep Decarbonization Pathways Project Consortium (2017, *forthcoming*). [Beyond emission targets: how to decarbonize the passenger transport sector](#). IDDRI, *Policy Briefs* N°13/17.

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