IDDRI

BLOG POST December 3rd 2014

Equity strikes back

Auteur

Alexandra Deprez

Research Fellow, International climate governance

Reading time: 2 min

LIVE FROM LIMA // *The negotiation group on the 2015 climate change agreement got underway in Lima on Tuesday. There was an interesting exchange on the concept of equity, which is still on-going. This prefigures the challenges to come in reaching a global climate agreement in Paris in 2015.*

The negotiation group on the 2015 climate change agreement got underway in Lima on Tuesday. Overall, there was not major breakdown in the negotiations, and after some procedural wrangling over working methods the negotiations eventually proceeded into substance.

There was an interesting exchange on the concept of equity, which is still on-going. This prefigures the challenges to come in reaching a global climate agreement in Paris in 2015. Up until now, equity has been surprisingly absent from the negotiations on the new Paris agreement. Why? There is increasing recognition that the way that “developed” and “developing” countries are defined in the climate negotiations is out of date. Yet it has proven impossible to explicitly renegotiate these groups. Instead of tackling this directly, countries had decided that each would determine its own emissions reduction target. In this way, each country would make its own assessment of what was an equitable contribution and there is no need for an explicit definition of what each group – developed and developing – must do.

So far so good, apparently. Equity in the case of emissions targets is more or less ‘solved’: every country needs to act, but these actions are nationally determined. Not so fast. There are still two problems. Firstly, how can we ensure that these ‘self-defined’ emissions targets are sufficient to keep warming at safe levels – as noted by the environmental NGOs in a report released today? Secondly, unlike emissions targets where all countries should contribute, there are areas where developed and developing countries continue to have quite different obligations, such as financing mitigation and adaptation in developing countries, as well as legal accountability for emissions targets. Should all countries be legally bound? Here equity may be more difficult, because these questions are more black-and-white. An approach based on contributions by all and self-selection along a spectrum of efforts, as we have with emissions reductions, is less workable for such a yes-or-no question.

But continued black-and-white differentiation doesn’t reflect the economic diversity of countries within the developed-developing country groups, nor changes in their capacity to respond to climate change. In order to address this problem, the negotiations have recently introduced the concept of ‘evolving’ responsibilities. The Least Developed Countries have proposed a revision of the definition of the developed and developing country groups, based on the kinds of emissions targets countries take on. A revision could involve the creation of several kinds of groups, such as developed, advanced developing and developing countries - like the Brazil proposal called ‘concentric differentiation’. Other countries have expressed strong opposition to what they see as revisiting the Convention.

So the equity discussion is wide open, this was reflected in sharp reactions of some countries to the negotiation text today.

CLIMATE