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INDCs: a new vehicle for international climate cooperation

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Countries have started to publish their intended nationally determined contributions (INDCs) to the international negotiation process. Switzerland and the EU have been the first, others should follow soon. It is now important that this process amplifies and accelerates. We explain here why, by stressing the fact that INDCs are part of a renewed and promising negotiation process, and by proposing ways for Parties to build and interpret them as constructively as possible.

INDCs are part of a renewed and promising negotiation process

In the lead up to COP21, the INDC process represents a fundamental change from past approaches to international climate cooperation. Notably, under the Kyoto protocol, commitments were proposed by Parties, but there was a negotiation, an adjustment of commitments and a top-down process to establish precise and universal rules for these commitments.

In Copenhagen, the situation was altogether different. National pledges were made at a time of high political pressure, when the shape of the regime being negotiated was completely unclear, particularly with respect to key aspects of objectives, differentiation and the overall framework for cooperation. There were also no common rules for transparency of pledges and no framework for accountability towards them.

Now, the situation has changed. With the INDC process, we have a top-down collective objective to limit warming to 2 degrees which is addressed through universal bottom contributions. These contributions are nonetheless proposed in the context of basic common rules and of existing accountability mechanisms developed since Copenhagen. There is also a more developed vision of the long-term cooperative agreement, building on what has been agreed and learnt since Copenhagen, in which these contributions will be anchored.

This new perspective reflects a renewed vision of a global climate agreement, with a clear acknowledgment that national appropriation of the climate agenda, combined with a dynamic, cooperative and universal framework, would result in a more flexible, efficient and fair way to address this transformational challenge towards the common 2°C objective. In this regard, INDCs must not be viewed as the final word on what a country can contribute; it rather constitutes the first concrete step to operationalize [a dynamic process](#) in which INDCs are the basis on which the Parties, in collaboration with the international community, must build to increase the ambition of action. Regular cycles and reviewing mechanisms will therefore be key to get a clear assessment of the global state of mitigation and adaptation efforts, and encourage countries to extend their commitments in ambition and forward in time.

In this context, INDCs should represent an opportunity for countries to share experiences and lessons, to engage in a dialogue to identify fields of cooperation to accelerate their efforts, and also create trust by providing transparent information on implementation.

For all these reasons, it is important that as many countries as possible submit their INDC as soon as possible in order to start preparing the core objective of COP21, which will be to set the framework for this process on the basis of their submitted INDC and, potentially, of any additional information supporting them.

Four criteria for Parties to build and interpret INDCs

In order for INDCs to effectively play this role of international climate cooperation vehicle, we see four key elements that countries should show through their INDCs, or at least that other Parties should be able to interpret on this basis.

First, it will be important to understand whether each INDC represents a strengthening of the ambition of climate action in each country. In other words, what are the signals that it sends to investors, the public, and to other countries regarding the trajectory envisaged? It will be important to be able to say, once the INDCs are on the table, that they represent a new dynamic and a shift of [trajectory for the global economy](#).

But in the context of a regime driven largely from the bottom up, a purely aggregate understanding of the INDCs is not sufficient. We thus propose three additional questions that should be asked of the policy ambition and trajectory summarized and quantified in each INDC. It is important to understand that the INDCs themselves may not provide

the answers to these questions; they need to be seen in the context of a broader understanding of the circumstances, policies and ambitions of each country. Hopefully, the regime will be able to provide answers to these questions over time, through a broader policy dialogue, transparency and periodic revision of the INDCs.

We therefore propose to interpret each INDC through four questions:

1. Does the INDC represent a strengthening of the ambition of climate action in the country (compared to national policies, previous pledges, etc.)?
2. How does the country plan to reach the objective of the INDC? Can we identify whether Parties provide transparent information on policies and measures they consider to reach the targets presented in their INDC, as a pre-condition to have shared discussions on the policy implementation, create trust, and reveal potential levers for increased ambition or cooperation?
3. How does the INDC relate to other national policy priorities? What is the connection between the INDC and the other domestic priorities, as a crucial driver for a real, comprehensive and long-lasting commitment to a low-carbon and climate-resilient development strategy? Is the INDC part of coherent economic and social development strategy?
4. What are the (national and international) blockages and opportunities to deeper emission reductions? Can we identify from the INDC areas of national policy and international cooperation that can help us to progressively increase the ambition of this and subsequent contributions?