



BLOG POST September 3rd 2015

ADP Bonn negotiations: What is the deal with strategic review?

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 Reading time: 7 min



With only 6 remaining negotiation days until COP21, the Bonn ADP session this week has to accelerate negotiations and make progress on building convergence, especially in those areas where it is most lacking.

In their 'tool' ([ADP.2015.4.Informal Note](#)), the ADP co-chairs identified the so called 'strategic review' as one of these areas particularly in need of work to clarify the existing options. Indeed, the tool's text on strategic review, and in particular the text situated in the 'draft agreement' (Part I) reveals several confusions, including on what is the review's purpose, focus, scale, timing, process, and outcome.

Before taking a closer look at these inconsistencies and attempting to bring clarity, it is useful to step back and revisit the basics. The main role of the Paris Agreement is to further the implementation of the objectives of the UNFCCC, notably to reach the global goal of keeping temperature rise below 2 degrees Celsius (in addition to reaching any other long-term goal the Parties might inscribe in the new agreement). It is now widely acknowledged that the INDCs submitted in 2015 will, when aggregated, most likely not be *ex ante* sufficient to place global emissions on a 2 degrees trajectory. Thus, the Paris Agreement has the fundamental role of instituting processes that enable countries to progressively raise their ambition in line with this long-term temperature goal.

Strategic review: the critical link between the transparency system and cycles of contributions

Two essential ambition-raising processes in the new agreement are the transparency system and rounds of collective action (also known as cycles of contributions). Indeed, a well-constructed transparency system that collects, processes, and shares information on the implementation of countries' Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) helps to build trust in collective action among them. In this way, the transparency system works to allay concerns which currently limit countries' mitigation ambition, including fears related to free riding, economic competitiveness issues, as well as fears related to the technical, social, political, and economic feasibility of deep decarbonisation (see this [blog post](#) and [IDDRI paper](#)). In turn, cycles of contributions will enable countries to progressively raise countries' ambition through regular moments of high-political visibility in which countries come together to revisit and extend their contributions (see [IDDRI's paper on rounds of collective action](#)).

While there is growing convergence on the possible general contours and elements of the transparency system and the cycles of contribution in the new agreement, the link between them still lacks clarity.

Linking the two ambition raising processes is precisely the vital role the strategic review should take on. In our view, the strategic review should be a collective review of global progress toward the achievement of the objectives of the agreement. Concretely, the strategic review would consist of an aggregate assessment of the implementation of NDCs.

Aggregate, as a critical complement to the assessment of individual country implementation the post-2020 transparency system would conduct, in following with the current transparency system's practice under the IAR (International Assessment and Review) and ICA (International Consultation and Analysis). The current assessment tracks progress toward achieving Cancun pledges; when transposed into the post-2020 climate regime it should track implementation of NDCs (see [IDDRI's transparency paper](#) for a proposal for how to transition from the current transparency system into the new one). While an individual assessment is important to keep individual countries accountable on their commitments, it cannot on its own fully build trust in collective action. Indeed, only an aggregate assessment can track broad implementation trends occurring across a group of countries or a region, and provide a synthetic view of how the world as a whole is progressing on implementation towards the 2 degree global goal.

Focused on *implementation of NDCs*, as an essential step to building trust in collective action and raising ambition. The strategic review should focus on building ambition, since this is the essential role of the Paris Agreement. To this end, it should be distinct from an *ex-ante* review of countries' commitments, which while essential for building trust among countries in their seriousness and willingness to act, and important for keeping the global community accountable to working toward the 2 degree goal, does not provide information on countries' on the ground mitigation action.

Better defining the strategic review allows us to clarify how it can be concretely linked to the transparency system and the cycles of contribution. For its inputs, the strategic review should draw primarily from the new transparency system's country-level reports (bi-annual reports on the implementation toward NDCs, and technical reports) and synthesis reports (of the 'peer-to-peer' sharing between countries), as well as from other sources of information (e.g.

IPCC reports, reports from UN agencies and other multilateral or external assessments, as the International Energy Agency (IEA)). The conclusions of the review would be summarized in an synthesis information report to be shared with the governing body of the new agreement, with the explicit purpose to serve as a key non-political strategic input into the following cycle of contributions.

Guiding principles of the strategic review

For the strategic review to be a success, it is fundamental that Parties also inscribe in the final Agreement text major principles to help guide the creation of its modalities, and enable its implementation.

Drawing on our research on the transparency system, the cycle of contributions, and the 2013-2015 review, and reflecting views present in the negotiation text, we have identified the following important principles for the strategic review:

1. Universal: all Parties to take part in the strategic review

In our view, all countries should take part in the strategic review. This would notably mean that firstly, the strategic review would draw from all individual country reports (from the transparency system) to produce its aggregate synthesis report on progress of implementation. Secondly, all countries would be expected to take into account the strategic review when updating their contributions (in a nationally-determined manner) in the following cycle.

2. Equitable: based on an equitable transparency system

Having as main input the reports of a transparency system in which countries equitably report on progress they are taking toward their NDC would go a long way to *de facto* render the strategic review equitable. Furthermore, if the strategic review is aggregate and has a purely information purpose, equity becomes less of a driving issue than in the transparency system, which operates at the country-level scale.

3. Technical: a process that is technical, rather than political

A strategic review that is technical, not political helps ensure that it not be hijacked and used as a proxy for political negotiations, which would affect its ability to produce results that inform the cycles in a neutral, factual manner. This conclusion is based in particular on our detailed analysis of the 2013-2015 Review, from which we concluded that the Review is likely to fail in influencing the ADP outcome in 2015 (as it was supposed to) because it became too politicized. To this end, we suggest that the strategic review be conducted not in an open plenary, but rather by an *ad hoc* Committee. This Committee would be convened of Parties' representatives, selected on the basis of expertise and from a representative group of Parties, members of the Convention's sectoral bodies (the Adaptation Committee, the Standing Committee on Finance, the Technology Executive Committee) and the IPCC. The Standing Committee of Finance could serve as a model for this Committee.

4. National determination and self-differentiation: regarding the strategic review's outcome

The outcome of the strategic review should be a report to be shared with the COP, and for use by countries to raise their ambition in their subsequent contributions along the no-backsliding principle, but also in keeping with the principles of self-differentiation and national determination. National determination here means that the strategic review aims to provide information that should influence countries' updated contributions, but that since these are nationally determined there would be no top-down imposition of conclusions from the strategic review onto Parties.

5. Periodical: undertaken every 5 years, in view of being an input into and influencing the following cycle of contributions

The strategic review informing countries' updating of their commitments should thus take place likewise every five years, sufficiently in advance of the cycle year to influence this process, yet also close to it to be as timely as possible.

6. *Facilitates clarity and understanding of aggregate progress, to influence countries to provide contributions that progress beyond the previous undertakings of the Party*

The outcome of the strategic review (a synthesis report) should facilitate clarity and understanding of the implementation that has been taken so far, and thus how far countries in aggregate are from the 2 degree and other global goals, and thus give a sense of direction for the new contributions.

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