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What kind of ambition mechanism for the Paris agreement?

Auteur

Henri Waisman

Director, Deep Decarbonization Pathways programme

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*As the final negotiation session before the Paris conference is being held in Bonn, some important progress has been made on two key elements defining the context of these negotiations: **the financial commitment of 100 billion dollars per year**, which serves as a benchmark for the North-South financial solidarity efforts, and **national contributions, which show country commitments (INDCs), especially in terms of greenhouse gas emissions reductions.***

1. Taking stock of INDCs ahead of COP21

The overview of INDCs submitted so far is based on two observations.

First, the high level of participation – 156 countries representing almost 90% of greenhouse gas emissions have submitted their INDCs to the UNFCCC – is an important indicator of the very widespread adoption of the idea that ambitious emissions reductions must be achieved at the level of each individual country, including developing countries. This in itself is a shift away from the prevalent approach seen in negotiations so far. In addition, these contributions are more robust than the Copenhagen pledges, since they are largely based on more developed technical analyses and policy frameworks.

Second, this raises the question of the ambition of these contributions in relation to the 2°C limit. Despite the high level of uncertainty – due in particular to an intrinsic methodological challenge, between commitments set for 2025 or 2030, and the need for emissions pathways for the whole century to enable a robust assessment of the scope of climate change by 2100^[1] – assessments converge to conclude that current commitments are insufficient in view of the emissions reductions required by the 2°C limit. In particular, the pathway currently defined would imply a drastic shift in post-2030 investment trends to comply with the 2°C pathway with highly disruptive effects on the economy, which could be significantly reduced by a rapid increase in low-carbon investments ([see MILES report](#)).

2. Towards a dynamic agreement with review cycles for national commitments

These analyses demonstrate the need to pursue the work launched in this round of INDCs, in terms of both emissions reduction targets – in order to increase their ambition to reach levels compatible with the 2°C limit – and of details about the content of the changes underway – in order to provide more details about the actions envisaged to produce shifts in national emissions pathways.

It thus seems clear that the submission of national emissions reduction targets should not end in 2015, but that countries should be encouraged to submit regular reviews of these commitments by building on the lessons learned by all concerned during preparations for the first generation of INDCs. This process to further develop the INDCs should be based on several key ideas.

Rapid reviews of commitments for 2030. These reviews need to be made rapidly in order to enable more ambitious changes for 2030. The goal is to give as quickly as possible a clear signal that the low-carbon transition is underway in order to provide the incentives required to speed up the transition (especially where investment is concerned). This is a basic element to avoid the risk of becoming trapped in changes of insufficient scope that could only be subsequently reversed at a high cost. One of the proposals currently being discussed is a review no more than five years from now, which appears to be a maximum timeframe when considering significant reviews of targets for the next 15 years.

A progressive increase in ambition. These reviews will need to mark a progressive increase in the level of ambition for associated emissions reductions, reflecting the most significant opportunities for reducing emissions provided by national circumstances. This ratchet mechanism is essential to avoid going backwards in terms of ambition. Indirectly, it defines the appropriate approach to the definition of these reviews, in other words taking the previous submission as a starting point and identifying its possibilities for additional ambition that can be obtained in particular through a better understanding of perspectives on national potential and international conditions.

Integrating commitments into long-term pathways. Reviews of commitments should be integrated into the long term, as the only way of connecting country commitments to the climate target. The goal here is not to envisage the submission of legally binding long-term pathways, but to suggest that the commitments submitted by countries should be designed so as to include their impacts on pathways beyond the formal commitment period in order to avoid becoming trapped and to enable more explicit linkages with the 2°C goal.

Greater transparency on the content of changes. Countries must provide clear, transparent and informative information about the content of the changes envisaged, with greater detail on the sequence of changes to the different levers for change at the economic sector level. An illustration of this kind of approach is provided by the analysis of decarbonisation pathways in 16 countries conducted as part of the [Deep Decarbonization Pathways Project](#). In addition to the increase in mutual trust between Parties resulting from a shared understanding of the efforts made, this kind of detailed approach should make it possible to specifically structure discussions around the focal points of international discussions and should thus serve as an anchor point for the review mechanism. Transparency on the content of national changes is a precondition for identifying the elements of international cooperation capable of providing additional solutions to enable more ambitious emissions reductions in some countries. Here we see the definition of a potential back and forth process between the national and international levels, capable of progressively producing an increase in the level of ambition through cooperation.

3. What rôle can COP21 play?

The establishment of review cycles for national commitments is a key element of discussions in the run up to the Paris agreement.

For this, it is necessary to specify the articles defining this process in the agreement. The trust they will build for the implementation of a review process for current commitments that is truly structured and ambitious for the post-2015 period will be a key element to be closely monitored in order to determine [the success of COP21](#). In particular, a one-off review mechanism would not give a sufficient signal of the fact that the international community will continue to work in a regular, predictable manner, every five years, to increase the level of ambition for climate action.

[1] For example, two of the main international initiatives (Climate Action Tracker and Climate Interactive) obtain very different results regarding the temperature increase associated with the commitments currently contained in the INDCs (+2.7° for one; +3,5° for the other) because of very different assumptions regarding the post-2030 pathway.