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What happened at the Bonn International Climate Meeting (UNFCCC-SB50)?

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The 15th meeting of the subsidiary bodies of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) met in Bonn from June, 17th to 27th.[1](#) After the intense effort to negotiate the rules for the implementation of the Paris Agreement adopted in Katowice (December 2018) at COP24, this session focused on a smaller number of technical issues and did not see any major progress, but revealed political issues and tensions that will be key to the success of the September Climate Summit in New York, hosted by the UN Secretary General, and of COP25, to be held in Chile two months later.

The Bonn negotiating session provided an opportunity for various countries, including the Chilean Presidency, to exchange views informally on the theme of ambition,² ahead of the G7 under the French Presidency in Biarritz in August, the Climate Action Summit in New York and the Green Climate Fund replenishment meeting, all crucial steps to prepare for an ambitious increase in national contributions next year. Formally, this session was also intended to set technical milestones, but it did not have the expected success. This blogpost deciphers three themes on the agenda: the rules for implementing international carbon markets, the consideration of the IPCC 1.5°C report and the review of the Warsaw mechanism dedicated to loss and damage.

Carbon market mechanisms

The Paris Agreement (Art. 6) allows countries that so wish to engage in "cooperation" that results in reductions in CO₂ emissions, which can then be transferred to the international level. Inherited from the international carbon credit mechanisms created under the Kyoto Protocol, the "offsetting" approach must be reinvented in an era where all countries (and not only the most developed) are committed via the Paris Agreement to accounting for and reducing their emissions. The rules for the application of this article are the only ones that have not been adopted by the UNFCCC within the [Katowice Package](#)—whose stakes and implications for the transparency framework we also decipher [here](#). Despite more negotiating time available, some negotiators refused to start from the basis of discussion established in Katowice, and collectively failed to agree on a new version of the text that would serve as a starting point for negotiations in Chile at COP25. This lack of clarity hinders the possibility of bringing possible compromises to the political level by the time of the pre-COP ministerial meeting in Costa Rica and of COP25, and leaves the possibility of an additional targeted negotiating session, as was the case last year in Bangkok.

At the heart of these discussions is the challenge of ensuring environmental integrity and avoiding double counting in international carbon credit transfers, but also the status Kyoto-inherited mechanisms such as the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM).³ Without robust rules, these mechanisms could contribute to artificially inflating the progress made by States in reducing emissions, thereby distorting institutional and academic evaluation and measurement exercises, or flooding the credit market with credits so as to lower their prices and render the system ineffective.

IPCC Special Report on the impacts of a 1.5°C warming⁴

Following the [lukewarm receipt of the 1.5°C report at COP24](#), the Bonn meeting provided a new opportunity to formally recognise the need for countries to use the IPCC's work to inform the increase in their contributions in 2020, whether through their 2030 commitments (NDCs) or their development strategies at 2050. However, [the compromise reached](#) barely manages to acknowledge that exchanges of views have taken place, and that the IPCC report represents the best available science on the subject. Saudi Arabia and Iran have actively worked to ensure that these conclusions remain largely procedural and do not explicitly link to the submission of new commitments in 2020. Nevertheless, the formal recognition of the report as best available science can serve as an implicit incentive, as the Paris Agreement (Art. 4.1) encourages countries to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions "in accordance with the best available scientific data".

Unfortunately, this result is not surprising, but it enshrines the formal blocking capacities of a minority, which even wanted, as a [provisional version \(see Art. 7\)](#) shows, to cast doubt on the solidity of the IPCC's conclusions and discourage their use by States. But this tension has also enabled the vast majority of countries to reaffirm their

commitment to the role of science as a catalyst for climate action; it is up to them to match words with deeds in 2020.

Loss and damage

The Paris Agreement (Art. 8), recognising that manifestations of climate change (extreme events and slow onset events) can cause both tangible/financial and intangible irreversible loss and damage, opens a field of international cooperation distinct from adaptation to prevent and mitigate them; however, it closes the door to any notion of liability (to whom damage should be attributed) or compensation (to whom to seek compensation). The " Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage " has been established, at the request of developing countries, and is currently confined to a role of collecting and disseminating information on the subject; after five years of activity, it is to be revised at COP25. The discussion in Bonn focused on the [terms of reference of this review](#); the final text specifies the means and timetable of this review, but remains deliberately vague as to its objectives, masking the heated debates on this subject.

In addition to assessing the effectiveness of the mechanism's overall governance structure, many developing countries want to use this review to enable the mechanism to become a dedicated financing tool, in addition to the funds allocated to adaptation, considering that the lack of collective progress on mitigation will mechanically increase the proportion of climate change impacts that they cannot cope with.

The resistance visible at this UNFCCC session cast a light on the challenge of achieving global carbon neutrality by 2050, an objective that the IPCC has made essential to limit global warming to 1.5°C and to which countries will have to respond next year by revising the contribution they had each presented in advance of COP21 in Paris. If national political processes to raise ambition are to be ready to bear fruit in 2020 with new commitments, the key moments of this autumn will have to generate significant emulation between States, with the support and even pressure of other actors such as the private sector or local authorities (cities, regions, etc.) and citizen engagement. This includes the New York Climate Action Summit or the replenishment meeting of the Green Climate Fund, each in its own way seeking to illustrate, encourage or make possible ambitious climate action.

¹ Subsidiary bodies (Scientific and Technological Advisory Body, or SBSTA; Implementing Body, or SBI) traditionally meet twice a year, at UNFCCC headquarters in Bonn in June, and in parallel with COPs at the end of the year.

² Levels of national climate policy aspiration and planning, reflected through short to medium-term commitments (the "national contributions", or NDCs) and long-term and resilient low-carbon development strategies.

³ <https://www.ecologique-solidaire.gouv.fr/sites/default/files/Guide%20B%20%20Le%20m%C3%A9canisme%20pour%20un%20d%C3%A9veloppement%20propre%20Guide%20MDP.pdf>

⁴ www.ipcc.ch/sr15/

CLIMATE

CARBON MARKET

PARIS AGREEMENT

IPCC

COP24

COP25