

# A country-driven perspective on long-term low-emission development strategies (LT-LEDS)

## Implications for a COP26 Decision text or outcome

**Henri Waisman, Marta Torres Gunfaus, David Levai, Lola Vallejo, Alexandra Deprez (IDDRI)**

The Paris Climate Agreement invites all Parties to formulate and communicate long-term low greenhouse gas emission development strategies (LT-LEDS). Over the past 5 years, this mandate has played a critical role in prompting domestic processes on long-term strategies. LT-LEDS submitted since 2015 have also progressively improved in precision and relevance over time, not least in the context of carbon neutrality announcements. The recent acceleration and diffusion of long-term strategies has helped to highlight the domestic benefits of such an exercise for in-country decision-making on climate and development policies and implementation.

However, there have been no COP decisions adopted to guide the direction of LT-LEDS after 2020. By construction, the Paris Agreement ambition mechanism is not a 'one-off' exercise but a recurrent and evolving process, and consistently, LT-LEDS should be expected to contribute to this process. Such progressively improved alignment with the Paris Agreement goals would require continuity on the country work on LT-LEDS, which has not yet been established. At COP26, Parties need to agree on a Decision that ensures continuous work on LT-LEDS and capitalizes on lessons learned to date to make the best of this instrument.

### KEY MESSAGES

This study identifies eight specific objectives that a decision at COP26 on the future of LT-LEDS should deliver, in order to enhance the work on long-term strategies, improve their effectiveness in response to the collective climate objectives, and help materialize their domestic benefits.

1. Ensure that countries continue to work on long-term strategies after 2020, thereby creating conditions for continuous improvement.

2. Acknowledge links between LT-LEDS and NDCs, while preserving their separate natures.

3. Highlight LT-LEDS as a tool for countries to explore carbon neutrality pathways.

4. Highlight LT-LEDS as an important input to upcoming international discussions on climate cooperation and ambition, notably in the context of the Global Stocktake.

5. Acknowledge the role of LT-LEDS to make financial flows consistent with the climate targets.

6. Organize support schemes to provide funding and capacity building in support of the elaboration and implementation of domestic LT-LEDS in developing countries.

7. Facilitate international knowledge-sharing on long-term strategies.

8. Suggest enhanced collaboration with Non-State Actors, notably subnational governments and businesses, on LT-LEDS.



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## 1. CONTEXT: LT-LEDS IN THE PARIS AGREEMENT

### 1.1. Rationale

In its Article 4.19, the Paris Agreement invites all Parties to "strive to formulate and communicate long-term low greenhouse gas emission development strategies", the so-called LT-LEDS. This invitation, formalized in the COP21 decision text<sup>1</sup> and reiterated in the COP24 decision,<sup>2</sup> calls on countries to submit their LT-LEDS by a specific year: 2020.

The concept of long-term national development strategies involving socio-economic considerations and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions first emerged in international climate negotiations over a decade ago. In 2008, the Bali Action Plan introduced Low Emission Development Strategies (LEDS). The Copenhagen Accord, the Cancun Agreement<sup>3</sup> and the Durban decisions<sup>4</sup> then further emphasized that developing countries should follow LEDS to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainability concurrently, while limiting their impact on the global climate system. Since then, several countries (e.g. France, Colombia, the UK, South Africa) have established their own processes for designing long-term strategies to guide domestic policymaking on energy transition and climate policy, despite the lack of an additional and explicit mandate from the international community.

The Paris Agreement's invitation for countries to submit LT-LEDS has significantly helped accelerate detailed domestic work on long-term strategies around the world and helped trigger a collective dynamics around long-term strategies, including knowledge sharing, capacity building, and support towards developing countries.<sup>5</sup>

Article 4.19 has not only spurred the development of additional LT-LEDS, it has also reinforced their integral role within the Paris Agreement's ambition mechanism. First, by inviting countries to adopt a long-term perspective, LT-LEDS support a country-driven and progressive alignment between short-term individual commitments (notably in Nationally Determined Contributions, NDCs) and the requirements of the collective long-term goals for mitigation, adaptation and finance defined in Article 2.1 of the Paris Agreement, including the carbon neutrality objective (Article 4.1).<sup>6</sup> Second, inviting all countries, both industrialized and developing, to develop an LT-LEDS, provides opportunities for collective discussions on the global-scale needs and levers to accelerate the transition rooted in domestic visions for aligning development and climate objectives. Third, long-term strategies offer a concrete opportunity for countries to consult, include and engage a wide range of Non-Party stakeholders at the domestic level, and to collectively align their actions with the objectives of the Paris Agreement.<sup>7</sup>

Other global fora have doubled down and reiterated the call for Parties to develop LT-LEDS. The G20 and its members have agreed to respond and to develop LT-LEDS.<sup>8</sup> A number of coalitions of businesses, investors, cities, states and regions have also called on governments to "develop and communicate as early as possible robust long-term plans to achieve net zero emissions by 2050 to inform these and subsequent NDC revisions".<sup>9</sup> The finance sector is also increasingly viewing LT-LEDS as an investment plan for the low-carbon transition, thus an instrumental tool to align financial flows with the Paris Agreement objectives, as illustrated by the Multilateral Development Banks' alignment approach announced at COP24.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In 1/CP.21. Para 35

<sup>2</sup> In 1/CP.24 Para 21

<sup>3</sup> Parties are called to develop "low-carbon development strategies or plans" in 1/CP.16 Para. 45 and 65.

<sup>4</sup> Developing country Parties are invited to develop low-emission development strategies in 2/CP.17 Para. 38.

<sup>5</sup> For example, 33 countries, 15 cities, 15 regions and states, and 196 companies have joined the 2050 Pathways Platform to get support with the development of LT-LEDS: <https://2050pathways.org/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.wri.org/news/cop26-long-term-strategies>

<sup>7</sup> See for example the "Call for Action" issued by COP24 Presidents Poland and Fiji at the conclusion of the Talanoa Dialogue.

<sup>8</sup> For example, the 2020 Leaders' declaration "reiterate[s] the invitation to communicate by 2020 long-term low greenhouse gas emission development strategies."

<sup>9</sup> <https://s3.amazonaws.com/assets.wemeanbusinesscoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/11065046/Non-state-Actors-Call-to-Action.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/784141543806348331/Joint-Declaration-MDBs-Alignment-Approach-to-Paris-Agreement-COP24-Final.pdf>

## 1.2. An international overview on the state of progress

The Paris Agreement's invitation on LT-LEDS has triggered a range of different domestic processes on long-term strategies. In some countries, these processes are narrowly focused on the formal exercise of submitting a plan to the UNFCCC, as a direct answer to Article 4.19. In others, processes primarily designed to target a broader set of objectives and/or existing policy processes also served as the basis for the official submission of an LT-LEDS under Article 4.19.

Regardless of the original impetus, as of January 31, 2021, a total of 29 countries have already communicated their LT-LEDS,<sup>11</sup> which represents almost a third of the world emissions.<sup>12</sup> Several others are conducting an internal process that will likely lead to other LT-LEDS submissions ahead of COP26. However, we can also expect that the majority of countries will still not have engaged in such an exercise by the end of 2021.

LT-LEDS submitted since 2015 have also progressively improved in precision and relevance over the past five years. Notably, recent submissions are based on more detailed and sector-level analyses and benefit from an approach that allow a wider participation of various stakeholders throughout the development process. Most LT-LEDS focus on mitigation, but developing countries are integrating adaptation aspects too (e.g. Benin and Marshall Islands among submitted strategies, but others are in preparation). Importantly, these LT-LEDS also better reflect the latest science and Parties' collective international commitments, including regarding carbon neutrality which has been endorsed by a fastly increasing number of Parties, including major emitters. This is progressively transforming LT-LEDS into a proxy for countries' vision on how to reach net-zero emissions as well as an instrument to ensure that short-term and medium-term targets and actions are consistent with their long-term goals. As such, LT-LEDS are becoming a key instrument to build trust that mid-century carbon neutrality announcements are backed by a real vision and credible policy instruments and to provide a shared direction of travel around which domestic and international actors can coalesce.

Despite such significant progress, the influence of LT-LEDS on updated NDCs is not visible in available submissions to date. This reflects the fact that a number of methodological challenges caused by the fundamentally different nature of these two processes—including purpose, legal character and embedded accountability—have remained largely unaddressed.<sup>13,14</sup> It should be no surprise that a number of technical and political challenges remain after (only) five years since the new paradigm introduced by the Paris Agreement. In particular, time is needed to ensure

stakeholders' buy-in and ownership into new instruments and dynamic processes, and to establish needed in-country technical and institutional capacities. By construction, the Paris Agreement ambition mechanism is not a 'one-off' exercise but a recurrent and evolving process, and one can expect that countries could progressively improve the connection between NDCs and LT-LEDS processes, consistently with the recognized need in the Agreement for continuous improvements in submissions and processes. However, such progressively improved alignment would require continuity on the country work on LT-LEDS, which has not yet been established.

## 2. A COUNTRY-DRIVEN PERSPECTIVE ON LT-LEDS

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### 2.1. Domestic benefits of long-term strategies as a core motivation for LT-LEDS

The recent acceleration and diffusion of long-term strategies has helped to highlight the domestic benefits of such an exercise for in-country decision-making on climate and development policies and implementation, including in countries where the decision to prepare a long term-strategy has been primarily driven by the Paris Agreement mandate (Art. 4.19), as this internationally-driven exercise can also serve as a precedent for domestic planning and regulation. Indeed, once the development of an LT-LEDS is on the domestic political agenda, countries do tend to take a broader perspective than just contributing to the international climate regime.

Embedding the development of a long-term low emission development strategy in the domestic agenda brings about several key benefits, including:

- Exploring synergies and trade-offs between ambitious mitigation targets and various country-driven non-climate objectives, including Sustainable Development Goals, to inform the design of concrete actions and policy packages according to a specific country's priorities, context and circumstances.
- Providing a strategic perspective on national public policy to help identify concrete policy options and necessary shifts to be adopted in the short term. In particular, by giving a dynamic picture of the expected emissions reductions for each sector, long-term strategies allow to guide sectors that are harder to abate towards a deep decarbonization transition rather than delaying these decisions while focusing only on the low-hanging fruit.
- Informing investment decisions, by providing a clear signal to public and private investors on the long-term direction of travel and the corresponding investment plans at different time horizons. Indirectly, long-term strategies can therefore serve as guidelines to drive the alignment of development banks and private investors' portfolios with the Paris Agreement's goals (Article 2.1(c))

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<sup>11</sup> <https://unfccc.int/process/the-paris-agreement/long-term-strategies>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.climatewatchdata.org/lts-explore>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.wri.org/news/climate-action-today-and-tomorrow-relationship-between-ndcs-and-ltss>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.iddri.org/en/publications-and-events/policy-brief/enhancing-ambition-and-implementation-nationally-determined>

- Exploring and shedding light upon key international enablers and accelerators of ambitious domestic transitions, thereby helping identify areas for international cooperation based on domestic needs. Indirectly, long-term strategies also contribute to ensuring coherence between climate policy and other agendas (foreign policy, national security, trade, bilateral agreements, public-private partnerships, etc.).
- Serving as a tool to creating and sustaining an inclusive dialogue between different domestic stakeholders, including across different ministries, around a shared vision for a carbon-neutral society and the considerations to adequately manage the necessary transitions to reach that goal. Integrating stakeholder engagements in the development of long-term strategies can: (1) contribute to building awareness and ownership of goals, (2) promote the alignment of different actors' views and actions and highlight the necessary choices and potential trade-offs of action across sectors to anticipate conflict, (3) create communities of practice that can champion different parts of the domestic transitions, and (4) by doing all of the above, develop a foundation for closing the potential gap between national commitments and on-the-ground implementation.

These numerous domestic benefits should therefore be a key motivation for countries to continue developing, reviewing and revising LT-LEDS after 2020, using them as a living document and useful process to help inform and boost domestic efforts, as well as build consensus.

## 2.2. Guiding principles for designing LT-LEDS that can maximize domestic benefits

Key lessons can be drawn from the growing number of long-term strategy exercises being developed across countries. These key lessons—in terms of process and content—can help optimize the domestic benefits of long-term strategies, thereby providing guiding principles for designing LT-LEDS that maximize domestic benefits.

On **process**, key elements that can maximize the usefulness of LT-LEDS include:

- Having a strong political mandate, at the highest political level and a clearly established leadership and cross-ministerial governance.
- Being co-constructed with key stakeholders.
- Enhancing the integration of multi-disciplinary inputs: e.g. (1) taking into account multiple dimensions of feasibility relevant to different stakeholders, (2) including inputs that will enable the consideration of the political nature of system transitions.
- Drawing primarily from research by in-country institutions and local experts, rather than depending on external expertise. The provision of continuous support to these institutions and other local experts is key to build and maintain this in-country capacity. This dimension is key to facilitating the

revision of LT-LEDS, whereas external expertise may suffer from a lack of continuity over time.

- Institutionalizing the LT-LEDS development in a dedicated governance process, anchored in regulation or in new or existing governmental bodies, in order to legitimise the LT-LEDS' domestic uptake and implementation and optimize future revision processes.

On **content**, key elements that can maximize the usefulness of LT-LEDS include:

- Exploring in-depth carbon dioxide emissions neutrality (rather than marginal emission reductions) and steep reductions in other greenhouse gases.
- Identifying adaptation priorities and options and their associated enablers to strengthen the country's resilience and reduce its vulnerability to climate change, given projected climate impacts.
- Assessing systemic changes in all sectors of the economy and interactions of sectoral system changes.
- Investigating the sequence of actions and policies to be taken at different time horizons to support the sectoral and economy-wide transformations towards the long-term objective.
- Directly integrating consideration of the climate goal within plans and policy for domestic development priorities.
- Analyzing the impact of emission reduction pathways and corresponding mitigation options with key societal and environmental goals.
- Envisaging key uncertainties and alternative routes towards the long-term climate and development objectives.
- Rendering explicit the role and nature of international transformations that play a role in domestic strategies.

## 3. THE FUTURE OF LT-LEDS: INSIGHTS FOR INCLUSION IN A COP26 DECISION TEXT OR OTHER OUTCOME

We list here below eight key roles that an international mandate on LT-LEDS (such as one that could emerge from a COP26 decision or another outcome) could help in order to enhance the work on LT-LEDS, improve their effectiveness in response to the collective climate objectives, and help materialize their domestic benefits.

### 3.1. Ensure that countries continue to work on LT-LEDS after 2020, thereby creating conditions for continuous improvement of LT-LEDS

The Paris Agreement's accompanying decision only invites Parties to submit LT-LEDS by 2020 (1/CP.21, para. 35), and provides no indication of Parties' continued engagement with LT-LEDS after this date. An international call at COP26 for continued work on

LT-LEDS appears key to reaffirm the case for such work, recalling the domestic benefits encountered by those who have engaged in such exercise and creating a hook for furthering national work on long-term strategies.

Continued work on LT-LEDS could be relevant to all Parties, whether they have: (1) already submitted their LT-LEDS but would be willing to submit a revised, enhanced version after 2020; (2) already started working on their LT-LEDS but would need more time to conclude after 2020; or (3) have not yet established an LT-LEDS process but see a window of opportunity to start working on it.

A renewed international mandate could also help reflect that the benefits expected from LT-LEDS can be better delivered through a continuous domestic and international process, raising the interest of advancing a standing invitation to Parties to engage on LT-LEDS, anchored in the Paris Agreement ambition mechanism's five-year cycle.

### **3.2. Acknowledge links between LT-LEDS and NDCs, while preserving their separate natures**

The relevance of LT-LEDS to the Paris Agreement's ambition mechanism lies in its complementarity with the NDCs. LT-LEDS can help ensure that NDCs are consistent with long-term goals, and that the short-term commitments do not back-load all the difficult transformations to later years. As such, LT-LEDS provide a point of reference for in-country discussions on the domestic long-term impacts of national policy decisions and climate ambition, discussions which are key in order to avoid incremental mitigation action, and its associated lock-ins.

Establishing more explicitly the link and complementarities between NDCs and LT-LEDS could also help ensure that in-country processes for these two instruments are designed in such a way that they feed into each other. In order to facilitate the interplay between NDCs and LT-LEDS, it is particularly key to ensure the analytical and governance aspects of both instruments are developed in a coherent manner. On the other hand, preserving the specificities of LT-LEDS, notably its voluntary nature, is critical to keep them an instrument for exploring different options without the constraints imposed by the need to set a binding target.

### **3.3. Highlight LT-LEDS as a tool for countries to explore carbon neutrality pathways**

LT-LEDS are a key instrument to explore options at the country level in order to implement the far-reaching systemic transformations required to achieve carbon neutrality.

The relevance of LT-LEDS for exploring carbon neutrality goals stems first from its time horizon (mid-century and beyond), which allows investigating the period until "the second half of the century", which is the time frame at which the global balance of greenhouse gas emissions must be attained according to Article 4.1 of the Paris Agreement.

The relevance of LT-LEDS to explore carbon neutrality also stems from the very approach this instrument implies, which allows (1) an exploration of possible futures under uncertainties, (2) a focus on the content of transformation rather than on the emission numbers themselves, and (3) an assessment of the pathway and of the relevant moments to take key steps towards deep decarbonization. As an exploration tool, LT-LEDS can render explicit the challenges and opportunities created by the structural transformations needed to reach carbon neutrality, and confront the consequences of alternative pathways towards this end goal, thereby informing key political economy decisions of implementing country-level transformations towards carbon neutrality.

Finally, LT-LEDS can also be a relevant instrument to build domestic ownership of the carbon neutrality goal, as it offers a space for exploring decarbonization options and organizing stakeholder consultations more openly than the NDCs with its short-term targets. LT-LEDS can therefore provide a space for discussions framed around the collective exploration of alternative futures and their implications rather than the preservation of vested short-term and deeply anchored interests.

### **3.4. Highlight LT-LEDS as an important input to upcoming international discussions on climate cooperation and ambition, notably in the context of the Global Stocktake**

The transformations and actions needed to achieve the Paris Agreement's global goal require a strengthening of international cooperation. This is in turn one of the key objectives of the Agreement's 5-yearly Global Stocktake planned to start in 2023. To be consistent with the Paris Agreement's bottom-up paradigm, it is essential that global cooperation priorities identify the critical enablers needed to accelerate the transformation to low-carbon and resilient economies. The LT-LEDS exercise can play an instrumental role in identifying these international enablers and understanding the main barriers to neutrality. It can therefore help focus the Global Stocktake discussions on elements that really matter for individual countries, help identify the key issues to be tackled collectively and help build consensus on the best global and national responses. As such, LT-LEDS can be a critical input to ensure that international cooperation is framed around



countries' needs for implementing their transformation to a carbon neutral and resilient economy.

### **3.5. Acknowledge the role of LT-LEDS to make financial flows consistent with the climate targets**

LT-LEDS provide a detailed vision of sectoral transformations required in the long run. This horizon, by providing a clear signal on the long-term direction of travel, is a key source of information for elaborating investment plans at different time horizons. LT-LEDS can therefore guide public and private investors' decisions and facilitate the alignment of their portfolios with the Paris Agreement goals (Article 2.1(c)).

### **3.6. Organize support schemes to provide funding and capacity building in support of the elaboration of domestic LT-LEDS in developing countries**

The development of an LT-LEDS is a resource-intensive process that requires building upon existing and new analytical and institutional capacity. The provision of international funding and support to capacity building is a matter of international equity to ensure that countries without or limited pre-existing analytical capabilities are still able to access the benefits of the LT-LEDS exercise. International funding and support could come notably from multilateral and bilateral bodies and their roll-out towards implementation as well as from dedicated organizations that support the development of LT-LEDS (i.e. 2050PP).

### **3.7. Facilitate international knowledge-sharing on LT-LEDS**

Developing an LT-LEDS is a learning exercise that provides a wide range of detailed information on the opportunities, challenges and enablers of deep decarbonization transformations in each specific country context. Facilitating knowledge-sharing on the processes and methods adopted to design the LT-LEDS could help identify best practices to guide exercises by other countries and progressively improve submissions' quality. Exchanges on the detailed content of LT-LEDS submitted by Parties could also help (1) support a progressive alignment of visions towards the collective long-term climate objectives, (2) keep track of options to limit the risk of backsliding, and (3) help identify the priorities of cooperation emerging from a collective review of country strategies. International knowledge-sharing can be implemented in different forms, including through institutionalized processes, which could include the possibility offered by UNFCCC for countries to present and discuss their LT-LEDS on a voluntary basis during its convening, confronting responses and solutions with other countries as well as Non-State Actors.

### **3.8. Suggest enhanced collaboration with Non-State Actors, notably subnational governments and businesses, on LT-LEDS**

The LT-LEDS exercise can be an opportunity for engaging in a structured dialogue between governments and Non-State Actors (NSAs), notably subnational government and businesses, on the low-emission transformations needed to reach carbon neutrality. Such a structured dialogue could serve to help align visions and facilitate the cooperation towards the achievement of a collective carbon neutrality goal. This involvement of NSAs can take the form of having them develop their own long-term strategies, but also ensuring their structured participation in the consultations for the design of Parties' LT-LEDS.

## **4. CONCLUSION**

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Based on the experiences to date, continuous work on long-term strategies has the potential to significantly contribute to country-level decision-making and drive action towards Paris Agreement-compatible futures. Ensuring continuity of domestic processes on long-term strategies therefore appears as a critical enabler for long-term strategies to deliver their full benefits both nationally and globally.

The international mandate derived from Article 4.19 has played a critical role in prompting domestic processes on long-term strategies. Although Article 4.19 is itself not time-bound, there have been no COP decisions since the Paris Agreement was adopted to guide the direction of LT-LEDS after 2020. Maintaining both international and national momentum for LT-LEDS will therefore require a COP26 decision to guide the future developments, submissions, and updates of LT-LEDS.

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## Implications for a COP26 Decision text or outcome

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The Institute for Sustainable Development and International Relations (IDDRI) is an independent think tank that facilitates the transition towards sustainable development. It was founded in 2001. To achieve this, IDDRI identifies the conditions and proposes the tools for integrating sustainable development into policies. It takes action at different levels, from international cooperation to that of national and sub-national governments and private companies, with each level informing the other. As a research institute and a dialogue platform, IDDRI creates the conditions for a shared analysis and expertise between stakeholders. It connects them in a transparent, collaborative manner, based on leading interdisciplinary research. IDDRI then makes its analyses and proposals available to all. Four issues are central to the institute's activities: climate, biodiversity and ecosystems, oceans, and sustainable development governance.

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