

ENSURING SUCCESS AT COP26: STRATEGIES, EXPECTATIONS AND AMBITION

Physical distancing and de-globalisation responses to Covid-19 question the future of intergovernmental climate negotiations at a historical 'make it-or-break it' point when countries need to continue implementing the Paris Agreement by setting up and revising roadmaps to decarbonise their economies (Averchenkova and Zenghelis 2018; Rietig 2020).

This requires

1. Co-ordinated exchanges of expertise and lessons learned,
2. Capacity building among parties and non-national actors through coordinating and facilitating the sharing resources necessary to implement NDCs,
3. Public pressure through media attention and
4. Provision of financial and technological capabilities via international burden-sharing mechanisms (Rietig 2019).

There is a high risk that Covid-19 could lead to another lost decade on climate change like the time lost due to the 2007/08 financial crisis, despite the intentions to 'build back better' from that disruption. This means that the international community would miss the last chance to keep global temperature increases below 2°C resulting in 'run-away' and irreversible climate change (IPCC 2018).

The Presidency has an opportunity to improve the effectiveness of negotiations in addressing climate change and implementing the Paris Agreement. This is crucial as progress towards the implementation of the Paris Agreement and limiting global temperature increases to 1.5-2°C by means of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) by countries so far has proven insufficient.

Consequently, countries need to increase their ambition in line with the Paris Agreement. This can be facilitated via conducive framework conditions for formal and informal negotiation settings such as the inclusion of facilitation and mediation approaches.

The tools of the facilitation and mediation fields provide crucial means to overcome disagreements among countries that result in slow (or a lack of) progress in formal and informal negotiations within the UNFCCC. The negotiation process can be managed more effectively to increase countries' willingness to commit to and implement more ambitious climate and low carbon development policies.

There are several facilitation and mediation approaches the Presidency could use to make the UNFCCC negotiations more effective based on previous precedents and in line with Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (for more details, see Peringer & Rietig 2021):

1. Move to an interpretation of consensus that distinguishes it from unanimity
2. Provide regular reminders of the urgency of the negotiations
3. Strengthen the role of the chairs to support the development of consensus decisions through increased use of summary, integrating questions, focused small groups and other approaches.
4. Use experts more to identify and develop options – even within a session or overnight.
5. Use professional facilitators and mediators.

ENGAGING WITH PARTIES

The overarching principle should be a focus on an inclusive and transparent process to ensure the highest possible level of legitimacy and accountability.

Therefore, the recommendation is not to solely focus on the key greenhouse gas emitters and emerging economies such as the United States, China, India, Brazil, Indonesia, South Africa, Russia and the EU countries. Instead, the focus should be on a broad and diverse coalition of developed and developing countries who have established themselves as leading in climate action. As governments change, countries' ambitions can also increase or decrease, which makes working with and through non-state actors such as cities and business coalitions an important fall-back option until the next national government with higher climate action ambitions comes into power.

The key to success is to demonstrate to any country reluctant to embrace transitioning to a zero/low carbon economy by 2050 (or as soon as possible thereafter based on common but differentiated capabilities), and in particular those countries trying to prevent/slow down progress of the global community towards this goal, that they are putting themselves at an economic disadvantage in the 21st century's global green zero carbon economy. The focus should be to engage with all countries willing to embrace ambitious climate action and to identify the key support countries require to implement it. In many cases the problem is not a lack of ambition, but the fear of not being able to deliver any commitments for domestic and resource constraint reasons that keeps countries back from pledging and implementing ambitious climate action. Covid-19 exacerbates this situation further.

The Presidency could

1. Issue an open invitation to all parties willing to engage within this 'Net-Zero Coalition' and approach parties who have demonstrated international climate action leadership in the past,
2. Engage in one-on-one bilateral conversations to better understand these countries' objectives,

3. Invite relevant non-national actors into the conversation,
4. Host virtual and in-person meetings of this coalition throughout 2021 while continuing to invite all UNFCCC parties to join the conversation to ensure the highest possible level of inclusiveness and transparency.

ENSURING EFFECTIVE DELIVERY OF OUTCOMES POST-COP-26

The Presidency needs to prioritise identifying what support countries require to accelerate their zero/low carbon transitions before, during and after the summit. Often, this comes in the form of for example

- Capacity building and learning through knowledge/experience with low carbon and adaptation policies from across governance levels and jurisdictions,
- Access to zero/low carbon technologies and infrastructure,
- Mobilising financial resources through global financial markets/access to affordable financing and
- Access to transnational networks of non-national actors capable of supporting countries in their low carbon transitions.

A key outcome of the COP26 summit should be increased ambitions to address climate change through updated Nationally Determined Commitments.

This means that the logic of the Paris Agreement of bottom-up climate action pledges could be extended into implementation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Asking countries
 - a. For more ambitious Nationally Determined Contributions,
 - b. For details on how they plan to achieve their targets through policies and other measures,
 - c. Which resources (policy, know how, financial, etc) they require to implement these policies and zero/low carbon transition plans,
2. Establish a 'marketplace'-type online platform that brings together parties with national/transnational non-state actors and other parties capable of and willing to provide support, build capacities and invest so that all parties can achieve their Nationally Determined Contributions regardless of their financial resources. This allows for transparency and accountability of climate action capacity building as well as fair access to global resources also for least developed and small developing countries,
3. Task an independent body such as the UNFCCC Secretariat to administer and monitor the platform and
4. Develop and agree on monitoring, reporting and verification mechanisms for this capacity building platform to ensure equitable and fair distribution of the support, along with a time plan for reviewing and improving the mechanism.

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