

Oxford Climate Policy – the blog

To initiate debates on international climate policy

Why an effective Ambition Mechanism is vital to deliver the Paris Agreement

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The Paris agreement agrees the overall ambition:

– limiting global warming to below 2°C and aiming for below 1.5°C, the rich countries providing at least \$100 billion to help the poorer countries get onto a lower emission and climate resilient pathway.

But it does not specify how much each country needs to do to achieve this ambition

The ‘Nationally Determined Contributions’ (NDC) of the Paris Agreement are – as the name implies – a statement of the actions individual countries have themselves undertaken to deliver.

So rather than starting with what is needed to combat climate change, the Agreement starts with what countries are prepared to do. This is true for emission reductions, for finance and for all the other critical elements of the deal.

To achieve the overall ambition, the Agreement therefore relies on countries upping what they said they will do over time.

In order for this increase of actions to happen, the Agreement uses the ***idea of accountability***[3] of each country to its peers and to the general public, which is meant to work as follows:

- All countries agreed to develop their own climate action plans where they commit to action to reduce emissions and to adapt and (in the case of the richer countries) to support the poorer countries to do so.
- All countries agreed to measure this and report back to peers, the international community, and civil society at home and across the globe.
- It is then assumed, through the reporting and five-yearly **Global Stocktakes**[4] (GST) reviewing whether there is sufficient action, that the next national statement of climate action will be more ambitious.
- Essential to building ambition, is the assumption that the public and peers demand more action, that global consensus for climate action grows – driven by people’s concern about the climate impacts they observe and by increased confidence that climate action supports growth and reduces poverty.
- Through this demand, each countries’ climate plans get revised upwards regularly, measurement becomes more accurate, public awareness grows and expectations build.

So the world is meant to bridge the gap between the emission reductions needed to keep the rise of global average temperature to well below 2°C, aiming for the Paris aspiration of 1.5°C.

The good news is an agreement was reached ...

The first universal agreement on climate change was made. Countries engaged on a scale few expected. The speed at which it entered into force is unprecedented in the global fight to combat climate change. There is evidence of ambition increasing beyond Paris too. Progress is being made on [aviation emissions](#) which were outside scope of Paris.

But...

- It relies on pressure from public being able to drive increased ambition of governments.
- It assumes that pressure from the public will increase slowly over time

The increase in ambition needed is significant – and action needs to be taken quickly. The recent [Oxford University 1.5°C Conference](#) suggested that we could pass 1.5°C in a decade. We can’t therefore wait for 10 years to increase our ambition. But the current NDCs collectively leave us still on course for warming by 2.7-3.6°C globally – which will translate into much greater impacts for many countries.

Currently...

While the framework agreed in Paris does contain some of the elements required for an effective ambition mechanism – the synchronised reporting on the NDCs and collective reviews (GST) – in its current form, it will not be able to generate the needed raise in ambition.

What is missing is a synchronised timetable – ‘a mechanism’ – for ratcheting up ambition. The only action mentioned under the Paris Agreement is that countries “*may at any time adjust its existing nationally determined contribution with a view to enhancing its level of ambition*”. However, such ‘spontaneous’ updating is completely inadequate. What is needed are synchronised updating exercises, where expectation and pressure can be built for increasing ambition, for creating ‘virtuous ambition circles’.

Another major challenge is the institutional inertia of governments – once a commitment has been announced, it is difficult to revise it. Yet, businesses and others making long term investments need to have a longer-term idea of what governments intend to do. The public also need to understand whether their government intend to do enough to protect them, in order to start putting pressure on them to ratcheting up their government’s ambition.

So how do we make sure that the ambition mechanism works?

We need to make sure citizens across the world can not only track whether enough action is being taken – but also what governments intend to do, so governments collectively become more accountable for whether they collectively live up to what is needed, and individually carry their fair share of the action.

- If some countries only provide new plans every ten years (like the EU prefers) with no mid-term update (i.e. after five years), why should others increase ambition every five years? All countries need to update their climate plans every five years, and give an indication of what the subsequent five year plan would achieve.
- There should be a rolling five year timetable with synchronised timing for new contribution statements for the immediate future with an indication of longer-term ambition – a deadline every 5 years where citizens can demand action, where governments are held to account and where peers can apply pressure.

All this is not a challenging request to our climate negotiators going to Marrakesh.

All it requires is a simple decision in the rules being developed for the Paris Agreement to ***“request all Parties in 2025 to indicate a 2035 NDC and update their 2030 NDC, and to do so every five years thereafter”***.

[5]

But it is vital if Paris is to deliver its ambition. Twenty-three words that would provide a working Ambition Mechanism. Twenty-three words that would help prevent catastrophic climate change.

Notes:

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[3] **Transparency of Action and Support under the Paris Agreement**

[4] **The Global Stocktake Under the Paris Agreement: Opportunities and challenges**

[5] **The Paris Ambition Mechanism: Review and Communication Cycles – Options Note**

This entry was posted in Uncategorized on 24 October 2016 [<http://oxfordclimatepolicy.com/blog/why-an-effective-ambition-mechanism-is-vital-to-deliver-the-paris-agreement/>] by Benito Muller.

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