



Completing the Ambition Mechanism of the Paris Agreement

Leading climate negotiators highlighted the urgent need to complete work on the Paris Agreement's "Ambition Mechanism" by resolving the issue of common time frames at the 26th Conference of the Parties (COP26) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), during a Webinar organised by ecbi on 20 May 2020.

Negotiators from the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), the Independent Association of Latin America and the Caribbean (AILAC), the Least Developed Countries (LDC) Group, the African Group of Negotiators (AGN), and the Environmental Integrity Group (EIG) participated in their individual capacities in the webinar, along with the Chair of the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI), who participated as an observer.

The discussion was based on a draft political brief prepared by Kishan Kumarsingh, Lead Negotiator from Trinidad and Tobago and Co-chair of the ecbi Advisory Committee, on why the ambition cycle matters, and why work on it should be completed now. The brief highlights the importance of the Ambition Mechanism in making the Paris Agreement dynamic and lasting, as well as responsive to science, economic and technological opportunities, and public calls for climate action.

However, it notes that the Ambition Mechanism is still missing a key piece: a decision on common time frames, which will synchronise the plans of countries with each other, and with other elements of the Paris Agreement such as the global stocktake and the enhanced transparency framework.

"COP26, which had to be postponed to 2021 due to the Covid 19 pandemic, will already mark Year 1 of the crucial first decade of implementation of the Paris Agreement," Kumarsingh said, while introducing the brief and the purpose of the Webinar. "It is of paramount importance that the ambition modality be completed in Glasgow, not least to demonstrate to the world that the multilateral climate change regime is serious about enabling nationally determined ambition." He said the purpose of the Webinar is to gauge whether participants agree on the urgency of the issue, and if they do, to brainstorm on how to move it forward within country groupings, in forums such as the [High Ambition Coalition \(HAC\)](#) and [Cartagena Dialogue](#), and with the Presidency of COP26, to make it a priority.

Why a common time frame is critical for the Ambition Mechanism

The intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) of countries, submitted before the Paris Agreement was adopted in 2015, have different time frames over which they will be implemented, as no "common" time frame for all countries was stipulated in the initial calls for INDCs in Warsaw and Peru. The majority of INDCs chose either a five-year or ten-year time frame for implementation.

This variation in the INDCs was accommodated in [Decision 1/CP.21](#), adopted in Paris. In paragraph (§) 23, countries with a time frame up to 2025 were asked to submit a new NDC by 2020, and do so every five years thereafter (§23). Countries with a time frame up to 2030, meanwhile, were asked in §24 to “communicate or update” their NDCs by 2020, and do so every five years later. While Parties [agreed](#) to apply common time frames to their NDCs from 2031 onwards at CMA1 in Katowice, they were unable to agree on the actual duration of a common time frame.

Different time frames for different countries, however, will likely undermine the Ambition Mechanism of the Paris Agreement. A common time frame is essential to create a periodic point in time when all countries are expected to simultaneously assess their future ambition options, at reasonable intervals. This will ensure that while no Party faces unfair pressure to update NDCs, the conditions exist for an upward (or “virtuous”) cycle of ambition and raised global ambition.

A common time frame also means that the implementation of all the NDCs for a given period will end at the same time – and therefore all Parties will be in a position to evaluate their performance over the same period, to provide consistent information for the aggregate review of global progress that will take place every five years through the global stocktake.

Finally, the NDC time frame is also likely to affect final accounting – for instance, in the context of the Article 6 cooperative approaches, where transfers may take place between countries. Unless Parties have similar NDC time frames, accounting for such transfers could become more complex and less reliable, and therefore undermine the integrity of the markets.

In his opening remarks, Kumarsingh sought to present a compromise between the two majority preferences (five and ten years), referred to as the **Glasgow Ambition Cycle** in his brief.

The Glasgow Ambition Cycle: a Goldilocks solution

ecbi Director Benito Müller presented the idea of a ‘[Glasgow Ambition Cycle](#)’ as the missing element to complete the Ambition Mechanism. “While the postponement of COP26 to next year due to the Covid 19 pandemic may have been inevitable, it must not be used as an excuse to postpone enhancing the ambition of the global response to climate change under the Paris Agreement,” Müller said. “We cannot afford to postpone ratcheting up the ambition of targets originally announced five years ago.”

He proposed adoption of the following language at COP26 (based on the language in §§23 and 24 of [Decision 1/CP.21](#)):ⁱ

- Requests Parties to communicate **by 2025** a nationally determined contribution with a time frame up to **2035**, and to do so every five years thereafter.
- Requests Parties to consider **in 2025** updating their nationally determined contributions with a time frame up to **2030**, in line with Article 2.2 [on equity] and Article 4.3 [on progression] of the Paris Agreement, and to do so every five years thereafter.ⁱⁱ

This option will allow countries to have a have a ten-year outlook in their NDCs to aid longer-term planning – and at the same time, a five-yearly update, to take into account technical, social, and economic changes frequently enough. It will align the NDCs of all Parties with each other to facilitate more accurate assessments of aggregate progress, and with the five-year cycle of the global stocktake.

i **§23:** Requests those Parties whose intended nationally determined contribution pursuant to decision 1/CP.20 contains a time frame up to 2025 to communicate by 2020 a new nationally determined contribution and to do so every five years thereafter pursuant to Article 4, paragraph 9, of the Agreement; **§24:** Also requests those Parties whose intended nationally determined contribution pursuant to decision 1/CP.20 contains a time frame up to 2030 to communicate or update by 2020 these contributions and to do so every five years thereafter pursuant to Article 4, paragraph 9, of the Agreement;...

ii **Article 2.2** of the Paris Agreement: “This Agreement will be implemented to reflect equity and the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, in the light of different national circumstances.” **Article 4.3:** “Each Party’s successive nationally determined contribution will represent a progression beyond the Party’s then current nationally determined contribution and reflect its highest possible ambition, reflecting its common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, in the light of different national circumstances.”

Müller further noted that the proposed language is in line with the formal submissions of several countries and Groups to the UNFCCC (see **Table**).

Submissions by countries and groups on common time frames	
Country/ Group	Excerpt from submission
Brazil, November 2014	<i>Each 10 year cycle includes a 5 year contribution term, followed by a 5 year indicative 3 term. Before the end of each contribution term, the indicative term would be either confirmed or adjusted upwards, and an additional indicative term would be communicated for the following period.</i>
Chile on behalf of AILAC, March 2018	<i>For AILAC, 'timeframes' [...] should be considered by the CMA in light of the Paris Agreement's ambition mechanism and its ability to deliver on its long-term goals.</i>
Egypt on behalf of the AGN, March 2018	<i>African Group is of the view that NDCs with a common time frame must be submitted in 2025. Hence, the NDCs submitted should be considered for 1 January 2031 and end on 31 December 2035.</i>
Ethiopia on behalf of LDCs, March 2018	<i>The LDC Group proposes a dynamic NDC cycle of 5+5 years in which Parties communicate a 5-year NDC for an upcoming 5-year implementation period and simultaneously provide a subsequent indicative NDC for the following 5-year implementation period.</i>
Belize and Trinidad & Tobago, March 2018	<i>Given paragraphs 23 and 24 of Decision 1/CP.21, this dynamic NDC cycle could be brought about by simply requesting all Parties in 2025 to update their 2030 NDC and communicate an indicative 2035 NDC, and to do so every five years thereafter.</i>
Switzerland, December 2019	<i>Requests all Parties to communicate by 2025 a nationally determined contribution with a starting point of 1 January 2031 and a time frame up to 2035, and to do so every five years thereafter.</i>

Feedback and discussions

Kumarsingh invited participants to provide feedback on his brief, and on how to take the issue forward. He said it is becoming increasingly clear that the technical negotiations have reached a point of exhaustion, and political resolution of the issue is needed. For this to happen, the issue will have to be a priority for ministers attending COP26. Their engagement will also be appropriate because the NDC planning and implementation cycle involves an in-country process of consultations and endorsement, and is strongly linked to political processes. While vital time in the first year of implementation is being lost due to the Covid 19 crisis, he said it could be turned into a gain, if the time is used to get political buy-in to complete the Paris Agreement's Ambition Mechanism.

Participating in her personal capacity, SBI Chair Marianne Karlsen confirmed that the issue is on the agenda of the next meeting of the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI), possibly in October 2020. She said any work that is done in the interim to mature this issue will be valuable, and resolving it will clear up current confusion on what Parties have to submit when. She agreed that national Parliaments and legal systems have a key role to play in the NDC cycle, and political buy-in will be essential.

A participant from AOSIS agreed a decision was urgently needed, and said it should be clear on what is expected when of Parties – the decision should not be vague or subject to interpretation.

Another participant from the AGN said lack of a decision on this issue will make it impossible to operationalise the Ambition Mechanism, and it is a critical part of the cyclicity of the Paris Agreement.

A participant from AILAC highlighted the need for political leadership, and the leadership of the COP26 Presidency and the co-facilitators of the common time frames discussion.

A participant from the EIG said the issue of common time frames is often forgotten when negotiators discuss the remaining elements of the Paris rulebook, and only Article 6 is mentioned. She said the EIG has been vocal on the issue and has a preference for five-year cycles. She also agreed that the technical discussions had helped to identify possible landing zones, but political engagement was now needed to resolve the issue. She highlighted the need to clearly identify the audience for messaging on the issue, including possibly ministers, delegations, the HAC and Cartagena Dialogue, and broader civil society. Noting that civil society has not yet been engaged in the common time frames issue, she said the HAC has been useful in the past to get ministers engaged and preparing communication for civil society. The Cartagena

Dialogue, meanwhile, has been useful in coordination during negotiations. She also agreed that the delayed UNFCCC sessions are an opportunity for bilateral discussions between delegations, and encouraged engagement with the COP26 Presidency to request the allocation of adequate time for this issue at COP26. She felt lack of negotiating time has also been a factor in why the issue was not yet resolved. Finally, she said it will be helpful to at least define a timeline by which a decision on the issue is needed.

A participant from the LDC Group said the discussion should not only be limited to those with similar points of view – efforts should be made to engage those with divergent views.

A participant from the AGN said further technical negotiations are needed, and agreed that more time to discuss the issue should be requested during the SBI meeting in October and during COP26. She emphasised that a decision on common time frames will be fundamental for ambition in the Paris Agreement process.

Müller referenced three recent blog posts, and said the EU's position is likely to be more aligned with the proposal for the Glasgow Ambition Mechanism following the adoption of the [European Green Deal](#).

Participants then described the opportunities they will have for consensus building within their own Groups, and promised further feedback and inputs on the brief.

“I think the work being done here may bring common time frames to a far better and more mature stage,” SBI Chair Karlsen said in her feedback. “I am looking forward to the continued dialogues on this. Special thanks to Kishan and Benito to move a much needed narrative forwards.”