

CAN EQUITY INDICATORS BRIEF

The climate crisis is a crisis of global commons management. We are in this together. We must understand each other to be acting fairly, or we will fail. Thus, it is very good to see that equity is back on the negotiating table. It means that we have a chance.

In particular, the climate talks cannot succeed unless we face the challenges of “equitable access to sustainable development.” After all, the core of the climate problem is holding to an extremely stringent global emission budget *while at the same time supporting sustainable development and adaptation*. Which is to say that ambition and equity are, inevitably, the two sides of any viable climate agreement. We will not have one without the other, and we should all know this by now.

In this context, CAN believes that success demands a shared “Equity Reference Framework.” Within such a framework, both Parties and Observers can evaluate the national pledges relative to the shared global challenge, comparing them to each other and to that larger challenge in an ethically and politically productive manner that leads to stronger, fairer pledges.

Some believe this to be an unrealistic and even counter-productive ambition, but we strongly disagree. As confirmed again by the IPCC, the science is extremely challenging, and there cannot be any further delay before action begins in earnest. Unless all countries see each other to be striving towards fair and adequate pledges, they will hold themselves back. This is the real and present danger, which we all need to address urgently.

THE CONVENTION’S CORE EQUITY PRINCIPLES

The Convention asserts three core equity principles:

- **A precautionary approach to adequacy**, referring to the collective obligations of countries to undertake and support urgent and adequate global action to prevent dangerous impacts of climate change and provide effective adaptation to unavoidable impacts, as an inadequate agreement cannot be equitable.
- **Common but differentiated responsibility and respective capability (CBDR+RC)**, in which obligations to take action and provide support, and rights to receive such support, are a function of both historical and current emissions, and of capability to act.
- **The right to sustainable development***, which we understand as the right of all countries to not just lift their people out of poverty, but also to provide their citizens with sustainable and universalizable living standards. By sustainable we mean “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” By universalizable, we mean living standards that could be made available to the citizens of all countries.

THE CHALLENGE OF COMPARABILITY

To move forward at speed, we must establish a shared understanding of equity, one that is precise enough to be quantified. More specifically, we must strive to agree on a small list of essential equity indicators, those that are needed to operationalize the above principles. Such an understanding would allow national pledges to be evaluated relative to these principles, relative to the exhaustion of the global emissions budget, relative to each other, and relative to an evolving and increasingly clear notion of national fair shares. Meeting this challenge does not mean agreeing to a single “formula,” but neither does it mean that any Party is free to define equity as it wishes, using incoherent definitions that merely flatter its short-term interests.

Traditional realism will not effectively address these issues. It tells us, for one thing, that mitigation is the essence of the problem, and that adaptation must take second place. And it plays to an old and misleading notion in which national mitigation obligations are understood as primarily matters of domestic emissions reductions. Neither of these conceptions will do. What must be compared is national effort, conceived as the sum of domestic mitigation and international support, and on both fronts – adaptation as well as mitigation.

This does not mean that, to act decisively in Paris, we must first agree to an altogether encompassing accord. But we must cease to pretend that domestic mitigation is everything. There will be no success in Paris without major breakthroughs on the “means of implementation.” And if such a breakthrough requires international-finance mechanisms, so be it. In a high-transparency world, such mechanisms can be entirely compatible with the principles of CBDR+RC. We have ways forward, if we will take them.

THE EQUITY INDICATORS

The key step is the one that takes us forward to implementation, from words to numbers. We must progress from the Convention’s principles to an agreed and common list of equity indicators that can animate and begin to operationalize those principles. This brief statement does not fully explain our view of the equity indicators that best express the intent of the Convention principles, however the CAN effort-sharing working group has produced a longer paper that attempts to do just this. See http://www.climatenetwork.org/sites/default/files/can_convention-based_indicators_sept2013.pdf

What is important, even in this brief overview, is to name the five equity indicators that, taken together, capture the spirit and significance of the Convention’s core equity principles. These are: Adequacy, Responsibility, Capability, Development Need, and Adaptation Need. Although these indicators do not tell us everything we need to know about the future of equity and sustainable development, they provide a robust basis for a strong equity review based upon the Convention.

THE WAY FORWARD

The challenge, while approaching and moving beyond Paris, is to establish a cooperative approach to the twin problems of adequacy and equity. In the long term, we must deepen this process, such that both science reviews and equity reviews play prominent roles. The short-term is another matter, and the major question here is if equity indicators can help to “ratchet up” ambition. Some developing country negotiators are skeptical, and it is not hard to understand why. Substantial progress will depend on major developments on the finance front.

To be absolutely clear: the point of equity indicators is to support a dynamic approach to differentiation, one that can lay out an adaptive “spectrum” of obligations that evolves as countries develop and change. However, this will only happen if these indicators also facilitate the delivery of adequate levels of international support. We believe they can do so, but the truth is that, so far, nothing has worked. This must change.

Equity indicators, and Equity Reference Frameworks more generally, represent a major challenge that must be addressed if we are to agree to an effective international climate agreement. To some degree, this is a matter of greater informal understanding, but at the same time this understanding must be formalized. It is imperative that the indicators approach be embedded in the official process, and as quickly and substantively as possible.

* The right to sustainable development requires clarification. In particular, the roles of right-bearers and duty-bearers must be further defined. Also, all countries must take immediate and urgent action to reduce their unsustainable consumption and resource-use patterns, and to follow pathways of inclusive growth and sustainable development. Countries with greater capability should take ambitious actions to address unsustainable consumption and resource use, actions which must inevitably include life-style changes. Countries with limited capability must pursue sustainable development models which are inclusive, gender sensitive, climate resilient and low carbon, which they can only do successfully if they receive adequate and appropriate