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Multilaterals: ECOstential Questions

Many copies of ECO spend long lonely nights in the conference hall pondering fundamental questions like: “Why am I the one that did not get picked up?”, “Am I worth my carbon footprint?” and “Where do good copies of ECO go when they are tossed in the bin?”.

We wonder if Parties also ponder important questions. The Multilateral Assessments taking place today and Friday are important moments for Parties to answer questions like: “Am I doing enough to fulfil my obligations and save millions of people from climate impacts?”.

Key questions for ECO are: “What’s stopping developed countries from doing more to close the emissions gap when we know that they can?” and “Why on (warming) earth have many of them not ratified KP2?”

Here are some important questions that certain countries should be asking themselves:

- Will Australia fulfil its commitment to do more, given its stated criterion, in concert with the stronger international action of others? The government

appointed independent Climate Change Authority analysis argues the criterion has been met.

- How can Belgium deliver its 2020 target if it is not clear how the task will be divided nationally? It’s been more than 5 years since Belgium adopted its greenhouse gas emission reduction target for 2020, and it still has not reached agreement about effort sharing between the regions and federal government.

- When does Japan plan to submit the final target and how high will the final target be? Japan’s 3.8% emission reduction target by 2020 compared to 2005 is equal to a 3.1% increase compared to 1990. In other words, an extremely low interim target.

- Will the UK improve its pathway for the fourth carbon budget (2023-2027) to bring its ambition fully in line with at most a 2°C global trajectory? The UK’s Climate Change Act, with its system of carbon budgets, has given the government some credibility on the international stage.

- Germany has reduced its emissions by

27% compared to 1990 levels, but will it implement the climate levy on coal fired power plants, the only instrument on the table that will enable Germany to come close to its own goal of 40% reduction by 2020?

- How does Norway’s continued concessions to oil exploration fit into the Norwegian QELRC of 84% or the politically agreed target of 40% emissions reduction by 2030? If emissions from the petroleum sector will be constant or increased, where will the reductions happen?

- Could Canada please precisely define its definition of “net-net approach” and “production approach for harvest wood products”, and tell Parties precisely whether Canada expects to use these new approaches to offset growth in oil sands emissions to close the gap in meeting its 2020 target?

Finally, ECO wonders why such questions are even on the table. Why is there such a gap between what science and reason have made clear and the questions all of us still confront?

Empty chairs and empty nights

Establishing the Warsaw International Mechanism on Loss and Damage (WIM) was a major achievement of vulnerable developing countries. Last year in Lima, COP20 approved the WIM’s work plan for 2015-2016, which is crucial to progress, in addressing loss and damage from climate impacts. Unfortunately, that progress has stalled.

The mechanism has not been allowed to start its work yet, because, 6 months after Lima, its executive committee is still not staffed. Until a few weeks ago, LDCs—a moment of praise for them—were the only Parties to have submitted their representatives and most non-Annex I seats are now filled.

But where are the Annex I countries? Is this a strategy to delay the start of the mechanism? Or are Annex I countries working hard on identifying those individuals who are most committed to getting the mechanism up and running?

It is disappointing that the urgent work of the WIM faces such delay, and ECO urges all groups to finalise their nominations immediately. If speedily resolved, ExCom members can use the remainder of Bonn to kick off work well before Paris. Doing so would demonstrate that serious efforts to address loss and damage are underway, and the WIM is on track for inclusion into the Paris agreement.

SDGs: our last chance to save the planet?

Yesterday the UN released its zero-draft text for the Post-2015 development agenda, which includes the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). There's a rather weak climate change goal but no reference to the 1.5°C target or to the huge effort that is needed across all the SDGs to put us on that pathway. Nor is there comment on the drastic implications for poverty reduction of not staying below 1.5°C.

The main paragraph on climate change has no acknowledgement that the SDGs are the building blocks to a low-carbon and climate-

resilient future. This needs to be corrected. To achieve sustainable development, the SDGs must address structural issues. Given all the knowledge mankind now has on the destructive effects of the fossil fuel economy, the declaration must not fail to mention the obvious need for a shift from fossil fuels to renewable energy. How New York fares will impact what happens in Paris. ECO hopes you'll tap your colleagues, who are neck deep in the Post-2015 dialogues, on the shoulder and remind them of the central role action on climate has on the path to a sustainably developed future.

RED ALERT: Defend your future

It's time for a reality-check: mitigation is not a negotiation tactic, it's a mission for protecting people and the world's environments. The mounting tension surrounding the outcomes of the Structured Expert Dialogue (SED) shows that the journey from science to policy is a tricky path. (Saudi Arabia -- we're not impressed; this is not a game, decisions made here have profound effects on people's lives and livelihoods.)

The SED said that 2°C cannot serve as a guardrail that will keep us safe as long as we stay to one side, but rather 2°C is at best a last-stand defence line. The review underscored that even 2°C of global warming will incur heavy losses for the world and its peoples. A 1.5°C target would be much more secure.

The current warming of 0.85°C is already incurring clear and

inescapable damages. No community and no country, whether developed or developing, is exempt. Typhoon Haiyan devastated Filipino communities, and Cyclone Pam hit Tuvalu, Solomon Islands and most of all Vanuatu with extraordinary force, wiping out hard-won development. Sea-level rise elevated the storm surge of Hurricane Sandy helping to bring one of the most sophisticated cities in the developed world to a standstill and there too, the poorest suffered most of all.

Negotiations on mitigation continue today -- Parties know that 2°C or 1.5°C aren't just random numbers, they mark the line between civilisation and chaos. But it's not enough to know -- it's time to act. And mitigation isn't just a bit of text to argue over, it's a tool to defend everyone.

Germany's dirty little secrets

German Chancellor Angela Merkel wants to make climate protection a top issue for the G7 Summit she is hosting this coming Sunday and Monday. With preparations at Schloss Elmau under way, ECO is growing ever more concerned about Germany's coal power plants.

Coal still accounts for 44% of Germany's electricity supply, and CO2 emissions rose for 3 years, mainly due to the burning of cheaper-and-dirtier lignite, before a decline was seen in 2014. The "Energiewende" country is risking the ability to achieve its national target of 40% greenhouse gas emissions reduction by 2020 (compared to 1990 levels).

That's why the government has decided on a Climate Action Program to further cut emissions. Germany's energy minister, for the first time ever, has proposed an additional contribution from the power sector, targeting coal power plants over 20 years old. By addressing the dirtiest 10% of Germany's coal power plants, the government wants to reduce an additional 22 million

tonnes of CO2.

Naturally, there was an outcry following the announcement of this modest first step. Members of Merkel's conservative party protested heavily against any coal phase-out, while trade unions balked claiming that thousands of jobs are at risk. Under heavy attack, energy minister Gabriel may now weaken his proposal. The nation waited for Merkel to react, in vain.

Everyone has the right to some secrets, but when that involves polluting the atmosphere, then transparency is needed. To be taken seriously as the G7 president, the Chancellor needs to break her silence by supporting a shutdown of the dirtiest coal power plants to pave the way for a 100% renew-able energy supply. Only with that kind of leadership can Merkel credibly push Canada, Japan and the US towards a G7 commitment on a long-term reduction goal.

In the multilateral assessment session today and tomorrow, delegates may wish to ask whether Germany is ready to face up to these dirty little secrets.

The Energy That Must Not Be Mentioned

Yesterday, ECO enjoyed a full day of presentations and discussions on renewable energy (RE) during the Technical Expert Meetings. RE is now creating more jobs than the oil and gas sector: the success is truly inspiring. RE's development potential, and current and future importance, is so noteworthy that it's now referenced in the SDGs zero-draft document released yesterday. It's long past time that RE appeared in the texts here in Bonn.

The cost of solar power has declined 80% and wind 60% just in the last five years. Generating RE is now cheaper than fossil fuel-based sources in many parts of the world. Investments in RE grew by 17% last year. Moreover, the largest investors in RE as a share of GDP are all developing countries: Mauritius, Uruguay, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, South Africa and Chile. It's clear that RE can be a viable and accessible development pathway, despite arguments

to the contrary.

In the past year, China installed more RE than coal, while the US installed more wind power than coal and gas combined. Germany achieved almost 28% RE in its electricity mix. In India, RE is now double the capacity of nuclear energy. And the list goes on and on...

These trends demonstrate that a transition to 100%RE is already possible with today's technology. Just imagine what we can do with future technology! However, the current growth rates of RE are not enough to stay below 1.5°C or 2°C degrees.

Given all of this, ECO thinks it's more than a little surreal that RE isn't reflected in the Paris negotiation text yet. The Paris agreement must mark the beginning of the end of fossil fuels and accelerate the transition to 100% RE for all.