



ECO has been published by Non-Governmental Environmental Groups at major international conferences since the Stockholm Environment Conference in 1972.

ECO is produced co-operatively by the Climate Action Network at the UNFCCC meetings in Bonn, Germany during the March ADP2-4 meeting.

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Negotiations are a contact sport

We're pacifists here at ECO, but that doesn't mean that we don't have a soft spot for a good game of competitive sport. And just like the race to a low-carbon, climate-safe future, negotiations can be a good game, too – of course, we expect everyone to be good sportspeople and act in good faith.

ECO remembers our mother's warning – "games ain't fun without no rules". It's time that everyone took that advice to heart. For the games to really get started on the comprehensive, fair and legally binding agreement the world needs, we need rules to guide the discussion. Those rules, under UN processes, require Parties to form a contact group before formal negotiations can begin. ECO suggests this should happen before the half-time break of this Bonn session. In a contact group (open to Observers, as the Philippines on behalf of the LMDC have suggested), Parties can tackle unfair proposals and score goals for ambitious and fair solutions.

It seems the crowd cheering for a contact group is wide and growing, to include the African, Arab, BASIC, LMDC and some of the Pacific SIDS countries. So that leaves a question as to why the Europeans and Brollies, who usually love rules, seem determined to remain stuck in an eternal warm-up of informal consultations?

ECO is peace-loving at heart, but we've already enjoyed two years of reflection, with everyone sharing their "feelings", and time is tight. Parties need to kick off the real negotiations, based on their text proposals, in the structure of negotiations. ECO is looking forward to reading a record-breaking draft negotiating text (that is not as unwieldy as pre-Copenhagen) in Lima.

Putting the stale in stalemate

While perusing some of the recent submissions to the ADP, ECO was overcome by an unshakable sense of déjà vu. It almost seemed as though some Parties might have resubmitted some of their pre-Copenhagen submissions by mistake.

China's submission, for example, contained no less than 14 references to the Bali Action Plan and process. Yet not a single one to the Durban Action Plan beyond the first 3 paragraphs. And, boy oh boy did that call for 1% of GDP from developed countries for the Green Climate Fund bring back some memories.

China must be aware that simply recycling old submissions and repeating generic principles is not an effective negotiation tactic, especially when the ADP is moving to deeper water. It will neither strengthen your negotiating position vis-à-vis developed countries, nor help developing country peers who are looking to their "big brother" to help protect their interests and rights here. Why not use the many success stories and progress in China to leverage enhanced contributions at home and by others, and to facilitate a strong 2015 global deal?

Then there's the US, with its ongoing insistence on moving past binary categories, in spite of having failed to do its part during the period when those categories actually made sense. Sitting on top of the global economic food chain, and still unwilling to return emissions to anywhere near 1990 levels, let alone below as we would prefer at ECO, the US continues to lack credibility when it lectures other countries on their responsibilities.

These two countries seem stuck in a perpetual time warp. There's China imagining itself in a pre-industrial state of climatic grace, and the US imagining an idyllic future without fundamental global inequalities and with past failures and omissions forgotten.

ECO is aware that there is an element of faux reality with these negotiations, especially in this belated phase of extreme opening positions. But reality is desperately needed in the face of the dangers posed by the climate crisis, and the sooner the better.

When will Australia increase its pre-2020 ambition?

The independent review by the Australian Government's Climate Change Authority (CCA) is clear that Australia's current 5% target is "woefully inadequate". Instead the CCA has recommended that Australia's fair share would be a target of a 19% reduction of emissions below 2000 levels.

So Australia - what will it be? Will you stay on 'woefully inadequate' or listen to what your own Authority is saying and increase your ambition to at least a 19% reduction in emissions? Because, let's face it — as the OECD country with the highest per capita emissions, your weight is pretty hefty...

Adaptation Committee: All hands on deck

Entering its second year of work, last week's 5th meeting of the Adaptation Committee (AC) marks a new potential horizon for the group. It either has to move full steam ahead, providing value to the international response on adaptation, or continue to get stuck in the doldrums.

Far from having the winds taken out of its sails, the AC achieved some important outcomes, such as:

- The launch of the National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) Task Force, which will bring different UNFCCC bodies together to support developing countries in formulating and implementing their NAPs, and
- A decision to engage with the Green Climate Fund and ADP Co-Chairs to improve coherence on adaptation related agenda items.

If these achievements don't seem like much, there's more! Two days ago ECO applauded the Technology Executive Committee (TEC) for moving towards greater transparency, so it should be acknowledged that the AC is already "ace" in that respect, by allowing observers active participation in their procedures. More UNFCCC bodies should follow suits.

Transparency of support for technology transfer

ECO is a fan of transparency, and we're encouraged by the general agreement on the need for more of it on mitigation here in Bonn. Parties need to start considering the unique needs of transparency for support — particularly to enable the transfer of environmentally sound technologies.

This discussion opens the opportunity to move beyond standard MRV questions. Instead, can we assess whether support ensures that all Parties are enabled to participate to their fullest extent? And are supported technologies respectful of communities and planetary boundaries? Such questions reflect the reality that full participation of developing countries is needed to ensure emissions reductions at the required scale, and that support is needed to enable this participation. This would also be jeopardised by the introduction of technologies that put sustainable development at risk, threaten biodiversity or are undesirable from a cultural perspective.

How can these pitfalls be avoided? Complete transparency.

To achieve this, there must be a comprehensive set of quantitative and qualitative indicators that can appropriately reflect relevant concerns. These should include indicators to measure the participation of countries in the full variety of technology transfer arrangements from bi- to multilateral or business-to-business, and the list goes on.

Transparency also demands the establishment of a mechanism that stakeholders can demand redress in the case that climate action is impacting their property or livelihood. This must be accompanied by capacity building and technology assessment tools that can be used to determine the most suitable national fit.

It's a big job, but there's no alternative given that we need to use technology to enable mitigation action without causing other environmental or social problems.

From expert meetings to action agendas

Everyone has been waiting for today: the technical expert meetings will conclude with an entire session dedicated to "The Way Forward". The last two days of presentations have demonstrated that there are many examples of successful ways to deliver clean renewable energy and the enormous potential for scaling up action. However, we haven't even discussed how the ADP process will help to close the gigatonne gap between now and 2020. That's what Workstream 2 is about still, right?

ECO suggests that today's session should focus on areas of common interest, barriers to scaling up renewable energy and how the UNFCCC could spur on cooperative action and overcome the barriers.

There are key questions to respond to: what do we need the Technology Mechanism, the Standing Committee and the Green Climate Fund to do to realise the potential of renewable energy and energy efficiency? What decisions are needed in Lima to enable implementation?

UNFCCC institutions can be tasked to contribute in different ways. For example, the Technology Executive Committee could analyse renewable energy technologies highlighted by the Technology Needs Assessment process and synthesise lessons learned and best practices. The Task Force could also identify renewable energy technology gaps or aid country planning by tracking the price trajectory of promising technologies.

ECO asks that Parties focus on defining areas of homework, ensure that sufficient time is allocated in June to develop detailed strategies and then use the institutions to deliver on the potential.