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Work stream 2 - It's time to act

If you have read yesterday's ECO (or the IPCC's newest report), you know why we need ADP Workstream 2 (WS2). We need to close the ambition gap ASAP to avoid the worst impacts of climate change. To stay below 1.5°C, we need to phase out all fossil fuels and phase in 100% renewable energies, with energy access for all by 2050 at the latest. To achieve this transition, we have to avoid any further lock-in into unsustainable high-carbon infrastructure.

That's why ECO was pleased that the draft decision text on WS2 calls for its continuation until 2020 and for enhancing the technical expert meetings (TEMs). The TEMs have highlighted many opportunities for additional action and their multiple benefits – particularly for deploying renewable energy and energy efficiency measures. But, how do you move from identifying options to implementing effective action on the ground in terms of reducing GHG emissions?

ECO has a few suggestions:

1. Establish a process building on the TEMs for Parties to announce which of the identified policy options they plan to implement either on their own or in partnership. This should be the objective of a regular high-level ministerial engagement - and the decision needs to say so.
2. Establish a Forum on Accelerated Implementation in June, to consider the strengthening of existing commitments, enhanced means of implementation and formulating of new NAMAs. In addition, Parties should come ready to explain which of the policy options emerging from the TEMs they are in a position to implement. Bonn would then become a forum for ideas for additional action and creating new partnerships allowing ministers to prepare ambitious announcements for Paris.

Enhanced means of implementation are necessary to drive actions. Simply "inviting" the technology and financial mechanisms to provide that support is too weak. Instead, why not "request" the GCF to prioritise, in its mitigation window, those activities that contribute to closing the pre-2020 gap and achieving a zero-fossil future. Finally, the Technology Executive Committee has mined the Technology Needs Assessments to find that the most sought after technologies in developing country energy sectors (aka the low-hanging fruit) and they are (you guessed it): renewable energy and energy efficiency. The TEC could scan the horizon specifically on innovative energy sector technologies, including preliminary assessments of the economic, social and environmental impacts of their implementations in various environments.

Financial faux pas

Yesterday the ADP contact group finally got down and dirty on the potential finance content in the Paris deal when negotiators discussed the finance section of the co-chairs non-paper. There is no point in denying that ECO was shamelessly excited to finally start the discussions on what must be an integral part of the 2015 agreement. Whilst probably not surprising to anyone that has been following the UNFCCC for more than a few minutes, it was a bit of a let down to have the first half of the session wither away in a flurry of process confusion.

When the dust had settled sufficiently for substantial talks to begin, ECO's enthusiasm was curbed further. The US led the charge by requesting all references to the adequacy, predictability and additionality of finance removed. ECO almost suspects the American negotiator was deliberately speed-talking to hide the desperately dismal nature of the suggestions.

With onset depression, ECO, listened to the Swiss delegate start off on a constructive note by pointing to the paragraphs they would like to see in the actual agreement, the ones that could be addressed in other decisions and the parts they didn't agree with. However, without warning they suddenly launched a frontal attack against the idea of an ex-ante process leading to quantified finance commitments. They were very clear that this idea was an abomination they would never suffer. ECO is, as most of our avid readers will know, convinced that quantified commitments are essential to, inter alia, provide predictability to developing countries.

And while it may be legitimate to disagree on content, ECO didn't like the Swiss bullying tactics. ECO is convinced that this kind of approach rarely leads to constructive and fruitful discussions.

ECO also witnessed Sudan questioning the possibility of climate finance being gender sensitive. ECO has no doubts about this not only being possible but also highly necessary.

While this first leg of the finance discussions ended on a less than positive note, ECO is hopeful that today's continuation will be more constructive in looking at ideas of how to ensure that wealthy countries contribute their fair share to the global effort by providing the necessary finance, as well as other necessary support.

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Is Germany changing course on coal?

Germany has a problem. Europe's biggest economy currently risks missing its national 2020 mitigation target of a 40% reduction from 1990 levels. Despite the boom of renewable energies, Germany's emissions have been on the rise again for the last two years. If you think this is due to the country's nuclear phase-out, then think again. In reality, with 27% of German electricity production originating from renewables today, this clean technology represents a higher share than nuclear power used to have. The real reason for Germany's rising emissions is the continuously low price for emission certificates in Europe's creeping Emission Trading Scheme. With no credible CO2 price signal, the burning of coal remains highly profitable for energy suppliers in Europe. In Germany, this is causing not only higher emissions but also a huge surplus of electricity.

To address this, Germany's Environment Minister Barbara Hendricks, when traveling to Lima next week, will have some news in her baggage. Today, the government presents an "Action Plan" on how to fill the emission gap and reach Germany's 2020 climate target. In this plan, following public debate, Germany is announcing an additional reduction of 22 million tonnes of CO2 from the electricity sector. Although ECO finds that

the formulation is vague and the reduction too low, the facts behind the Action Plan are clear: For the first time ever, Europe's biggest economy intends to remove a part of its coal power capacity from the grid.

ECO thinks this is an important signal to Lima: if countries want to tackle climate change, they need to phase-out coal and phase-in renewable energy technologies and increased energy efficiency. As a next step, ECO urges Germany to not only address coal emissions at home, but also credits and export guarantees for coal power plants abroad. This is not unprecedented: some days ago, France addressed this issue, as the US did before them. Moreover in the UK, no new coal power plants can be built.

Even the German industry has been surprisingly supportive here: last Sunday, the biggest German energy supplier E.ON announced the sale of its coal, gas and nuclear business and their focus on renewables, grid and energy services. The German G7 presidency should build on these developments and form a coalition of the willing to start what the climate needs: a socially responsible phase-out of fossil fuels and 100% Renewables for all, as fast as possible.

Are we really going to make the poor pay for loss and damage?

It's a fool's game to think that polluters might get away with not paying for the loss and damage they have contributed to. For Typhoon Haiyan 6,300 people of Tacloban paid with their lives only a year ago, and 4 million of their friends and relatives paid with their houses. 13 million people in Kenya paid with hunger in the drought ending in 2011. And the people of the Pacific, and other low-lying regions, are paying with their land and homes. Someone has to pay for the loss and damage — the inevitable result of low mitigation ambition and inadequate levels of adaptation support provided by rich countries. At the moment it is the poor who are paying.

Clearly this is not tolerable, and Parties recognised this in Warsaw by incorporating the need for support within the functions of the Warsaw Loss and Damage Mechanism.

However, the current interim Executive Committee (ExCom) has been incapable of dealing with this obvious need in an adequate manner. As a result, finance, technology and capacity building are clearly lacking in the draft work plan - something that Parties must address. In short this means that Parties will have to decide whether a newly constituted ExCom will have the courage to deal with this gap. The COP therefore must a) provide them with a strong mandate to do so and b) endorse an ExCom constituted with proper representation of vulnerable countries – including a permanent place for AOSIS, LDCs and African countries. Parties might alternatively decide that support for loss and damage would be best dealt with at the COP level due to its highly political nature.

One thing is certain – it would be morally bankrupt to think that the poor should continue paying for the loss and damage that widely fall into the responsibility of big polluters.

Change the system, not the climate

Peruvian civil society organisations and grassroots movements are seizing the hosting of COP20 to join efforts in elevating environmental issues on the government's agenda, particularly as part of the country's development policies.

Climate change impacts have already reached Peru. In rural areas, people in Peru are already experiencing the negative impacts of climate change such as water scarcity, thus adding to existing environmental and social challenges. Yet Peru has been praised at the same time. This is exemplified by the approval of a project, known as the 'Ley paquetazo'. The courting of extractive industries has already led to cases such as that of Maxima Chaupe, a female farmer. She was sued by Yanacocha - one of the biggest gold mining companies - for living on the land where Yanacocha was planning its Conga extraction project. Maxima and her family were not only ordered to leave the land, they were also asked to pay Yanacocha a compensation fine of about US\$2,000. Other injustices have even led to fatalities: Edwin Chota, Jorge Ríos, Leoncio Quinticima and Francisco Pinedo, indigenous awajun, were killed by illegal loggers when trying to protect their community forest near a conservation area in the Amazons of Peru.

COP20 is an important milestone on the way to Paris, but it remains a closed space for stories of people like Maxima and Edwin who claim justice and call for a new, climate-friendly and sustainable development pathway.

ECO is happy to announce two events aiming to change this: Firstly, from the 8th to the 11th of December, the Cumbre de los Pueblos (People's Summit) will take place in Lima. It will be an open space for people to attend, get informed, make proposals, and call for urgent action to be conducted by their governments. Secondly, civil society and social movement organisations are also organising the Marcha Mundial en Defensa de la Madre Tierra (People's March), which will take place on the 10th of December in Lima. Around 15,000 people are expected to participate.

Two degrees too much

The Structured Expert Dialogue (SED) of the 2013-2015 Review gained important Presidential attention yesterday. At the beginning of the meeting, COP President Vidal stated that the SED is the most important space to reconcile science and policy. He continued in mentioning the mandate of the 2013-2015 review - which is to consider the adequacy of the long-term goal and progress towards achieving it - meaning that clear answers must result from the review for the Paris decisions.

On the first task to consider, the adequacy of the 2°C limit, yesterday's meeting gave clear answers from science. If temperature increases are limited to below 1.5°C, there are more chances for adaptation.

One example is the coral reefs provide crucial sources of protein in many peoples' diets. Coping with warming of 1.5°C is already a severe challenge for corals, but they will struggle to survive with 2°C warming. Also, 'below 1.5°C' could mean a chance to protect the summer Arctic sea ice.

It's not only ecosystems or sea ice in danger with 2°C warming, but people are also vulnerable. Cultures of Arctic communities and those on low-lying lands are endangered: for them the risk is high with 2°C.

It was good to hear yesterday that the US is interested in better understanding the differential risk of a world that is 1.5°C warmer and one that is 2°C warmer. AR6 of IPCC could deliver new insights on that, and ECO hopes this is the beginning of a real willingness to act on science-led mitigation ambition.

Of course the SED did not only look at the risks of climate change but also at mitigation opportunities. The scientists state that a fundamental departure from BAU is necessary for a 2°C-trajectory. For that, there is a need for carbon removal technologies (CDR) in the second part of the century, unless we make a steep change in emissions reductions by 2050. As we don't really know what CDR is, how it works and which risks are associated with it, this is another convincing argument to begin effective and expeditious mitigation promptly.