

Taking stock of the Pacific COP

The road to enhanced climate ambition

November 2017

We commend the Fijian presidency for achieving agreement on a number of key issues at COP23. The “Talanoa Dialogue” and the inclusion of enhanced ambition has been well anchored in the texts agreed in Bonn and must now be enriched by the Polish presidency.

Talanoa Dialogue

The Fijian presidency presented a robust design of next year’s stocktake of the global efforts to achieve the Paris Agreement’s long-term goals and inform the Nationally Determined Contributions, the so-called Talanoa Dialogue. The Talanoa Dialogue will consist of both a preparatory and a political phase, with the former beginning already now and running until COP24 in Poland where the political phase will take over.

The dialogue will build on a range of inputs, including IPCC’s special report on 1.5, and the outcome needs to be enhanced ambition. It will be especially important that the dialogue leads to countries ramping up their climate targets by 2020 (the current 2030 targets only take us one-third of the way, according to UNEP’s latest Gap Report).

Fiji has achieved genuine success, ensuring that this critical process for enhancing ambition is included in the Bonn package and bears the marks of Fiji’s legacy. The hope now is that the Talanoa Dialogue will proceed with the sense of openness and urgency that the Fiji presidency intends.

Paris rulebook

Countries managed to make incremental progress on the Paris rulebook. The achievement is uneven across different areas. Transparency and compliance are progressing surprisingly well, while the discussions around the Global Stocktake and NDC are slow.

The workload of 2018 will be very heavy. Due to the weak mandate, there won’t be any work been done in between now and the intersession in April 2018. Many difficult questions such as how to apply flexibility and differentiation will still be resolved next year.

Pre-2020 climate action

A two-page decision on pre-2020 was agreed upon, with a stocktake on pre-2020 implementation and ambition both in 2018 and 2019 the most notable elements. Furthermore, developed countries are asked to submit information on progress in enhancing ambition prior to 2020 by 1 May 2018, which is then to be synthesised by the secretariat. It’s also calling on all countries that haven’t done so yet to ratify the Doha Amendment as soon as possible.

Pre-2020 action was a source of tension throughout the first week of COP23, but in the end developed countries showed good faith and accepted the valid concerns about the lack of short-term climate action. We are pleased to see that the issue of pre-2020 action will be discussed at the COPs in 2018 and 2019, while a synthesis report on pre-2020 ambition will be compiled. Those moments will throw up both challenges and opportunities for progress on this critical piece of the Paris puzzle.

Climate impact and support package

There was very limited progress on issues like climate finance and loss and damage, key priorities of the most vulnerable countries. Developing countries were looking for a permanent agenda item

or a space on loss and damage to anchor the issue better in the negotiations, but in the end they only got a one-off expert dialogue (next May in Bonn), called the Suva Dialogue, to discuss the issue of loss and damage support.

There was however agreement to anchor the Adaptation Fund under the Paris Agreement, ensuring its survival after 2020.

After a year of devastating climate impacts, the Fiji COP did shine a light on climate vulnerability, but the conclusions of COP23 still leave much work to be done. Finance and loss and damage were two challenging issues throughout the talks and the delegates leave Bonn with very limited progress and few concrete agreements.

The Trump effect

In the fallout from Trump's decision to withdraw from Paris, the fact that the COP proceeded with minimal disruption is testament to the global appetite for climate action. The rest of the world remains committed to Paris and the need to ramp up climate action.

But we are still missing strong climate leadership, both on the domestic front on national energy and land use policies and in propelling international climate action forward. Much work will need to be done in the Talanoa Dialogue, key political moments such as the G7 and G20, the Ministerial on Climate Action (happening in the first half of 2018 in Europe and the second half in China), and at the 2018 COP24 in Katowice, Poland.

Forests and land-use

There are both positive and negative outcomes on forest and land-use issues. On the positive side, we have witnessed a growing awareness at the scientific, technical and policy level for the role of the forest and land-use sector in climate mitigation and adaptation. Even though the increased use of negative emission technologies like BECCS (bioenergy, carbon capture and storage) is still promoted as a big part of 1.5 degree development pathways, critical science highlights the need for natural climate solutions that increase environmental integrity and ensure social standards. The negotiations here in Bonn have not resulted in much progress on the rulebook for this sector, but it was positive to see the stakeholder engagement on this issue increase significantly. Further research on natural climate solutions and transparency in the continued development of the rules related to this sector are key.

On agriculture the negotiations have resulted in a work programme that has been awaited for the last 5 years. This will now further define the overlapping issues of required mitigation and adaptation action.

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