

Differences re-emerge on the rocky road to Paris

A new climate change agreement is to be adopted in Paris in December, but there are big differences on how to reach a fair deal, and the negotiations are tough.

Bonn, 8 June (Martin Khor) – The UN Climate Conference in Paris in December may become a Climate Summit if many top political leaders accept an invitation to attend. What role they are to play is not yet known, or even the dates they are requested to come.

A new agreement to tackle climate change is expected to be adopted. But there are many hurdles to overcome before a deal is reached.

At negotiations now taking place in Bonn to draw up the Paris agreement, old unresolved issues have resurfaced, with sharp divisions between developed countries (the North) and developing countries (the South).

It is hard to see how they can be settled in the remaining week in Bonn plus the three more meetings including the Paris conference. But a deal in Paris is a political necessity, so somehow the differences have to be bridged, or else papered over.

There are two requisites for a good climate deal in Paris. First, It has to be environmentally ambitious, meaning that it leads the world to reduce emissions so that the average global temperature does not increase by more than 2 degrees Celsius (or 1.5 degrees, according to some) above the pre-industrial period.

That global average temperature rise has now exceeded by 0.8 degree since pre-industrial level. With global emissions increasing by about 50 billion tonnes a year, the remaining “space” in the atmosphere to absorb more emissions (before the 2 degrees limit is reached) will be exhausted in three decades or so.

Second, the deal also has to be fair and equitable. This means that the North, having been mainly responsible for the historical emissions and being more

economically advanced, has to take the lead in cutting emissions as well as transferring funds and technology to the South to help it switch to low-carbon sustainable development pathways.

This equity principle is indeed embedded in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, which will house the new Paris agreement, and which is now conducting the negotiations.

The South countries insist that this principle be at the centre of the new agreement, and that indeed it has to be since it comes under the Convention and thus it must be in accordance with the Convention’s principles and provisions.

But the North countries are most reluctant to accept this argument. They claim the world has changed, and all countries (except the least developed) should be treated the same way.

By this they mean that a new regime should be created in which all countries should undertake the same emissions reduction obligations, if not now, then in the near future.

In the interim, all countries should contribute in various ways to cut their present and future emissions. And they should do this, even if they do not get enough funds and the technology they ask for.

The developing countries argue that this kind of attitude is tantamount to the North escaping from their legal obligations under the present Convention, and that the rich countries are in effect subverting the Convention’s principles and provisions and re-writing the rules.

They are concerned that this “great escape” is aimed at shifting the burden of change away from the North to the South. Moving from the present cheap oil-based

energy system to one based on renewable energy, and other transformations, requires a social, economic and technological revolution that is costly.

Will it affect development goals? Who will pay for this cost? How to obtain the technologies cheaply enough to implement the revolution? What obligations should the South take on under the Paris agreement if the North does not meet its obligation to help out?

These questions and the differences in approach are at the core of the many problematic issues being negotiated.

The current Bonn session is grappling with a draft that contains the different views that countries have on the Paris agreement. Among the key issues to be resolved are the following:

- **SAME OR DIFFERENT TREATMENT:** Should countries have the same obligations to address emissions and to provide financing (a position favoured by the North) or have different obligations, according to their historical responsibilities and current level of development (the South's view)?
- **BALANCE ON MITIGATION, ADAPTATION, LOSS and DAMAGE:** Generally, the North is more interested in focusing the agreement on having obligations on mitigation (reducing emissions), whilst the South is equally or even more concerned about actions on adaptation (measures to reduce the effects of climate change) and loss and damage (coping with the damage caused by climate change, such as storms, heavy rain, floods, drought, etc.). The North is especially resisting loss and damage.
- **FUNDING:** The North pledged to mobilise US\$100 billion a year for climate actions for the South by 2020, but only a small fraction is available so far. The South wants a firm commitment on finance in the Paris agreement, and a roadmap on how the money

will increase to US\$100 billion between now and 2020, but this is resisted by the North.

- **TECHNOLOGY:** The South wants concrete commitments from the North to transfer technologies needed for mitigation and adaptation actions, including removing barriers such as lack of funds and know-how, and intellectual property which may raise the cost. The North wants the South to obtain technology on commercial terms, and does not want the agreement to mention the intellectual property issue or address know-how.
 - **COUNTRIES' "CONTRIBUTIONS":** Countries are expected to submit the "contributions" they intend to make to global climate action. The North wants developing countries to submit figures on their maximum mitigation obligations.
- The developing countries are upset that the North is refusing to commit any figures on funding, and many want to also include their actions on adaptation to show the range of their contribution to global actions. Meanwhile the mitigation commitments submitted by several developed countries show a low level of ambition.
- **LEGALLY BINDING? :** The Paris outcome could be a protocol or another legally binding agreement or an outcome with legal force. What exact shape or form it will take is still to be discussed. How binding it will be on countries, and what happens if they do not comply, will be one of the final issues to be resolved.

The above is a rough account of the differences, which are mainly on North-South lines. But there are also various shades of views among the developed countries and among the developing countries.

Whether they can be bridged before or at Paris remains to be seen. The fate of our climate, and humanity's future, depends quite a lot on it. +