

## Debate behind closed doors on the temperature goal in Paris Agreement

21 December, Penang (T' Ajit) — The long-term temperature goal and how to operationalize it was discussed at length among Parties before compromise was reached in the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

The negotiations were spread over several sessions at the recently concluded twenty-first session of the Conference of the Parties (COP21) of the UNFCCC in Paris that took place from 30 November to 12 December.

Central to the temperature goal debate was whether the Paris Agreement should strive to keep global average temperature rise to under 2°C or 1.5°C by the end of the century and in what context.

The 'context' discussed by Parties included science, sustainable development, poverty eradication, equity, common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR) and availability of means of implementation. The options for operationalisation of the long-term goal of 1.5°C or 2°C ranged from transformation towards climate neutrality to decarbonisation to peaking. Different country groupings had their own preferences and it took lengthy negotiations to agree on a formulation on the long-term goal and in operationalizing it, which was finally crafted and presented to Parties by the COP21 President, French Foreign Minister, Laurent Fabius.

In the Agreement adopted in Paris on 12 December, Article 2 or what was referred to as the 'purpose' of the Agreement provides the context to the long-term goal along with a formulation on what the long-term goal should be.

Article 2 reads:

*"This Agreement, in enhancing the implementation of the*

*Convention, including its objective, aims to strengthen the global response to the threat of climate change, in the context of sustainable development and efforts to eradicate poverty* (emphasis added), including by:

(a) Holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2 °C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels, recognizing that this would significantly reduce the risks and impacts of climate change;

(b) Increasing the ability to adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change and foster climate resilience and low greenhouse gas emissions development, in a manner that does not threaten food production;

(c) Making finance flows consistent with a pathway towards low greenhouse gas emissions and climate-resilient development."

(See also [TWN Update 18](#): *What countries agreed to under the Paris Agreement-Part 1*.)

The reference to operationalizing the above, in the mitigation section in Article 4 of the Paris agreement, reads: "...Parties aim to reach global peaking of greenhouse gas emissions as soon as possible, recognizing that peaking will take longer for developing country Parties, and to undertake rapid reductions thereafter in accordance with best available science, so as to achieve a balance between anthropogenic emissions by sources and removals by sinks of greenhouse gases in the second half of this century, on the basis of equity, and in the context of sustainable development and efforts to eradicate poverty."

The consensus to reflect both 2°C and 1.5°C in the agreement and how to operationalize this was achieved after considerable discussions and late night sessions among Parties.

For instance, in the first [version](#) of the draft agreement, which was a proposal by COP21 President, Laurent Fabius, presented on 9

December, the following three options with respect to the long-term goal were provided:

*“Option 1: below 2 °C above pre-industrial levels,*

*Option 2: well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels [and to [rapidly] scale up global efforts to limit temperature increase to below 1.5 °C] [while recognizing that in some regions and vulnerable ecosystems high risks are projected even for warming above 1.5 °C],*

*Option 3: below 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels,*

*taking into account the best available science, equity, sustainable development, the need to ensure food security and the availability of means of implementation, by ensuring deep reductions in global greenhouse gas [net] emissions.”*

For operationalization of these options, two further options were presented in the mitigation section:

*“Option 1: Parties collectively aim to reach the global temperature goal referred to in Article 2 through [a peaking of global greenhouse gas emissions as soon as possible, recognizing that peaking requires deeper cuts of emissions of developed countries and will be longer for developing countries; rapid reductions thereafter to [40–70 per cent][70–95 per cent] below 2010 levels by 2050; toward achieving net zero greenhouse gas emissions [by the end][after the middle] of the century] informed by best available science, on the basis of equity and in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication.*

*Option 2: Parties collectively aim to reach the global temperature goal referred to in Article 2 through a long-term global low emissions [transformation toward [climate neutrality][decarbonization]] over the course of this century informed by best available science, on the basis of equity and in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication.”*

In the second [version](#) of the text, also prepared by the COP21 President, presented on 10 December, the text pertaining to the long-term goal read: *“Hold the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2 °C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 °C, recognizing that this would significantly reduce risks and impacts of climate change.”*

To operationalize the above temperature goal, the option presented read: *“In order to achieve the long-term global temperature goal set in Article 2 of this Agreement, Parties aim to reach the peaking of greenhouse house gas emissions as soon as possible, recognizing that*

*peaking will take longer for developing country Parties, and to undertake rapid reductions thereafter towards reaching greenhouse gas emissions neutrality in the second half of the century on the basis of equity and guided by science in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication.”*

Since negotiations were happening behind closed doors, not open to observers, Third World Network (TWN) spoke to several negotiators to find out how these options evolved into the consensus reflected in the Paris Agreement.

According to sources there was a strong push from groups such as the **Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS)** and the **Least Developed Countries (LDCs)**, led by **Grenada, Marshall Islands, Kiribati, Tuvalu and Gambia**, and countries such as **Venezuela and Bolivia** to reflect 1.5°C as the long-term goal, since going above the temperature would put their survival at stake.

Countries such as the **United States (US), India, China** and groups such as the **European Union (EU)** were in favour of reflecting below 2°C, but given the strong demand to reflect 1.5°C, they were willing to work on a formulation reflecting both 2°C and 1.5°C. This seemed widely agreeable, a developing country negotiator told TWN.

However, the tone of the **US** behind the closed doors was quite clear. “1.5°C is very ambitious. We need to make sure the overall agreement looks like a reasonable one. The more ambitious we go, the more difficult it is to get there,” the US is supposed to have said.

Differences also arose in relation to the context in which the temperature goal should be achieved. Sources revealed that during the discussions on operationalizing the long-term goal, there was a debate on terms such as ‘decarbonisation’ and ‘carbon neutrality’ and on keeping differentiation (between developing and developed countries) with respect to peaking of emissions.

On operationalization of the long-term goal, sources said that the **US** supported global peaking, but with no timeframe. The US also said that it was attracted to the notion of decarbonisation over the course of the century. For the US, decarbonisation did not mean the end of use of carbon, but “controlling carbon through technologies”. On the context, it said that the

context for the entire agreement would govern how they would see it reflected with respect to the long-term temperature goal. The US was in favour of reflecting the diversity of circumstances of Parties “over time”.

Supporting a 1.5°C goal, the **EU** also pushed for a 2050 target and to achieve carbon neutrality by then. The EU further said the long-term goal needs to be driven by science and that each country would do what they liked and there was no need to reflect differentiation in operationalizing the long-term goal.

**China** was in favour of a long-term objective that had reference to below 2°C, with a possible vision of 1.5°C, based on equity and poverty reduction. For China the context to the temperature goal should be connected and it would be important to define long-term goal for not just mitigation, but one that talked of ambition covering mitigation and adaptation in the context of means of implementation and sustainable development. On operationalizing the long-term goal, 1.5°C would cause negative emissions for some Parties and this would be difficult to achieve even with technologies such as CCS (carbon capture and storage). For China the context to the long-term goal was equity and CBDR. It also said that decarbonisation would mean gradually one would have to phase out all fossil fuels and it cautioned Parties to be realistic about it.

“Of the other options present such as carbon neutrality, some developing countries said they did not understand such terms. Decarbonisation and carbon neutrality were the cause of anxiety to some Parties and there was fear that these could prevent broad participation. It is not that developing countries would not do anything. CBDR will ensure that we will be on a solid moral basis to cooperate effectively,” a developing country negotiator told TWN.

For **India** whatever goal was mentioned, there was a need to know how to achieve it. And if that clarity was provided, India could agree on any temperature goal. India wanted to safeguard its development in translating the mitigation long-term goal and called for equitable distribution of

carbon budget and alluded to climate justice during the discussions on the global goal. India also called for finance, technology and capacity building support.

India said it could not support concepts such as decarbonisation and called for a qualitative pathway so that countries could determine how they move. “If you want to have 1.5°C or 2°C, global carbon budget based on historical responsibility is the way forward. Developing countries need the policy space to develop. We are not against science. Equity and CBDR should provide the context,” India is supposed to have said.

**Bolivia** also called for the operationalization of the goal on the basis of equitable distribution of carbon budget.

Sources also said that for **Brazil** any long-term goal should be in the context of poverty eradication and sustainable development. Brazil said that the direction of travel for agreeing on a temperature goal should account for the means of implementation required to implement the goal. It said that while it did not object to reflect reference to 1.5°C, it would be possible if the goal was treated as a trajectory of travel. Brazil also said that it was difficult to solve 1.5°C or 2°C in isolation and the context should be differentiation. For the context, it preferred sustainable development over decarbonisation. Brazil also expressed concerns on peaking and said that it would be good to agree on the principle on the basis of equity and science, which would provide the context of how to reach the goal.

**Saudi Arabia** cautioned that for 1.5°C, severe action needs to be taken, and that it needs to be supported by finance, technology and capacity building support from the developed countries. It said it could not subscribe to a goal that Parties would not keep, especially in the absence of means of implementation support from the developed countries.

**Sudan** for the **Africa Group** was in favour of the context of equity and CBDR. It also cautioned against using terms such as decarbonisation and net zero, which were least understood.