

ECO



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In Defence of an objectives section

Let's start with the big questions: Why are we here? Is it the beautiful mountain panorama overlooking a magnificent lake, the long working days or the joy of spending more money, than average, for just about everything? No, ECO doesn't think so either. We're here to save civilisation, secure our children's future, keep global warming below 1.5 C; and to pave the path to get there.

The agreement needs to send a signal to the rest of the world that we're heading in the right direction towards a transition to a carbon-free future. It's not rocket science that putting the common objectives section at the beginning of the document sends a signal that this is exactly what we will do.

Clarity at the start of the document will give structure to the text and establish the overall goal supported by all of the subsequent elements of the agreement. Ergo, ECO will defend Section C until it runs out of ink to voice our never-ending support. It's Section C that will provide a clear direction knitting together all

the pieces, outline the drivers and our shared aspirations.

Section C on objectives must:

- Set the direction towards a resilient world in which we phase-out fossil fuel emissions and phase-in renewable energies, as soon as possible, and no later than 2050.
- Reflect requirements for finance, technology and capacity building for creating that resilient world and outline the MOI for developing countries; to help them peak their emissions before subsequently reducing them, ensure human rights, indigenous rights, gender equality and a just transition to decent work opportunities for all.
- Make clear that Parties understand the need for adaptation and preparedness will depend on on how fast emissions may be reduced.

We all know climate change is a systemic challenge. An agreement that does not start with a frame to enable a systemic response simply wouldn't work. We need to get this right from the start.

Differentiation is in the air

The post-Copenhagen vogue has been all about self-differentiation. Everyone wants to talk about it! This is good news, because if we don't differentiate contributions and rules and get trapped in pure self-differentiation, we'll lack the overdue ambition needed to tackle climate change.

But we'll need to become a lot clearer about the differentiation challenge. So what is needed now? Let's start with top-down elements – e.g. equity based comparative review and ratcheting – integrated in the Paris agreement. To that end, ECO raises the following three questions:

1) How do we differentiate?

The old binary distinction between “developed” and “developing” countries is unacceptable to (ahem) developed countries. Meanwhile, developing countries will not accept a new accord without a distinction between groups of countries.

So, what to do? Ideas are flying! We have Brazil's “concentric circles” proposal and South's Africa's equity reference framework. There's also America's rather tongue-in-cheek suggestion for a formulation in which emissions and economic indicators are used to define dynamic groups called “Annex X” and “Annex Y”. Then there's Ethiopia with their different formulation of dynamic annexes, based on per capita GHG and GDP indicators. And just about everyone's future features “cycles.”

2) Which rules should apply to which groups?

The rules of participation and responsibility are not expected to be the same for all groups. The MRV rules will differ according to groups, and so will plenty of other things.

3) How do we define equitable shares?

A positive cycle of increasing ambition requires an equitable regime. Grouping countries is insufficient because it won't define national “fair shares” in the common effort to stabilise the climate system. You already know our five equity indicators: adequacy, responsibility, capability, adaptation need and development need. South Africa's equity reference framework and India's recent “Section K” suggestion on differentiation are not too different.

So, it's clear that with Valentine's Day around the corner, it's not just love in the air—differentiation is in the air too. Now we need agreement on differentiation that's fair and robust enough for COP21, while opening the door for improvement and strengthening in the years after it. By June we need helpful results. This should pave the way for a common understanding of differentiation in Paris that supports an ever improving review and ratcheting system.

A message from outside the UNFCCC Bubble

ECO hears a lot of talk about the ‘real’ world—that thing outside of the UNFCCC negotiations, remember? Don’t worry, it still exists. And to be fair, outside of our bubble, there are others too, like the post-2015 sustainable development goals or development finance ones. All three of these bubbles are in motion this year, and their paths will cross. And we all know what happens when bubbles collide, or worse, burst. And that makes Liechtenstein’s signpost to the sustainable development goals in the preamble of the Geneva text very welcome.

With the post-2015 sustainable development process, the Heads of States Summit at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) later this year in September will set the tone for Paris.

So, shouldn’t the development framework for the next 15 years also deliver action on mitigation, adaptation, resilience, etc.? It only makes sense that the millennium declaration illustrates how climate-proof

development and sustainable development are interlinked. This kind of support for the UNFCCC would be most welcome, especially in strong statements from world leaders in New York.

But, dear Parties, you don’t have to wait until September. You can start as early as next week, because there’s a UNGA session from 17-20 February. This is the opportunity to support the long-term vision of phasing-out fossil fuel emissions and phasing-in renewable energy.

And beyond that, there’s the process on finance for (potentially sustainable!) development. It would be great if the conference in Addis Ababa this July brings forward climate-proof development finance, and a bit more clarity on how it relates to climate finance. ECO suggests that climate finance experts peek into this bubble, and work to ensure that both climate and development needs are fairly and adequately met. And no double-counting!



Locals calling for climate action in Geneva, Switzerland
Photo: Linh Do

The emissions abyss

The main focus here in Geneva is on shaping the Paris agreement for the post-2020 period. Nevertheless, it is critical that we do not lose sight of the need to increase our climate actions from now up to 2020 as well.

Even if a global climate agreement is reached in Paris this December, most of the proposals and targets for cutting emissions won’t kick in until after 2020. But the coming five years are absolutely vital in the battle against climate change.

During these five years global emissions should be peaking and then falling, or at the very least, levelling off. At the moment the pre-2020 period doesn’t seem to have much priority in most countries, despite the fact that emissions must peak within this decade to keep global warming below 2°C. It is no secret that with current emission trends we are heading for a 3.6 to 4°C scenario; just check the IPCC’s work. We can’t allow emission figures to drift ever upwards—otherwise the long-term goals will become even harder to meet.

We know that many countries have already started taking actions on climate change at the national level. But we also know that these have not gone far enough. The arguments that action on climate change will negatively affect growth or poverty eradication are no longer valid. Many things can be, and should be, done right now. From scrapping coal-fired power stations and reducing deforestation, to increasing renewables and improving energy efficiency, there are plenty of ways to limit pre-2020 emissions and close the gigatonne gap.

Sendai calling: tackling disasters and climate change

2015 will be a trek. One summit followed by another, ending with a steep climb to Paris. The first peak will be reached next month with delegates meeting at the World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (WCDRR) in Sendai, Japan to finalise a new framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR). ECO has some thoughts about outcomes at Sendai:

1. A strong signal that climate change is already increasing the frequency, intensity and unpredictability of natural disasters. Reducing disaster risks will require emissions to be cut drastically.
2. Ramp up support for disaster risk reduction action. Disaster preparedness is not a solo under-taking. Often a practitioner gap exists between DRR institutions and those doing adaptation on the ground. This results in bad planning and loss of crucial resources. Sendai should bridge that gap and transform DRR into “strategic DRR”.
3. Initiate a framework that tracks countries’ progress in advancing DRR both qualitatively and in metrics. This framework could also provide valuable learning and bring coherence in implementation of adaptation actions.
4. Promote approaches to tackle ‘exceeding national capacities’, which is a gap in the international system. Sometimes countries are overwhelmed by disasters. For many countries, these disasters are a direct result of our changing climate. The DRR needs of affected countries should be matched by reliable support, recognising collective and differentiated responsibilities.
5. Strive to be broadly coherent with the post-2015 sustainable development goals and the finance for sustainable development negotiations.
6. Just as with the climate negotiations, take better account of the needs of the most vulnerable, and integrate them into the entire process from needs assessment to implementation and monitoring.

From ECO’s viewpoint, the UNFCCC is still the main place for agreeing obligations and commitments to reduce risks through mitigation and adaptation and to address loss and damage. And Sendai is an important opportunity to provide mutual reinforcement between the UNFCCC process and other international efforts to address those concerns.