

WARMING BELLS

Relevant for: Environment & Disaster Management | Topic: Environmental Conservation, Sustainable Development & EIA

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The 24th Conference of Parties (CoP) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), that begins tomorrow in the Polish city of Katowice, is the global climate forum's most significant meet after Paris, 2015. If the two-week long CoP accomplishes all that is on its table, it will have put together guidelines to operationalise the Paris Climate Change Agreement. This is significant because the Paris process relies on countries to take the lead in global warming mitigation with Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). At Katowice, negotiators are slated to draft the rulebook that is essential to ensure that the pact's signatories are on track to achieve their commitments. The document will spell out how the signatories will report their global warming mitigation efforts, it will specify the yardsticks to chart their progress and elucidate what cooperation will look like in terms of providing support to countries in need of climate finance.

The process of drafting the rulebook has been a troubled one. The spirit of solidarity that swept the Paris summit has been witnessed only sporadically after the landmark pact was inked. There is no agreement within the UNFCCC on whether rules to track progress on NDCs should be common to all or split into differentiated versions for developed and developing countries. Climate finance to help developing countries meet their obligations remains a key sticking point. Developing countries argue that the rulebook should enjoin developed countries to report their climate financing commitments. Such reporting is crucial to help them plan effectively for climate action, they contend. Developed countries retort that the Paris Pact does not have such a mandate. Matters came to a head at Bangkok in September, when at a precursor meet to CoP 24, the group of Like Minded Countries — that includes India and China — made it clear that any progress at Katowice “will not be possible without any positive movement on finance”.

At the same time, much has happened outside UNFCCC fora, or on its sidelines, that offers reasons of hope. While climate diplomats have struggled to come to an agreement on thorny issues like tracking progress on NDCs and climate finance, renewable energy technologies have improved and become less expensive — especially in India and China. India and France have transcended the developed-developing country divide to helm the International Solar Alliance that could promote cooperation in solar technology development and further bring down the prices of renewable energy. At Katowice, negotiators should be guided by this spirit of cooperation.

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