

# STILL ON THE LAST CHANCE SALOON

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

The world is in deep trouble. Average global temperatures have crossed a degree Celsius above preindustrial levels and such concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere (410 ppm) has never been seen by humans before. The 24th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP-24) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Katowice, Poland (December 3-14) is meant to take forward steps to address this threat of climate change.

The purpose of the meeting is to set guidelines, or agree on a rulebook, to implement pledges that were made by various countries at the Paris Climate Conference in 2015. In the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), planned ahead of the Paris COP-21, each country described the actions it would take and the levels to which greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions would be reduced (mitigation). Many of them also described what they would do to improve their capacity to live in a warmer world (adaptation), and the extent to which these goals required support in the form of finance or technology transfer. Given that the Paris Agreement (PA) was ratified rapidly and went into force within a year (in November 2016), one would think agreeing on how to implement something that everyone wanted would be straightforward. Not so fast, say a few countries.

At Paris, the global community agreed to try to limit warming to 1.5° C above preindustrial levels since the effects can be dire beyond that. For instance, small island nations already face devastating effects with the rise of mean sea levels due to climate change.

The current conference at Katowice comes soon after a special publication by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the 1.5 Degree Report, according to which what we need are far-reaching, speedy transformative changes in our societies in order to stay below 1.5° C. Calling for an immediate and drastic drop in GHG emissions through technology and lifestyles and a focus on mitigation and adaptation, the report was an “all hands on deck” alarm.

When all nations agree on how to gather, count and report on their emissions and the process is standardised, the implementation of the PA becomes more grounded. There was reportedly some progress on these processes at the intermediate meeting held in preparation for the Katowice COP. But there also has to be a general agreement on how to estimate adaptation. This is more complicated and varied and is still being developed.

There has been little, if any, progress on finance, technology transfer and capacity development. Article 9 of the PA calls for financial support from developed countries that is significantly derived from public funds, which “should represent a progression beyond previous efforts”. This was expected to result in at least \$100 billion per year to address needs and priorities of developing countries for mitigation and adaptation.

Article 9.5 requires developed countries to communicate their levels of support, including pledges of additional finance. Even a rough estimate of financial needs for implementing all the NDCs puts it at \$4.4 trillion, according to a 2016 briefing paper from Germanwatch. The Climate Funds Update of 2018 notes that multilateral funds pledged until 2017 are less than \$30 billion, of which around \$20 billion has been deposited and about \$4 billion disbursed. Even according to the recent Summary Report of the Standing Committee on Finance under the UNFCCC, the total finance flows were around \$38 billion in 2016, and much of this has been through

multilateral funds. Global finance flows are estimated to be close to \$700 billion, but this includes renewable energy investment and other cross-border flows. The 2018 Oxfam Climate Finance Shadow report estimates that net new finance amounts to only \$16-21 billion.

There have also been charges of double counting and counting of development aid levelled against developed countries. According to a recent discussion paper from the Ministry of Finance, Government of India, what is required is credible, accurate and verifiable numbers on the climate flows expected from developed countries. Such reliable flow will encourage and persuade all countries that commitments made will be fulfilled. The inability to have any agreement between developing and rich countries ensures that the fights on finance and technology will intensify in Poland, especially in the second week. These are very likely to impede progress on the rulebook.

The ethical foundations of the climate change fights on the global stage are based largely on the occupation of atmospheric carbon space by rich countries, leaving little room for growth by the latecomers, which are poor nations. Countries with average income exceeding \$15,000 typically have the capacity and finance and technology to reduce their emissions dramatically. They must also alter their lifestyles considerably, which is required for the transformational change that the 1.5 Degree Report calls for.

Trying to change what was agreed at Paris, as has been insisted upon by the U.S., for instance, is tantamount to renegotiating the PA, according to emerging economies and poor countries.

As extreme events are on the rise, the separate stream referred to as “loss and damage” needs attention. This is a provision for support to poor countries experiencing economic and non-economic losses and destruction from climate change events. There has not been much progress on this issue by the task force set up to advance it. This is an important topic to be discussed at Katowice.

The implementation of the activities for the PA formally begins in 2020 and concludes in 2030. We are currently in the Doha Amendment period, or the second phase of the Kyoto Protocol, which has not been ratified. In a couple of years after the start of the PA implementation, we will have a stocktaking — reviewing progress and deciding on more stringent targets for the future. This renewed commitment towards the future means that countries have to trust each other, which would mean that fulfilling obligations is a foundation of future ambition and action.

While the U.S. and its current policies are much to blame for the situation, other developed countries are not doing that much better. Australia and France have had political turmoil due to their climate policies even while experiencing severe weather events. Protests on fuel charge hikes have rocked France. Europe is still heavily reliant on coal and European Union emissions were stable in 2014-2016. The U.K. has been relying on fuel from fracking and many have remarked that the advances in California under the leadership of Governor Jerry Brown are superficial and do not address fundamental issues.

Today's children are inheriting from their parents and grandparents an earth that is out of control and heading to be 3-4° C warmer by the end of the century. Perpetual growth is not viable for any species. Business-as-usual policies with high consumption by the rich are driving the destruction of ecosystems and the mass extinction of species. The “sixth extinction”, massive destruction of species on earth, as it has been named by Paul Ehrlich, Elizabeth Kolbert and others, is ongoing and where this will take us is beyond the scope of our imagination.

Sujatha Byravan is a scientist who studies science, technology and development policy

Our existing notification subscribers need to choose this option to keep getting the alerts.

**END**

Downloaded from **crackIAS.com**

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com

crackIAS.com