

HOT AIR AT KATOWICE

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

“Until you start focussing on what needs to be done, rather than what is politically possible, there is no hope,” said [Greta Thunberg, a 15-year-old activist from Sweden](#) who shook the United Nations gathering at Katowice, Poland, with her plain speaking. But what she said should not happen is exactly what happened at the recently concluded 24th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP24) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. While there was some progress on the process by which the Paris Agreement of 2015 would be implemented, key issues of concern for the poorest and developing nations were diluted or postponed.

The [1.5 Degree Report](#), which was produced by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in October 2018, showed that the earth is close to a climate catastrophe. This report was not suitably acknowledged as an evidence-based cause for alarm by the U.S., Saudi Arabia and Russia, however. These countries wanted the report “noted” but not “welcomed”. Arguments on word choices stalled the meeting at various stages, especially with the U.S. present with its large team of lawyers. While the U.S. is getting out of the Paris Agreement, formally by late 2020, it still took part in deciding (or rewriting) the rules for many agreed items of the Paris Agreement.

The summit aimed to establish guidelines for implementing and reporting on the Paris Agreement. Countries were looking to establish an enhanced transparency framework to monitor, verify and report actions taken in a systematic, standardised manner. As reported in their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), all countries would carry out mitigation. But adaptation is a significant portion of many developing countries’ plans. Transparency — what would be done to reduce emissions, how countries would measure and report progress, and how much support industrialised countries would provide — was an important aspect of the discussions. This will inform stocktaking of progress on the Paris Agreement and how much more is needed to cut emissions and raise ambition.

Funds were also required from rich countries for the losses and damages borne by poor nations. While this meeting was not about loss and damage per se, this item will take greater precedence as warming effects intensify. Technology transfer and capacity building support are also issues of importance to vulnerable countries and poor, developing countries that need help to transition from high to low carbon economies.

There is little to no finance available for poor and developing nations. The details on funding and building capacity have been postponed. References to “equity” in the draft rule book were erased by the U.S. delegation, leaving one Indian negotiator to remark that they would have to go back to the original language of the Convention if differentiation between the developed and industrialised countries is purged from the text. Article 9 (the provision of financial support to developing countries from industrialised nations) was ignored; instead, there was an emphasis on carbon markets and insurance mechanisms. Finance was not even considered until the Africa Group of Nations forced open the issue by boycotting the discussions. Still, with name-calling from Switzerland and backtracking from the U.S., there was a lot of tension at the negotiations.

In spite of these problems, a single rulebook for all countries has been produced and will serve as a foundation for more detailed rules and structures. Many international civil society groups

expressed utter dismay over the disregard of equity. Poor and developing countries whose greenhouse gas emissions have been low or negligible will bear the brunt of warming effects. Whether or not funds will be replenished even for the implementation of the current NDCs is unclear. Funds for finance, better terms for new technologies to be transferred to developing and vulnerable countries, and economic and non-economic support for loss and damage and their equitable moorings in the text have been eliminated, minimised or footnoted. Yet, the need for 'ambition' was loudly proclaimed by many actors. How can there be ambition without support?

One should remember that the European Union, Australia, Switzerland and Japan did not disagree with the U.S. when "equity" was wiped from the text; in fact, they consented. So, simply pointing to the U.S. as the ogre would be incorrect. And corporations have had a significant role to play in the drafting of the text in climate agreements. A Shell Corporation executive boasted recently about the role that the company had played in writing parts of the text of the Paris Agreement, especially Article 6, which is about market mechanisms and carbon credit. Text from the company's straw proposal is part of the Agreement, according to *The Intercept*. American historian of science Naomi Oreskes and others have shown the methods by which those with vested interests have funded scientists and politicians to challenge climate change, thereby sowing confusion.

Local and state-level action that keeps climate change at the centre and fully incorporated into "good development" is the most critical policy perspective nations can adopt. As long as people and governments treat climate and environment as marginal to development, and well-being as marginal to GDP growth, climate change impacts will strain and tear every weak stitch of the world's economic and development fabric.

There is hope in youth action in various parts of the globe, from Europe to Australia to the U.S. The farmers' protests in India are but a symptom of a development-as-usual crucible gone wrong. Ms. Thunberg is not alone, and perhaps our strongest prospect is to get behind this future generation. As she said: "If solutions within the system are so impossible to find, maybe we should change the system itself."

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