

Far from keeping the world safe

“The science on climate change has been grim this year.” A replica of the Statue of Liberty which shows smoke emitting from the torch and a bronze sculpture titled ‘Unbearable’, both created by Danish artist Jens Galschiot, displayed during the climate change conference in Bonn, Germany. AFP

The 23rd meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP-23) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change concluded on November 17 in Bonn, Germany. The two-week meeting was regarded by many as primarily intended to clarify processes for the implementation of the Paris Climate Agreement through the creation of a rule book, with technical guidelines and processes. This would explain what compliance with the Paris Agreement means and how it would be monitored.

The key topics of contention were related to financial support, mitigation action, differentiation, and loss and damage — the same knots of disagreements that came up at COP-21 in Paris. The questions raised in Bonn were: Are developed countries going to do their fair share to support poor and emerging countries, having occupied the bulk of the planet’s available carbon space? What actions have thus far been taken to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by rich countries? Shouldn’t there be greater emphasis to phase out coal? There was also some apprehension about the role of the U.S. in the discussions since President Donald Trump had earlier declared that it would leave the Paris Agreement.

Actions related to the Paris Agreement are intended for 2020-2030. However, the pre-2020 period is part of the second phase of the Kyoto Protocol. Both the first phase of the Kyoto Protocol (**2005-2012**) and the second (**2013-2020**) principally laid out the responsibilities for reducing emissions by rich countries. However, there has been little progress and the 2012 Doha Amendment, the agreement concerning the second phase of the Kyoto Protocol, has not been ratified by a sufficient number of countries to enter into force.

Under pressure from poor and emerging economies, actions on the pre-2020 Kyoto period were added to the agenda in the first week of the Bonn meeting. As a result, in 2018 and 2019 there will be additional stocktaking on progress made on the Kyoto Protocol. There will also be climate finance assessments and all of these will be part of the overall process undertaken before 2020. It is reported that several countries have since expressed interest in ratifying the Doha Amendment and all these changes indicate some advancement.

Another aspect of the obligations that **need** to be fulfilled by big emitters is related to economic and non-economic losses under the work programme on loss and damage. In Warsaw, Poland, COP-19 established the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage to address the destruction likely from climate change, including extreme events (such as severe storms) and slow-onset events (such as sea-level rise). This track of negotiations recognised that even if the world were to drastically reduce its emissions, anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions already in the atmosphere would cause warming. This would severely affect the poorest countries that are the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

It is important that such countries have access to economic and non-economic support, especially since their actions have not led to these increased concentrations of harmful greenhouse gas emissions. The Paris Agreement recognises loss and damage and calls for enhanced action and support from the parties. However, loss and damage was not included in the agenda for the Paris rule book, and this was rightly a big bone of contention with poor and developing economies. There are no funds currently available for this stream and the discussion on this has been

postponed to 2018. This is alarming given that the world has already faced the wrath of numerous extreme events just in the last couple of years.

A third aspect of the support from rich countries is about providing finance, technology, and building capacity for poorer countries, both to protect themselves from the effects of climate change and to help them move along a low-carbon pathway. There were conflicts on financial support at various points, and on this topic, COP-23 was a failure. Without the means of implementation, the targets set by each country in Paris will not be achieved. There is also the promise of \$100 billion each year by 2020 into the Green Climate Fund, which has not seen much inflow to meet the goal. There was therefore little progress on the key issue of finance and several important decisions were moved forward to be discussed at the next meeting to be held in Katowice, Poland in 2018.

There have been a number of advances in renewable energy over the last several years. These were highlighted at various side events at COP-23. There were also several state and substate actors from the U.S. at Bonn, some of whom tried to distance themselves from the actions and statements of the Trump administration, along with a series of colourful protests and interactions.

On the plus side, negotiators did move forward on developing other details for the Paris Agreement implementation, a process that is carried out under the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Paris Agreement and a policy should be ready in 2018. There was also a draft of a document integrating positions from parties on information needed to communicate the Nationally Determined Contributions. Steps were also taken to spell out the details of the global stock-taking that will occur every five years starting in 2023 and on transparency measures that are part of the overall process.

Nevertheless, the science on climate change has been grim this year. Greenhouse gas emissions which appeared to have stabilised for a few years, probably for economic reasons, rose by 2% in 2017, perhaps due to additional electricity drawn from coal power plants in China. When coal will be phased out globally was a major question. In fact, there were protests organised by activists at Europe's largest open pit coal mine near the Hambach Forest in Germany, not far from the COP-23. Clearly, greater ambition on clamping down on fossil fuels is needed for the Paris Agreement to be successful. The Bonn meeting saw the launch of the Powering Past Coal Alliance, which was led by Canada and the U.K., and joined by numerous countries and substate actors.

There was small but significant headway made regarding agriculture where a work plan was proposed by Parties on items related to climate change and agriculture, including improvements in soil fertility and carbon, management of land use and livestock maintenance. For India, these developments could be an excellent opportunity for learning from others and sharing local knowledge.

Much more needs to be done for the international community to truly grapple with climate change — we are still far from keeping the world safe from its harmful consequences. And for India, there is unfortunately no time left for delaying action on multiple fronts on the landscape of sustainable development, which itself will be derailed by a warming world.

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

The definition of harassment needs to be constantly updated, and the process for justice made more robust

END

crackIAS.com