

Understanding Climate Change Diplomacy

By

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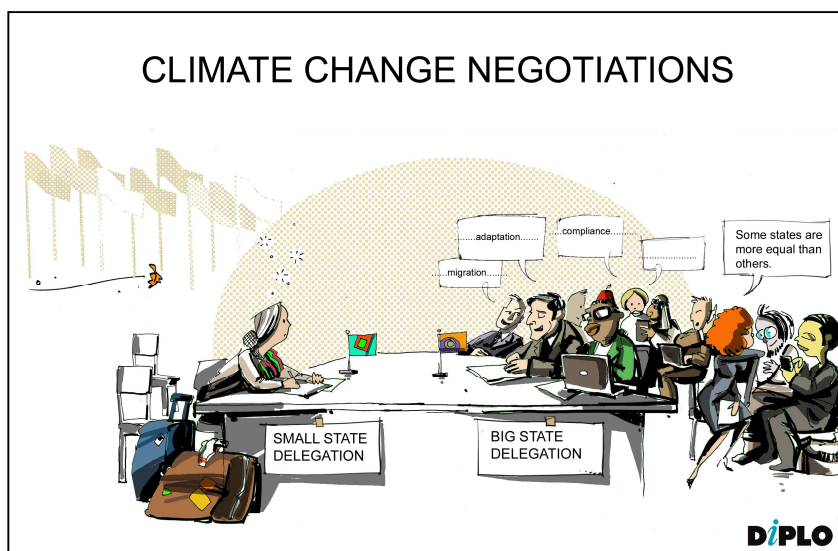
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Climate change is often quoted as 'a fundamental threat to development in our lifetime'. The recently released Eleventh Malaysia Plan acknowledges that 'climate change continues to be a major threat as it adversely impacts economic and social development gains and deepens economic inequalities'.

Climate change is 'a core development challenge that carries potentially serious implications for international peace and security' ...

Within the security arena, climate change is viewed as 'a core development challenge that carries potentially serious implications for international peace and security', 'a risk-multiplying threat' or 'a catalyst for conflict in vulnerable parts of the world'.

Although climate change is well recognised as a global problem that requires a global solution, it does not receive the same level of prioritisation or resources as other policy issues, such as nuclear non-proliferation.



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At the core is the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), one of the three conventions adopted at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992. The ultimate objective of the UNFCCC is to ‘stabilise greenhouse gas (GHG) concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that will prevent dangerous human interference with the climate’ and that ‘such a level should be achieved within a time-frame sufficient to allow ecosystems to adapt naturally to climate change, to ensure food production is not threatened, and to enable economic development to proceed in a sustainable manner’. The convention — dividing parties into different groupings — is near universal but is not legally binding as it does not set mandatory limits on GHG emissions and has no enforcement mechanism.

**UNDERSTANDING THE UNFCCC NEGOTIATIONS
A TIMELINE OF THE UNITED NATIONS
FRAMEWORK CONVENTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE**

START HERE

1988
IPCC ESTABLISHED

1990
1ST IPCC REPORT

1992
UNFCCC SIGNED

1992
UNFCCC SIGNED

1994
UNFCCC ENTRY INTO FORCE

1997
KYOTO PROTOCOL SIGNED

1997
KYOTO PROTOCOL SIGNED

1998-2001
KYOTO PROTOCOL RULES LEADING TO DEVELOPMENT OF "MARRAKECH ACCORDS"

2006-2012
2ND KYOTO PROTOCOL NEGOTIATIONS

2007-2012
UNFCCC NEGOTIATION ON "LONG-TERM COOPERATIVE ACTION"

2009
COPENHAGEN ACCORD

2010-2015
UNFCCC DURBAN PLATFORM ON "ENHANCED ACTION"

2013-2020
KYOTO PROTOCOL 2ND COMMITMENT PERIOD

2015
NEW GLOBAL TREATY TO BE ADOPTED IN PARIS

2015
COP20 LIMA

2020
NEW GLOBAL TREATY ENTRY INTO FORCE

2020 ONWARDS
POSSIBLE KYOTO PROTOCOL 3RD COMMITMENT PERIOD

2020 ONWARDS
NEW GLOBAL CLIMATE TREATY / PROTOCOL UNDER THE UNFCCC

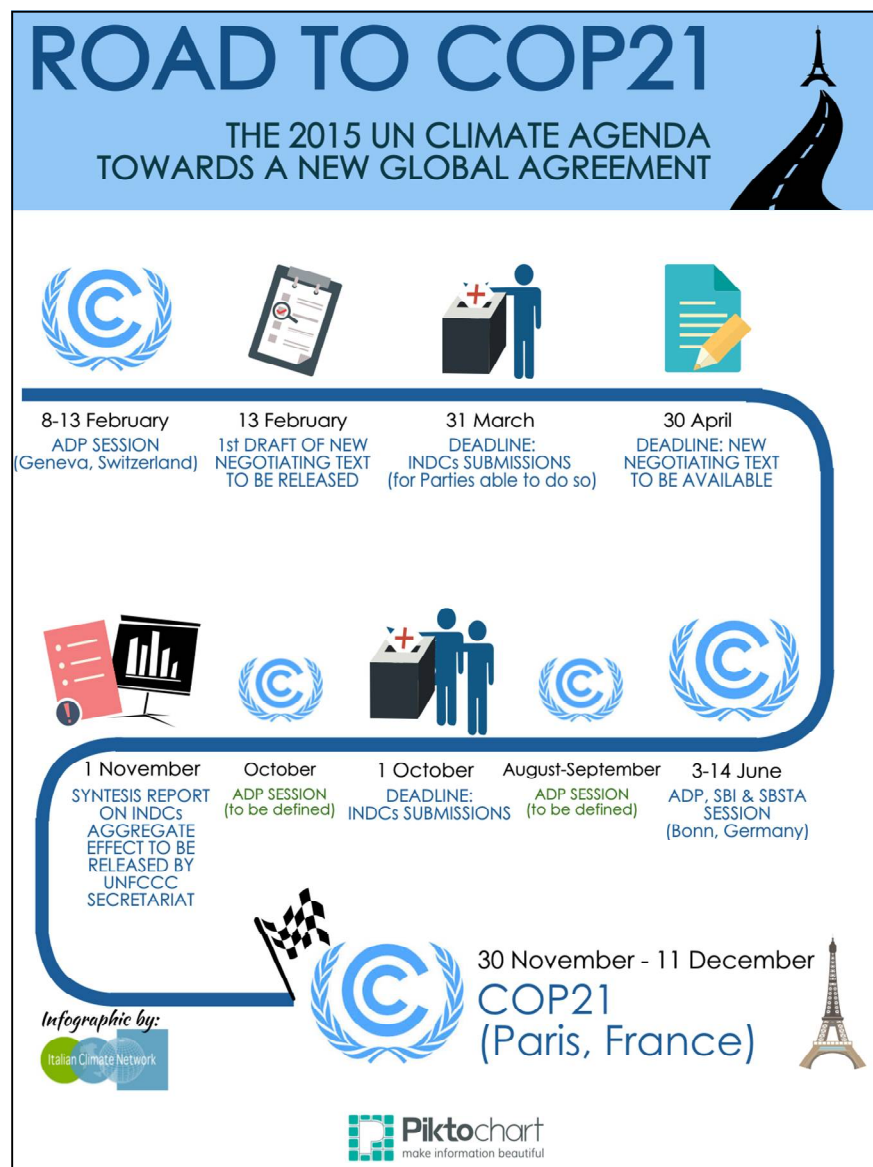
2020 AND BEYOND
THE CLEAN REVOLUTION IS ALREADY UNDERWAY. TO ACHIEVE REAL EMISSIONS REDUCTIONS WE NEED THE WORLD'S DECISION MAKERS TO DRIVE A CLEAN REVOLUTION - THE ONLY FEASIBLE PATH TO A SAFER, BETTER, MORE PROSPEROUS FUTURE.

International climate negotiations — the Conference of Parties (COP) and the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol — meet annually but the process is slow and problematic. Moreover, the changing economic landscape has witnessed some advanced developing countries becoming large emitters of GHGs, and engaging these countries constructively is no longer considered an option.

Yet, years of negotiations and attempts to design a new regime, including the second Kyoto commitment period in 2009, saw instead a political agreement — the Copenhagen Accord and the voluntary pledges. Even so, preliminary assessments indicated a possible ‘emission gap’ between pledges made and emission cuts necessary to have a likely chance of meeting the 2°C objective. The 2°C level is that which is generally accepted to sustain life without irreversible damage, although many are pushing for a lower target of 1.5°C. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Fourth Assessment Report, GHG concentrations at 450 parts per million (ppm) would give a 50 per cent chance of avoiding a 2°C rise. To stabilise GHG concentrations at 450ppm, global emissions must be at least halved from 1990 levels by 2050.

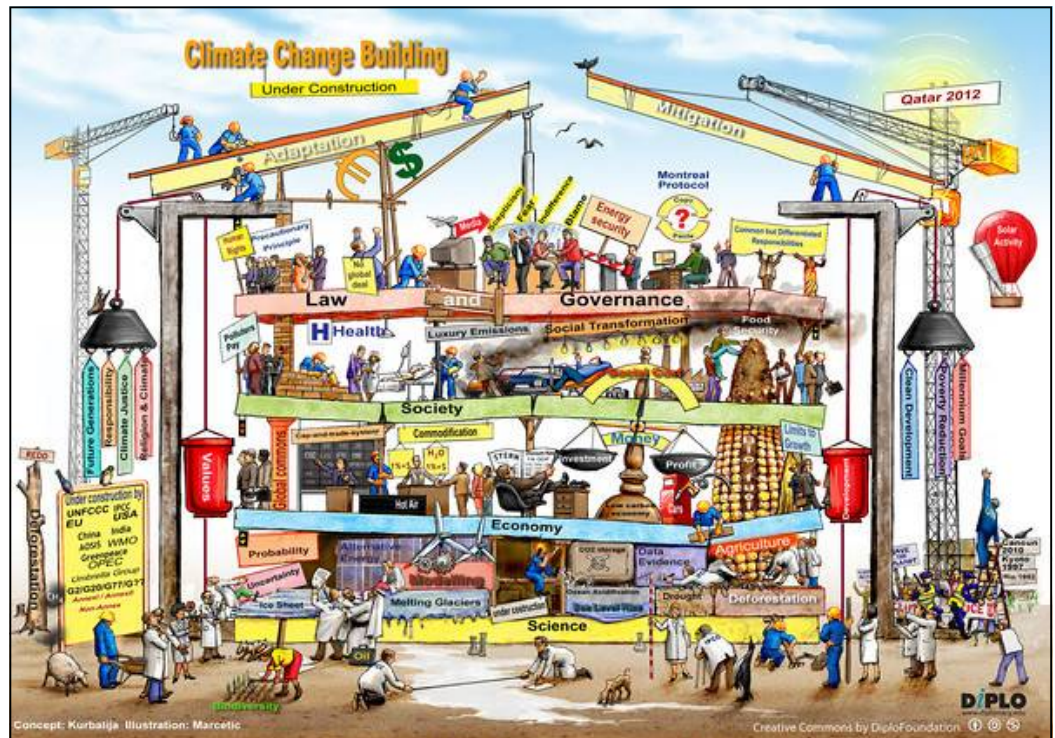
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The bottom-up Copenhagen pledges and the second commitment period will end in 2020. More importantly, it is widely recognised that without international agreement, no bottom-up solutions will deliver a below 2° future. All parties, including major emitters, have therefore agreed to negotiate. So, the 21st annual COP — commonly known as COP21 — aims for a binding and universal agreement from all the nations of the world; a full circle indeed!



It is, however, unclear what form the agreement will take — a protocol, a legal agreement or an instrument with legal force. Questions raised include: who will monitor or compare the Intended Nationally Determined Contributions by countries and what kind of differentiation is allowed.

Such is climate change diplomacy. Why has it been a challenge? Reasons include the complexity, the uncertainty and the diversity of interests.



The first complexity is to reduce emissions — getting away from fossil fuels and decarbonising the economy. The massive energy transition required involves policymakers, regulators, investors, producers and consumers. Incremental change in terms of renewable energy or energy efficiency is observed but massive scaling-up is required in all sectors — energy, transport, building, and many more.

Second concern is no longer the scientific uncertainty but the economic uncertainty — taking costly action now for some unspecified economic benefits and environmental gains in the future.

Hence, the issue of free riding — allowing others to act first. But many developing countries in Asia as well as small island states that did not historically contribute to the carbon dioxide concentrations are affected by climate change. In many of these countries, the impact from climate related extremes, for example, reveals significant vulnerability. Adaptation measures, very much on the periphery, have been somewhat elusive and efforts need to be assessed. Adaptation is place-specific as well as context-specific and, therefore, approaches for reducing risks vary. What is crucial is that a first step must be taken to reduce vulnerability and exposure to climate variability.

Third is the diversity of interests — justice, equity, technology transfer and funding.

Nonetheless, climate change diplomacy, within or outside the UNFCCC, has a role to play. It provides a framework and sets a level of ambition. Climate change diplomacy can provide the 'moral' force for countries to act. The European Union and some of the more advanced countries have been at the forefront of climate change diplomacy in an effort to create a more effective framework as well as shape the climate negotiations to reflect national priorities.

Diplomacy, at the same time, begins at home; domestic consensus is important and so is the political and social will from all levels. There must be sufficient resources and capacity to gather technical and strategic information as well as develop diplomatic skills to engage effectively in the negotiating process. Appropriate and effective communication and forming strategic alliances are also prerequisites to diplomacy. But one final question: who has the power to act? There is no one single actor. Power is very much diffused and vested in a number of actors and we all have a role to play.

