

Global Climate Policy Conference 2014 – summary and reflections

What can researchers contribute to the current efforts to break the logjam at the international climate change negotiations? Over 80 participants representing various groups of stakeholders gathered at ODI in London on May 7th and 8th to take part in the first Global Climate Policy Conference. The organisers – Climate Strategies and CDKN – wanted to provide a space for discussing new ideas provided by researchers in a variety of climate fields, that could push climate negotiations forward and contribute to breaking the deadlock. Issues and perspectives seem to come and go in the negotiations in what can seem to external stakeholders like confusion and isolation. The conference agenda was based on solid contributions from researchers taking some of these issues and subjecting them to rigorous analysis. Does “green growth” really offer a new narrative for achieving climate progress? Are the notions of equity behind the original UNFCCC treaty changing? Are aspirations for effective levels of public and private financing at all realistic? Does the idea of “clubs” of countries cooperating on adaptation, mitigation or both, hold promise or will it undermine the chances of a global solution? These and other questions were tested by presenters and an invited audience, mainly of experts in their field, with enough time to hold the issues and positions up to the light and debate them fully.

In the opening session chaired by Mattia Romani of GGGI, the conference started with changes in economic thinking bearing on sustainability. Carlo Jaeger and Michael Grubb presented their ideas on **sustainable development and green growth** and whether this was a “new focus or an optical illusion”. Carlo Jaeger emphasized that the green growth idea could be helpful but that the narratives behind it need development. One such story was told by Michael Grubb, whose book “Planetary Economics”, based on over 20 years of policymaking and academic experience, observed that for transformative change, it is not helpful to argue over whether standards and regulation, markets and pricing or strategic investment (in infrastructure, knowledge or innovation) would deliver the best result. As contexts differ, we need experimentation and implementation in all of these policy pillars. Focusing on only one will lead to disappointing results, as all have shortcomings. For a global agreement, the lessons learned in the Planetary Economics approach contain useful lessons, for instance for NAMAs, the Technology Mechanism and carbon markets. Respondent Radhika Perrot, from South Africa confirmed that all three pillars were recognized as important, but not consistently observed, in her country’s strategy for green growth.

In a session chaired by Ambuj Sagar of IIT, on how **mitigation and adaptation packages could secure finance**, Jose Garibaldi explained how current initiatives between like-minded countries in Latin America and the Caribbean were succeeding in “cross-subsidisation” of local mitigation policies through adaptation mainstreaming and country to country cooperation. Adaptation, over time, was a bigger cost for most countries than mitigation, and the case for support in adaptation was improved if action on mitigation could be demonstrated. Progress could be made if language was changed to emphasise

differentiated but ambitious action by all, a “small is beautiful” approach, the availability of support, and the benefits of crossing the boundaries of the traditional negotiating groups.

A conclusion from these two sessions was that **cooperation in clubs**, or coalitions of the willing, could be a useful complement to UN-based systems. Examples like the Quisqueya case that Jose Garibaldi introduced could be formed by clubs of countries where cost of climate change exceeded their mitigation costs. Michael Grubb argued that coalitions of countries that depend on fossil fuel imports could work for agreeing on mitigation. In the consensus-based UNFCCC negotiations, countries who do not share such interests could block such deals. Tom Brewer argued that such clubs could be helpful by forming coalitions that further efforts, but also highlighted risks of exclusion and regulatory capture. The idea of clubs (covered more extensively in the last session) could be also risky, as boundaries in the negotiations are often deep-rooted in history, emotions and tactics – argued Michael Cutajar, who went on to chair the next session on CBDR.

Common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBDR/RC) is a term that almost defines the UN Convention on Climate Change, but could use a rethink, argued both [Xiaohua Zhang](#) from the perspective of China, and [Christoph Schwarte](#) from an international legal perspective. Xiaohua Zhang argued that the term remains highly relevant, but more differentiation than Annex I/ non-Annex I is now needed. He introduced a grouping of developing countries with high capabilities to implement low-carbon growth strategies: “Capable DCs”. Christoph Schwarte ran through the recommendations of the recently-completed work of the International Law Association. He argued that in the spirit of the Convention, the distinction between developed and developing countries should to some degree be maintained but that more differentiation is needed, and mentioned a “spectrum of States’ commitments” and making a framework more flexible in order to manage the remaining atmospheric space as a common natural resource. The implication of this latter suggestion would need to be further investigated.

In [Sonja Klinsky](#)’s presentation at the session on **equity and fairness**, chaired by Daniel Klein of UNFCCC, socio-psychological viewpoints of what people perceive as fair played a crucial role. She argued that there was not a single concept of equity, and often what is fair cannot be easily expressed in words or argued. Sometimes, something just is not fair. The ultimate injustice done to people or groups occurs in situations of war. Still, some communities succeed in overcoming the aftermath of war; peace and reconciliation processes can provide useful lessons. To agree on a way forward after injustice, perpetrators need limited liability; a limit to the claim that can be put on them. Victims need a new deal, or a structural change that convinces them that things will get better. This was summarized as **‘backward-looking justice and forward-looking peace’**. It was also noted that compensation payments can undermine such an approach, and that it is important for all participants to have a sense that there is procedural justice. A conclusion could be that future narratives about a climate-resilient future that are credibly implemented (forward-looking peace) could be accompanied by gradually phasing out the rhetoric of historical responsibility (backward-looking justice).

Ari Huhtala of CDKN chaired the session on **private climate finance**, where Christa Clapp spoke about growing investor interest in green bonds, renewable energy in China and divestment campaigns. While more investment from the private sector should be encouraged, governments, researchers and UNFCCC have lots to do to create an enabling environment and to reach a scale that could make a difference. Problems along the way include adequate definitions or certification of “green”, to avoid the re-badging of BAU, achieving sufficient liquidity in the green bond market, persuading Governments to engage in de-risking (there were examples from developing countries, but the financial crisis has made all governments nervous about putting their balance sheet at risk), and persuading more investors that “green” is not just a synonym for “poor returns”. Different views were expressed about the importance of disclosure of risks and green activity by companies.

The last session, chaired by Heleen de Coninck, focused on **clubs**. Carlos Rossi presented a proposal by Peru for COP20 in Lima. The key was **technology integration approaches**, with a new focus on regional technology centres, producing technology that can be widely shared in a global pool. Globalization of technology, regionalization of application and diffusion, respect for capabilities and trade implications all played a role in the Peruvian proposals. Tom Brewer highlighted an area where such integration of technology could be furthered by developing the “club” approach: reducing methane leakages from LNG transport and processing, where emissions are increasing as a consequence of booming LNG trade globally. Such an agreement could develop general rules for methane leakage, certify exporters, importers and shippers, and verify whether agreed leakage rates are not exceeded. However, the incentives on clubs to achieve real reductions, and the possibility of undermining the international approach to a global problem, needed to be watched carefully.

Simon Maxwell of CDKN brought the conference issues together. Climate policy would not make progress unless it was grounded in research, linked to theory, multidisciplinary to reflect the “wicked” nature of the problem, alive to the changing structure of the world economy, and connected to the intellectual trends that moved today’s politicians, the public, and other stakeholders. The conference could not find all the answers, but asking the right questions was a major advance; it should never be forgotten that even policy research had to follow the basic rules of research: generate testable propositions and, for each of them, do the work necessary to assemble the evidence and refine the hypothesis.

Looking back over the event, other participants raised issues about effective and acceptable developing country participation and agenda-setting, capturing and accelerating the signs of positive momentum in the areas of finance, clean technology and donor initiatives, how technology can be developed for all and not just for the elites, and how to educate the public, generate a social movement and allow and help individuals across the world to look beyond their personal self-interest.

What happens next

The conference proceedings are being made available on video, accessible from the CDKN and Climate Strategies websites. A summary will be presented in a UNFCCC side-event in the Bonn Negotiations in June, featuring some of the papers presented to the conference. The full presentations will be assembled in a peer-reviewed publication which will appear later in the year. And Climate Strategies will be picking the most suitable issues and ideas from among those presented to turn into substantive research projects.

The general reaction to the conference so far has been very favourable; if this continues a further conference in the run-up to the UNFCCC Paris negotiations in 2015 will be considered, perhaps in a form that allows a multidisciplinary “laboratory approach” to some of the most intractable issues.

Signed: Heleen de Coninck along with CS and CDKN teams

Climate Strategies and CDKN wish to thank all presenters, chairs, respondents and participants for a thought-provoking event, and express their hope that such questions, and many others, may get addressed at the Global Climate Policy Conference 2015 – which – we hope – will become an annual event. Please let us know your interest in participation by emailing: info@climatestrategies.org

Presentations as well as the video from GCPC 2014 are already available on [Climate Strategies website](#).

Conference contributions by the speakers along with the summary of the discussions will be published in late August / early September 2014 in a professionally edited volume. Please check Climate Strategies and CDKN websites for announcement (www.climatestrategies.org and www.cdkn.org)