Keyword: climate-change

Headline: How COP24 rulebook will affect the future

Byline: The Daily Star/Asia News Network

Published Date: 05:28 PM January 07, 2019

Section: opinion

Word Count: 1404

Content:

DHAKA — Much of the discussion at the conference revolved around two important documents—the 2015 Paris Agreement and the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report.

The 24th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP24) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) concluded on December 15, 2018 at Katowice, Poland. After a busy two weeks, the nearly 14,000 delegates from 195 countries managed to agree on a rulebook for achieving their Paris Agreement promises. It began with a stark warning by Sir David Attenborough who urged world leaders to tackle "our greatest threat in thousands of years." He also warned that "the collapse of our civilization" is "on the horizon" if we don't take concrete action now.

Much of the discussion at the conference revolved around two important documents—the 2015 Paris Agreement and the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report. The latest IPCC report says that heating is the largest source of non-agricultural carbon emission, followed by transport and power generation, with fossil fuels dominating all sectors. There are various other sources which contribute varying degrees of carbon emission.

Considering the above situation, COP24 agreed on a rulebook that includes how governments will measure, report and verify their emissions reduction efforts. The 133-page rulebook uses the legally binding word "shall" instead of "should" in many places. On the climate finance issue, the rules are relatively permissive, giving flexibility to rich nations in what and how they report their contributions.

According to Article 4 of the Paris Agreement, countries' climate pledges are based upon "nationally determined contributions". To this end, the final decision says that all countries "shall" use the latest emissions accounting guidance from the IPCC. But the IPCC guidance was last updated in 2006, and is due for another update in 2019. Hopefully, the new report will consider the high global potential of methane. Under this rule, emission and proposed emission reductions will be regularly compared, added up and assessed in light of their adequacy for limiting warming well below 2 degree and 1.5 degree centigrade. A legitimate concern here is that even though the intention is to use the same accounting rule by all parties concerned, the final Katowice text allows countries to use "nationally appropriate methodologies". However, the countries agreed that their pledges will be recorded in a public registry and the pledges should cover a "common timeframe" from 2031.

Article 6 relates to market mechanisms. Countries can trade over achievement of their climate pledges and individual projects can generate carbon credits for sale. This means that a country can get carbon credit for its emission cutting efforts and carbon sinks. Brazil hopes to benefit from its large rainforest cover and asked for a new form of wording. But critics said that this would allow double counting of credits and undermine the integrity of the system. Also, it has been reported that the emissions cuts are taking place in sectors not covered by a country's climate pledge. My opinion is that countries should be able to do voluntary carbon trading as the Agreement says that such trading is "consistent with guidance" but it does not say anything about cases in which there is no guidance. So, the rules under this article remain unresolved and were set aside for further discussion at the COP25 meeting due in Chile later this year.

Good progress was made in formulating rules governing Article 9 which relates to climate finance reporting. The rules cover reporting on the projected availability of climate finance in future and reporting on money that had already changed hands. The final rules say that the developed countries “shall”—and the developing countries “should”—report on any climate finance they provide. The countries are allowed to report the full value of loans as climate finance rather than the grant equivalent portion of the total. Countries can voluntarily report grant equivalent values. Developed countries are instructed to report information from 2020 onwards on projected future finance. The rules say countries should give “an indication of what new and additional financial resources have been provided and how it has been determined that such resources are new and additional.” Another outcome from the discussion under the Article 9 is that every two years after 2020, ministerial dialogues and workshops will take place in order to decide about long-term finance.

Article 13 relates to transparency. The rulebook describes what, how often, and with which details countries should report back on their climate efforts. It covers seven types of information including emission reporting, progress towards meeting climate pledges, adaptation, climate impacts and climate finance provided or received. In this case also, countries fought over whether to differentiate the rules for rich versus poor countries. The final rulebook applies a single set of rules to all countries. In this case, rule has to be applied with some flexibility for those who need it in the light of their capacities. As per the rulebook, those countries should identify, regularly update and include information on improvement. The rulebook indicates that emission must be reported by no more than two years in arrears. The new-style reporting rules will kick in for all countries from 2024. This means that this will happen after global stocktaking of progress in 2023. There is a biannual reporting requirement. Some scientists think that reporting global warming potential based on carbon dioxide equivalent over 100 years is a backward step, because this method of calculation will ignore individual greenhouse gas effect on climate change.

Article 14 relates to global stocktaking which means that every five years, countries will come together and take stock of progress towards the long-term Paris goal of avoiding dangerous global warming. The final rulebook says that “it is crucial for enhancing the collective ambition of action and support towards achieving the purpose and long-term goals of the Paris Agreement.” The rules also set the structure for the stocktaking process, which is to be divided into three stages: information collection, technical assessment and consideration of outputs. The next stocktaking is due in 2023.

For vulnerable countries like Bangladesh, loss and damage caused by the unavoidable impacts of climate change is an important issue. The final stocktaking rule says that it “may take into account, as appropriate … efforts to avert, minimize and address loss and damage associated with the adverse effects of climate change.” It is also included into the transparency report to be provided every two years. Some other highlights include a commitment by the World Bank to provide 200 billion dollars to help poor nations cut emissions and adapt to the effects of climate change, and a joint declaration by the EU and some other nations to focus carbon cutting efforts on staying within 1.5 degree centigrade.

Some other rules that were discussed and finalized at the COP24 meeting include compliance monitoring, adaptation fund and raising ambition. COP 24 agreed to set up an expert compliance committee. The committee will be able to investigate countries that fail to submit climate pledges. COP24 also agreed on how countries should report their efforts to adapt to climate change. It was decided that adaptation fund, a financial mechanism set up under the Kyoto Protocol, should continue under the Paris Agreement.

One question is, how should countries raise the ambition of their climate pledges so they can collectively meet the temperature goals of the Paris Agreement? On current targets, as determined by individual nation states, the world is set for 3 degree of warming from pre-industrial levels, which is alarming.

A couple of years ago, we thought that carbon emission was stabilizing but it is rising now. Coal use continues and oil is the main catalyst of the world’s economy. Clean energy is developing at a faster rate than predicted before and the cost of production is also coming down. Removing carbon from atmosphere is one of the important projects that investors want to implement. Countries now have a rulebook that they can use to plan, implement and review future decisions. They cannot have any excuse not to start and accelerate the implementation phase of the Paris Agreement. We shall wait for COP25 to see further progress in this regard.

The author, Dr. Kanan Purkayastha, is an environmentalist, academic and author, currently living in the UK.