

Keyword: climate-change

Headline: Paris and its climate legacy for next generations

Byline: Titon Mitra

Published Date: 12:12 AM December 04, 2015

Section: opinion

Word Count: 909

Content:

As world leaders meet in Paris, the importance of arriving at an ambitious yet implementable agreement on climate change action has been graphically underlined by the fact that, based on UK Met Office data for 2015, for the first time, global mean temperature at the Earth's surface will have reached 1 degree C above preindustrial levels (data from January to September show 2015 global mean temperature at 1.02 degrees C [ $\pm 0.11$  degrees C] above preindustrial levels).

We are already experiencing the adverse impacts of a warming climate: 14 of the hottest summers since 2000; rising sea levels; changing rainfall patterns; increased droughts; and more erratic and destructive storms. Only those who choose to willfully ignore the ample scientific evidence available—and the disturbing news coverage we see regularly—can deny that climate change induced by human actions is happening, and its consequences are indeed very dangerous.

The Paris agreement will require compromise and, importantly, a recognition that the burden to take action will fall disproportionately between the developed and developing world. The key principle that has to be adopted with genuine commitment is that of “common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities.” This means that each and every one of the 200 or so countries represented at the 21st Conference of Parties will have to commit to take actions, the scope and scale of which will differ according to their technical and financial capacities. The richer countries will need to take on a greater share of that burden and support the lesser developed.

Over 150 countries have submitted their Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs)—the actions they will take to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to adapt to the impacts of climate change. The Philippines has committed to reduce carbon emissions by 70 percent from 2020 to 2030, but conditional on financial aid and associated technical support being provided by developed countries.

Based on today's level of public and private investment and the stated climate mitigation actions, developing countries will need to bridge an annual funding shortfall of as much as \$2.5 trillion in 2015-2030. Even if these funds were secured, the reality is that the current combined mitigation actions will account for only 86 percent of greenhouse gas emissions and still result in a temperature rise of 2.7 degrees C. A target of below 2 degrees C—the minimum we should be striving for—will require considerably more in terms of funding and commitment.

Indeed, climate change action should not and need not be seen as a sunk cost but rather as an investment in the future and a catalyst for a new era of innovation. Current technologies available to us will not be sufficient. Governments will need to create the incentive structures through carbon pricing and greater subsidies to accelerate innovation and to create the breakthrough technologies. The private sector needs to see that these technologies will significantly add to their bottom line.

Everyone will also need to commit to low carbon lifestyles to set the market demand. This will require both a collective international and national vision of a below 2 degrees C trajectory and a low carbon economy beneficial to people and the planet.

It should be understood that keeping global temperature rise to below 2 degrees C of the average preindustrial level may not be enough to avert dangerous consequences. But the 2 degrees C gives us a target to focus upon, a rallying point to catalyze collective action. While we should continue to be hopeful for Paris, we should also prepare for the fact that we may not be able to move too far from the 86 percent of greenhouse gas emissions covered by the current INDCs. If that is all we achieve, it is nevertheless a good first step. It is a foundation that can be built upon by putting in place transparent and robust mechanisms for measuring, monitoring and reporting progress. We should reconvene every five years and adjust INDCs. The consequences of continuing increases in temperature hopefully will create the realization among leaders and their political constituencies to take much more ambitious action.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has done what it can for now to accompany countries on the road to Paris. From formulating INDCs, Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Actions, National Adaptation Plans, climate finance readiness, policies and legislation for low carbon futures and other programs, it has helped over 130 developing countries access and deliver over \$2.3 billion in mitigation and adaptation initiatives. It has worked with vulnerable populations within countries, including women, girls, youth, indigenous peoples and remote communities to adapt and build their resilience to the inevitable consequences of climate change. Whatever the final outcomes of Paris, the UNDP will continue to accompany countries as they work on their climate actions.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon delivered a very clear message recently. He said: "Success in Paris depends on you. Now is the time for commonsense, compromise and consensus. It is time to look beyond national horizons and to put the common interest first. The people of the world—and generations to come—count on you to have the vision and courage to seize this historic moment."

For the sake of the world we will bequeath to our children, one hopes that Paris is listening.

Titon Mitra is the country director of the UNDP in the Philippines.

Subscribe to our daily newsletter

By providing an email address. I agree to the Terms of Use and acknowledge that I have read the Privacy Policy.