

## **The Paris Climate Deal Will Amount to Little without Strong Implementation**

The climate deal adopted in Paris on 12 December 2015 was a historic moment in global efforts against climate change. For the first time, consensus was reached among all 195 nations, members of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), with a globally-binding agreement that is supposed to present a way forward for the world to tackle climate change and its impacts. In many ways, this is an impressive achievement, a diplomatic success against the odds and a boost for the UNFCCC process which has seen numerous deadlocks and disappointments since it was first opened for signature at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992.

But for many, the Paris deal can be regarded as a success only in comparison to the failures that preceded it. Among the thousands of people who attended the Paris talks, there were those representing the communities already at the front-line of climate change who have suffered from the decades of inaction: farmers from the African Sahel whose livelihoods are threatened by unpredictable rainfall, Eskimos from Northern Alaska where the ice is melting away, island dwellers in the Pacific and Caribbean sea who have been forced to resettle due to sea level rises. For these and for millions of other people currently experiencing the impacts of climate change, the Paris climate deal will amount to little without strong implementation and a continuing drive for greater ambition.

The Paris outcome contains two elements, the Paris COP-decision and the Paris agreement that comes as an annex to the decision. The decision text itself does not require ratification or acceptance, as it is not a separate legal instrument but a decision under the UNFCCC. The Paris agreement is the legally binding core of the post-2020 climate regime and requires ratification (or acceptance, approval or accession).

The deal adopted in Paris marks the end of the transition from a top-down binding regime, focused on developed countries' emissions cuts, to a bottom-up, largely non-binding approach to global cooperation on climate change. It assumes that voluntary commitments by individual countries are more likely to be met than legally-binding, global commitments. And it seeks to raise ambition through careful management and norm building. As a result, it leaves many of the most critical questions unanswered for now.

On efforts to cut carbon emissions and halt the pace of global warming, Paris marks only the start of the process. One of the most celebrated aspects of the agreement was the text's aspiration to limit temperature rises to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. However, if the current commitments to cut carbon emissions, known as Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) and announced by 186 states before the Paris COP, are implemented, they will lead to the warming of no less than 2.7°C. The COP has delivered a mechanism which will require countries to revisit and scale up their INDCs every five years, but unless countries take action to increase their commitments significantly through decarbonisation and a decision to leave fossil fuels in the ground, the much-celebrated 1.5°C will be surpassed.



On climate finance, the picture is also mixed. There were some strong statements from developed countries regarding the support for poor countries to adapt to the challenges they are already facing, but beyond the rhetoric, much of the detail is lacking. Finance is addressed in the non-legally-binding decision text and financial support for developing countries is laid down in the agreement only as a formalisation of what had already been agreed in Copenhagen in 2009, i.e. developed nations will provide \$100 billion in climate finance annually to developing countries by 2020 to help them combat climate change and foster greener economies.

The deal also lacks any strategy to raise the 100 billion US dollars needed for climate protection and adaptation beyond 2020. Although industrialised nations are 'requested' to mobilise financial resources to combat global warming and emerging economies are 'encouraged' to voluntarily contribute to climate financing, what this process will entail exactly will not be discussed until the next climate conference in Marrakesh, Morocco.

The agreement does explicitly refer to damage and losses caused by climate change, an aspect of particular importance to the inhabitants of island nations and other vulnerable groups. But here too, we lack a timetable that would demonstrate how alternative and innovative financial resources could be tapped.

On these and other issues, the Paris agreement falls short of delivering clarity or the decisive action that is required to support those most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Nevertheless, it does contain the potential for a new era of more ambitious and more effective climate action. The challenge now is for the governments to honour their commitments and ratchet up ambition, and for the global civil society and the wider public to hold them to account. This is where the hard work and tough decisions really begin. Whether or not the Paris conference proves to be a genuinely historic moment or just another false dawn will depend upon what happens next.

