



China Carbon Forum | 中国碳论坛

An independent platform to foster trust and cooperation among China's stakeholders for climate action

Learning from Warsaw COP19: The Path Forward for International Cooperation

Executive Summary

Perhaps the most positive outcome of the 19th Conference of the Parties in Warsaw was the agreement by all parties to develop national plans to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 2015. However, in order to reach a legally binding agreement, parties will need to agree on which target to commit to and how to do it. As with previous COPs, developed countries asked for clearer commitment from developing countries, and developing countries insisted on the need for quick access to finance via the Green Climate Fund facility. Separately, after tough negotiations, an international mechanism to accommodate loss and damages from climate change related disasters was eventually achieved.

China understands that to win the battle over global climate change it must play a significant role. Developed countries are witnessing China's national mitigation plan and its constructive effort to address the impact of climate change through the development of emissions trading schemes. However, at the international level, China has not reached agreement with the USA nor the EU on its contribution to the framework of international negotiations. Nevertheless, all parties agree that long-term emissions reduction strategies need to be found by 2015.

Record of Discussion

The following is an edited synthesis of discussion that took place at the event among panelists (around 1 hour) and open Q&A with participants (45mins). As per convention, individual's comments are not attributed.

The Conference of the Parties (COPs) provides an invaluable international platform for information sharing that is transparent and efficient. Through the Kyoto Protocol, and developments

that have followed, it has helped bring focus to the measurement of carbon impact and to incentivize low-carbon action. Yet, it continues to be difficult to build real consensus on how to limit global warming to below 2°C. Countries often get stuck discussing the numbers without agreeing on a plan that will work towards the goal. The panelists felt that in order to fulfill common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR), developing countries as well as developed countries need to make meaningful efforts to tackle climate change, particularly countries with rapidly growing economies and large populations. The Chinese government, however, was not satisfied with the outcome of COP19. Developing countries are looking for implementation solutions that are still lacking.

The EU expects a lot from each COP and feels responsible for moving the negotiation forward in order to reach a satisfying agreement on a post-2020 commitment. **This post 20-20 commitment has to be inclusive from mitigation to adaptation, and from goals to implementation,** especially for countries that need help to implement their strategies. But it also has to be fair, **respecting CBDR,** and account for current emissions and historical records and respect the need for countries to grow. At this stage, **the legally binding nature of COP19 is still ambiguous** and asks parties for “intended” commitment in order to leave space for negotiation before a final agreement. Countries agreed that a text would be ready by the first quarter of 2015 and negotiation will be completed by the end of that year.

NGOs were not happy with the outcome at Warsaw. Many withdrew from the discussion before its end. NGOs consider that the EU and US are able to achieve higher emission reductions than their original mitigation plans, and that China should raise its carbon intensity reduction plan, claiming the recent extreme weather disasters in the Philippines and elsewhere should act as a “wake up call” for the international community on the necessity to limit global warming to under 2°C. NGOs also noted Poland wanted to explore coal until 2016. NGOs walked away from COP19 because it was lacking real pledge. They claim that **historical responsibility must be respected,** including Japan’s.

In response to Poland’s criticism, a representative believed its national action set a good example for a country like China. Poland signed the Kyoto Protocol with a 32% emission reduction target, and Poland is outperforming this target. Poland is exploring shale gas on a commercial scale, and is currently building the biggest center for clean technology in EU. **Poland invites China to set a platform of exchange on climate and energy.**

Does the “firewall” of ambition and responsibility between developed and developing countries still exist? For most developing countries, this firewall still exists. China and other developing countries still need CBDR. However, **China and other emerging countries that persist on CBDR do not necessarily mean inaction.** Also, collaborative effort should be considered, and every country should share the responsibility. It was also noted that while there is rapid development in some parts of China, rural areas are not developing quickly and will need assistance for future development.

All involved in the COP process should maintain a degree of hope and optimism - **it is about changing perception and generating momentum.** There will be a broad spectrum of commitments emerging from national conversation on climate change. Panelists agreed that China with its commitments have made far more contribution than other countries. From that perspective, the firewall is gone. Does that mean China at this stage would not still argue that it is still a developing country that it does not bare the same degree of historical responsibilities as other countries began industrialization in 18th century? Probably not. Yet some believe that as a result of this international conversation, developing countries are taking more action. EU represents 40% of global emissions, per capita emission are on par with China, and EU cannot solve it with Annex-I countries alone. To address this problem, this perceived “firewall” needs to be gone by Paris 2015.

Australian ministers did not travel to Warsaw, while Australia and Japan reduced their previous levels of ambition. Did this impact the negotiation? It is unfortunate and disappointing, but the timing was beyond control. Ascertaining the right information at the COP is important. Panelists believed these developments did not affect the COP’s outcome.

Do the national 2015 targets have a standard format for national contributions? is it intensity, or absolute target? What is the base year? At this stage more time is needed to carry out assessment of the commitment. There will be a variety of targets proposed by different nations - some will use Kyoto protocol, and others will choose different base years, and select different kinds of targets based on sector, carbon intensity, or energy efficiency. Rules around transparency and clarity will need to be as robust as possible to adequately comprehend each country’s level of ambition, but the task will be by no means easy. It is important to note, however, that even intensity targets can be sufficient. For instance, if China’s intensity based national targets are met, **absolute emissions reductions will be three times the amount reduced under China’s CDM projects.**

National level discussion is necessary, but eventually companies are the ones making emissions reductions. Would it be good to replace COP process with a sectoral process? Unfortunately politics often gets in the road of logical policy. Over time a sectoral approach is likely to work, but not yet. The new market mechanisms in the EU should help to play a role here, and these mechanisms could better accommodate the different proposals by different countries. Yet some of the panelists believed there were still concerns that the sectoral approach does not respect CBDR.