

# CLIMATE ACTION STANDS AT A CROSSROADS IN LIMA



*Image credit: Flickr/Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores*

## Speed read

- The UN process has historically been focused on mitigation
- COP 20 could mark a shift to considering the importance of adaptation
- Adaptation funding can help now and tie in with other development priorities

Halfway through the second week of COP 20, negotiation battles are in full swing. The talks taking place around me will be critical for decisions set to serve as a stepping stone to a potential agreement in Paris next year. And the buzz is that the Paris summit will be a make-or-break moment: unless it paves the way to the implementation of meaningful climate actions, it could be the end of the line for the global process as it currently stands.

At a press briefing on Saturday (6 December) about the progress of negotiations in Lima, Tasneem Essop of conservation body WWF said that, as things stand, key sticking points are whether a potential agreement should focus on mitigation only or also include adaptation, finance and the 'loss and damage' mechanism that applies to particularly vulnerable countries

facing impacts to which it is impossible to adapt. Losing family to a typhoon is one of those impacts — a sobering thought as Typhoon Hagupit continues to sweep across the Philippines.

According to observers, the US-China commitment announced before COP has — despite its questionable impact on emissions — lifted the mood by clearing a political path for other countries to act on mitigation. [1] But Essop's report on Saturday's negotiations painted a bleak picture of developed countries and emerging economies taking a hard line against a proposed review of existing mitigation commitments. "We cannot sacrifice a scientifically sound deal for a political outcome," she said.

Meanwhile, on the sidelines, the meeting is alive with discussions and sessions showcasing initiatives and ideas whose influence on the negotiations is questionable. For those not involved in decision-making, the meeting is something of a global fair where you live and breathe climate change politics, debate and activism.

### **Scientific backdrop**

Part of this is an opportunity to remind the world of what's at stake, through presentations on a multitude of issues that intersect with climate change. Among those highlighted by *SciDev.Net* are the status of financial investments, managing climate data, aligning climate action with development, involving indigenous communities in a meaningful way and using scientific evidence to set priorities for Paris.

For the most part, science is the backdrop of the meeting, not at the centre. The debate is well past contesting the evidence for climate change and focusing on how to act. Instead, discussions revolve around measuring countries' emission reduction contributions and how to finance, implement and assess key instruments such as REDD+, the Clean Development Mechanism and technology transfer.

**"We may stop the engine and turn the wheel, but the harsh reality is that the climate change *Titanic* may still hit the iceberg."**

## Anita Makri

The first project of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change's tech transfer mechanism is just getting off the ground. And countries have been sharing lessons from national adaptation programmes rolled out in the past few years. With mitigation, the tensions are evident in talks over how to proceed with REDD+, for example, where I heard countries put forward widely diverging positions over whether to access finance for projects now or wait for better guidance on safeguards against environmental and social impacts.

### **The place of adaptation**

But a key issue at stake for the developing world is how far the agreement will go to include adaptation — a message repeated by NGOs and advocates in COP's first week.

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The issue was also highlighted at last Saturday's press briefings. Meena Raman of the Third World Network said developing countries argue that, if mitigation measures are going to be legally binding in any deal in Paris, then the implementation of those measures must also be legally binding — and adaptation needs to be on the same footing too.

Julie-Anne Richards of the Climate Justice Project spoke about progress in negotiating the loss-and-damage mechanism, which also divides richer and poorer nations. Two key issues were whether vulnerable countries would get a sufficiently strong seat at the negotiating table, and whether loss and damage will be a stand-alone element of the Paris agreement.

Richards stressed that financial support is not the only issue — work also needs to be done to improve the science on climate change impacts and weather forecasting, and to work with

communities to increase their resilience. But all that has a cost, she said, and developed countries are simply unwilling to pay.

## **Momentum shift**

The need to ensure that adaptation is properly financed and practised is clear. Mitigation is an uncertain and long-term goal, so — even though it's critical to set ambitious actions in motion and to guard against conflicts with locally appropriate development — it will take time to shift momentum in how economies and societies are run. We may stop the engine and turn the wheel, but the harsh reality is that the climate change *Titanic* may still hit the iceberg.

People's lives are at stake, and we need to find a way to get help to those poorer passengers on the lower decks of the ship. Investing in adaptation can make a difference now and it is a way for climate action to work in concert with other development priorities — a win-win option against which it is difficult to argue.

The UN process has historically been dominated by mitigation. But maybe the time has come to mark a shift in focus and signal a new path for climate action that aligns more closely with adaptation.

Source : <http://www.scidev.net/global/climate-change/editorials/climate-action-crossroads-lima.html>