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COP21 in a key and decisive moment in the fight against Climate Change

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COP21 in a key and decisive moment in the fight against Climate Change

Abstract

The twenty-first conference of the States Parties of the Convention on Climate Change (COP 21) which will be held in Paris 2015 at the end of this year is a key international meeting in the fight against climate change. It will be necessary to develop a new international climate change agreement in order to limit global warming to a level below 2 ° Celcius. Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) are a key element to achieve the global agreement as they represent the effort that countries are willing to make in order to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases (GHG) starting on 2020.

Key words:

COP21, INDCs, greenhouse gases, energy security, , climate change.

COP 21: Towards an ambitious and flexible agreement

The 21st Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which will be held in Paris from the 30th of November to the 11th Of December of 2015, is a key international meeting in order to curb the planet's global warming. An international agreement should emerge from this conference in order to reduce global warming to less than 2° Celsius, taking into account the growth of emerging economies, the vulnerability of the least polluting countries regarding the consequences of climate change and the need to channel global progress towards sustainable development through the progressive decarbonization of the sectors that more contribute to the emission of greenhouse gases, especially the energy sector.

After the Kyoto Protocol that will expire at the end of this year, there has been only one proposed text that will replace it. The United States, Brazil, China, India, and South Africa presented a proposed agreement which was rejected by many participants, including the EU itself, because it had been kept out of the negotiation at the COP 15 which took place in Copenhagen in 2009. The summit, which had generated great expectations, was classified as a failure. However, the next summit is prepared with optimism because during the last few months, the countries that more pollute are bringing views together. Examples of these rapprochements are the agreement reached between the US and China on climate change¹ or the new EU framework of 2030.²

The latest proposed text for the agreement that will be discussed in Paris is very extensive, as it reaches 85 pages and contains numerous options presented by all countries, but it does not set clear objectives. In short, it is an open text, so that in the course of the COP21 all the proposals could be discussed and a good atmosphere could be created to conduct negotiations. Taking into account these arguments, over the past five years, little progress has been made to reach a new agreement. So, having right now a text that integrates different views of the developed and also developing countries opens a door to hope and fills a gap that seemed unfair, taking

¹ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/11/11/us-china-joint-announcement-climate-chan>

² http://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/2030/index_en.htm

into consideration the economic growth of China and India in their contribution to the emission of greenhouse gases.

The importance of INDC's

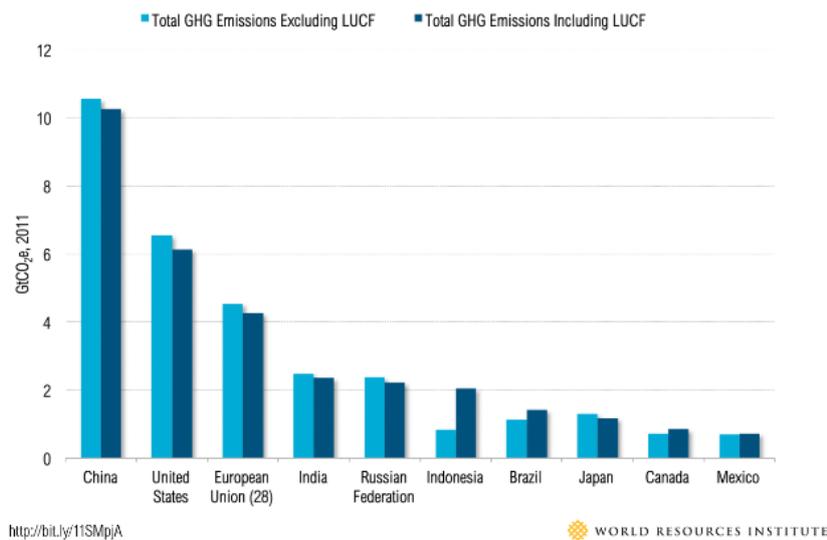
To this date, the legal nature of the text is unknown. It is not very clear if it is a binding agreement and even some analysts' state that its effects could be limited to its publication as the decision of the COP21. The remission of the Intended Nationally Determined Contributions or its acronym in English, INDC's³, is an aspect that will be definitive as it establishes the degree of commitment the countries are willing to acquire not only on issues related to mitigation, but also related to political and economic measures that the different governments will implement to reach sustainable development and a low carbon economy. Therefore, the INDC's constitute a key element to achieve the global agreement as they represent the effort that countries are willing to make in order to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases (GHGs) starting in 2020.⁴ It is also a way to prove to the international community the leadership aspirations of certain countries in the fight against climate change.

The first quarter of 2015 was the deadline for the submission of INDC's, but so far only 43⁵ countries have achieved it. For this reason, the deadline has been extended until the 1st of October if the countries want their proposal to be considered in the final text of the new international agreement. This flexibility is a further indication of the interest that exists in obtaining an agreement on the COP21 because the remissions of the largest number of INDC will strength the foundations of the Conference itself.

³ Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs)

⁴ <http://www.wri.org/indc-definition>

⁵ http://unfccc.int/focus/indc_portal/items/8766.php



Source: <http://www.wri.org/blog/2014/11/6-graphs-explain-world%E2%80%99s-top-10-emitters>

Taking into account that seven of them are among the world's mayor emitters of CO₂, it seems that the COP21 negotiations could go relatively successively. According to the World Resources Institute, the EU along with 9 more countries produce 70% of the emissions of greenhouse gases worldwide and of them, US and China are responsible of 50%.⁶ In view of this situation, climate change should be considered as a global problem in which countries have a common but differentiated responsibility and thus, the commitments in their fight against global warming should reflect these disparities.

Regarding the reduction of greenhouse gases, INDC's may constitute a means or a purpose, depending on the criteria of the country. For instance, in the case of the EU, its commitment was the reduction of emissions by 40% below the levels of 1999 by 2030. United States is committed to reduce its emissions by 26- 28% by 2015, but compared to the emissions of 2005. Regarding China, the Asian country has committed to reduce the intensity of its emissions on its economy by 40-45% with regard to 2007 by 2030. Also China has committed to reach its peak emissions by 2030 and also to generate 20% of its energy from non-fossil sources by that year.

⁶http://www.wri.org/sites/default/files/uploads/top_10_emitters.png

These are some examples of the variety in the formulation of INDC's that are being presented and that must be taken into account when writing the final agreement.

In this context, the impetus that President Obama⁷ has made in order to create this atmosphere of cooperation was crucial, considering that the US in the recent years has shown a greater commitment to the international community in the fight against climate change. Since the Durban conference, the US has been involved in a process of negotiation of a treaty that should be ambitious, inclusive and flexible. It has to be ambitious in order to curb global warming; it has to be inclusive because it demands the participation of the entire international community and it has to be flexible because it must reflect the differences between the countries responsible for global warming and those which are more vulnerable to suffer the consequences of climate change.⁸

Energy and climate change

The European Union has always been committed to the fight against climate change but now does it from the perspective of environmental sustainability, competitiveness of its economy and energy security marked by its high dependence on foreign supply.

For its part, the United States deals with the fight against climate change betting on renewable energies and sustainable growth. The United States has gone from not ratifying the Kyoto Protocol to trying to win leadership in the implementation of an sustainable economic model which is respectful of the environment by means of increasing investments in renewable energy and improving energy efficiency. The United States has tripled its wind energy production and has increased tenfold solar production. The emissions of greenhouse gases have fallen by 10% in the period between 2007 and 2013⁹, which represents the greatest reduction in absolute terms in comparison with other countries.

⁷ Although the IPCC reports emphasizes the contribution of human activity on global warming, in the US government, a high percentage of Republicans of the Senate and of the Congress deny that there is such a relationship.

⁸<https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/image/president27sclimateactionplan.pdf>

⁹<https://www.whitehouse.gov/climate-change>

The essential cornerstone to face the fight against climate change in a globalized economy consists in binding together climate change and the energy sector. The use and production of energy accounts for two thirds of global emissions of greenhouse gases and, therefore, is the sector where emissions should be reduced dramatically. For this reason, the International Energy Agency (IEA) launched at the end of June, the "Energy and Climate Change" report. This report indicates that the link between the world economy and the GHG emissions related to energy is weakened but not broken. For this reason, the IEA recommends that political leaders at the Summit of the COP21 should commit themselves to set goals that generate expectations for a national and global development low in GHG emissions. This commitment and thus, the success of the summit, should be based on four pillars:

- **Achieve Peak emissions:** The IEA suggests establishing an emissions peak by 2020 to ensure the decarbonization of the energy sector in the long term. The increase of 2 ° Celsius could only be avoided by 2050 by setting this goal in the short term.
- **Review of contributions every five years:** periodic review of mitigation commitments will make it possible to set more ambitious goals as objectives are fulfilled.
- **Strengthen the vision:** the IEA states that it will be necessary to promote the early development of new technologies in order to reach the stage of maturation before being widely adopted, as happened with the case of wind and solar energy, that they received initial support and, as of today's date, costs have been reduced and they have been adopted on a large scale. This support should continue in the development of other technologies such as energy storage, capture and storage of CO₂ and in the development of alternative fuels for road transport.

- **Track the transition:** the establishment of a system that makes possible to set the fulfillment of goals and INDC's and developing an adequate system of monitoring and reporting of emissions. Also, It will be necessary to establish accounting rules for the objectives presented by the countries.

Conclusions

We are facing an important change in the consciousness of governments and of the society in general: climate change and environmental issues do not constitute an obstacle for economic development; they are a stimulus, and almost an indispensable requirement to improve competitiveness, to foster the economy and to generate jobs. Climate change has transcended its environmental nature which was addressed in the beginning as a result of the first reports of the IPCC and has become bound up with economic growth, energy and security.

It is necessary to extricate economic growth from the emission of greenhouse gases. In order to do so, is vital to invest in research and to establish an appropriate legislative framework that generates confidence in investors; all this without losing sight of competitiveness and energy security. The economic crisis that began in 2008 has highlighted that the importance of the fight against climate change should not question the competitiveness of countries.

The Paris Summit COP21 will be held an environment conducive to the signing of an agreement. The agreement between EEUU and China, the 2030 goals of the EU and the commitment shown by the countries that were not compelled to reduce the emission in accordance to the Kyoto Protocol, contribute to affirm that sustainable growth and decarbonization of the economy are possible. The commitments of the countries presented in the so-called INDC's, are not the end, but the start of a long path that will have to be confronted in a solid and definitive way.

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