

Loss and damage in COP25

The 25th Conference of the Parties (COP25) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was held from 2 to 13 December 2019. No agreement could be reached on the rules governing international carbon markets and, as a result, the negotiations on this matter were postponed. With regard to two of the remaining negotiating issues – future emission-reduction commitments by parties, and climate finance for developing countries –, the agreements reached at COP25 fell far short of the expectations.

Although disappointed about the stalemate, many among the smallest and most vulnerable countries committed to upping the level of ambition of their national plans, calling on all UNFCCC parties to follow suit. Further, these countries requested that existing commitments related to climate finance are followed through, and progress on loss and damage is made.

This note outlines the agreements reached during COP25 in the area of loss and damage. The description is based on the text of the various decision drafts, accessed from the UNFCCC website in the week of 16 December 2019. Further, the description draws on both informal exchanges in which the authors were involved and the exchanges between negotiators during COP25.

Warsaw International Mechanism for loss and damage associated with climate change impacts

In 2019, the Warsaw International Mechanism (WIM) was reviewed, as per decision 2/CP.19. Based on the conclusions of the review, the parties to the Paris Agreement adopted the following decisions, among others:

- parties were encouraged to «establish a loss and damage contact point»;
- the WIM's Executive Committee was requested to liaise with the Green Climate Fund, to «clarify how developing country Parties may access funding from the Green Climate Fund»;
- the Santiago Network was established, as part of the WIM, to «catalyse the technical assistance» required by the most vulnerable countries.

In addition, the parties to the Paris Agreement considered four aspects related to the operations of the WIM. First, it was recommended that the next review of the WIM is held in 2024 «and every five years thereafter». Second, the WIM's Executive Committee was requested to «revise the terms of reference for and launch the expert groups on slow onset events and non-economic losses». Third, the WIM's Executive Committee was further requested to «establish, by the end of 2020, [...] an expert group» that draws up a plan of action concerning finance, sources of support, collaboration, outreach and risk management. Fourth, the governance of the WIM – namely, whether it should operate under both the Convention and the Paris Agreement, as requested by developing countries, or under the Paris Agreement only, as demanded by the United States. Since agreement could not be reached, it was decided that discussions be resumed in 2020.

Finance for loss and damage

In light of the increasingly acute need for loss-and-damage finance in the developing world – as evidenced by recent floods, droughts and storms taking lives and livelihoods in vulnerable countries – representative of those countries advocated for a COP25 decision focused on finance for loss and damage. Such a decision was not included in the text that the parties to the Paris Agreement eventually adopted. Instead, a reference was made to «the importance of scaling up the mobilization of resources», and the board of the Green Climate Fund was «invited [...] to continue providing financial resources». By the time COP25 closed, and even though not all the demands by vulnerable developing countries were met, these countries were willing to accept partial success and continue negotiating loss-and-damage finance during COP26.

Technology development and transfer

The third synthesis report of the Technology Needs Assessment process noted that agriculture, water, and infrastructure and settlements (including coastal zones) are amongst the most commonly prioritised sectors with regard to adaptation to climate change. Through the Technology Mechanism's Technology Executive Committee, “technology briefs” have been prepared for water and agriculture, to «convey information, key messages and/or recommendations in an effective manner». No such briefs have been prepared on the topic of coastal zones. Since the Executive Committee of the WIM has slow-onset events as one of its priority areas, it was agreed that the Executive Committee of the WIM and the Technology Executive Committee should work together on a “technology brief” focused on loss and damage in coastal zones. The Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC «[welcomed] the collaboration» and stated that «the completion of the policy brief [is expected] in 2020».

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