

COP21, Paris & the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Adoption of the UN's 2030 Agenda Plan of Action and the New Climate Agreement Negotiations



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On the 25 September 2015, the UN General Assembly formally adopted a new framework for achieving global sustainable development **(1)**: *Transforming our World: 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* [the “2030 Agenda”].

The aim of the 2030 Agenda is to wipe out poverty, fight inequality and to tackle climate change over the next 15 years.

The framework for the 2030 Agenda contains 17 interrelated, *Sustainable*

Development Goals [“SDGs”] and 169 *Targets* to achieve these goals.

The Goal and Targets specific for sustainable development and climate change is SDG13, “Climate Action” **(2)**. Its goal is:

“[To] Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts”
(Acknowledging that the UNFCCC is the primary international, inter-governmental forum for negotiating the global response to climate change).

When Should Adoption of the 2030 Agenda Commence?

The President of the UN Economic and Social Council, Oh Joon, has said action on SDGs must start immediately.

On the other hand, the SDGs and Targets that guide sustainable development decision-making over the next 15 years do not come into effect

until 1 January 2016. Does this mean that the 2030 Agenda should play no part at COP21?

The following question arises if the alternative were to apply i.e. *an immediate start for SDG 13, “Climate Action” and its Targets being adopted at COP21*: Would this lead to any advantages in facilitating negotiations for the new climate agreement?

Climate Action, Sustainable Development & the 2030 Agenda

Understanding **the needs for sustainable development and climate action** provides a foundation to address this question.

The 2030 Agenda recognizes that each country faces specific challenges in pursuing sustainable development.

Examples given include the needs of the most vulnerable countries - particularly, African countries, least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing states.

The *advantage* for adopting the 2030 Agenda’s SDG13 Framework at COP21 is that it would emphasize the UN commitment to a new climate agreement in which climate change and sustainable development were seen to be interdependent and mutually supporting.

The adoption of Agenda 2030 for achieving sustainable development goes beyond defining a SDG and setting Targets – the framework completed so far - and endorsed by the UN General Assembly.

In this regard, the following statement in the 2030 Agenda (at para. 59) is relevant:

“We recognise that there are different approaches, visions, models and tools available to each country, in accordance with its national circumstances and priorities, to achieve sustainable development...”

For this reason, commencing action on the SDG13 Framework at COP21 needs to be balanced against understanding the **concerns over the adoption and implementation that have been identified in the 2030 Agenda.**

The 2030 Agenda acknowledges that potential problem areas for its implementation may include: That baseline data for several of the Targets may be unavailable; and that some key issues which pose potential challenges to implement the 2030 Agenda may not have been addressed as yet.

It is essential that all concerns and issues, identified so far, be effectively addressed. That is, to ensure that the methodology, or process, for achieving sustainable development, itself, is not problematic for climate action.

But, what needs to be recognized is that some significant progress, including “*common ground*”, has already been made for climate action.

Common Ground to Facilitate Adoption of the 2030 Agenda at COP21

It is clear, at this stage, that some agreement supported by evidence-based scientific research already exists to provide a foundation for the adoption of the 2030 Agenda – *specifically SDG13 and its Targets* - at COP21.

Agreement was reached in 2010, at COP16, Cancun for a commitment to manage the risk of dangerous climate change from CO₂ emissions arising from human activities: *To limit the increase in global average temperature rise to below 2°C above pre-industrial levels*. Existing debate suggests that this limit may have to be revised to 1.5°C.

This commitment should be considered as a non-negotiable bottom line for the *global level of ambition* required to achieve the goal of SDG13:

- “[To] *Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts*”.

Achieving this *global level of ambition* will require substantial cuts in emissions by mid-century, through large-scale changes in energy systems and potential land use **(3)**. For example, lower global emissions in 2050 than in 2010, 40 % to 70% lower; then, moving in a direction to zero overall global emissions by the second half of the century – 2050 to 2070.

What is also clear is that, in addressing action for climate change, each of the 195 Countries and the European Union that have ratified the UNFCCC

will rely on a mix of adaptation and/or mitigation measures in their *INDCs* that will be specific for their *national realities, capacities and levels of development*. The 2030 Agenda acknowledges that the *global level of ambition* will guide each government to set its own **‘National Targets’**.

The adaptation and mitigation measures taken up in each INDC must be consistent with sustainable development – a key role for the 2030 Agenda.

Critique of the 2030 Agenda Methodology for Climate Action

For SDG13 of the 2030 Agenda to be adopted at COP21, it needs to be demonstrated that it would guide decision-making over sustainable development of the INDCs submitted at COP21 - within the boundaries set by SDG13 and its Targets.

A precautionary approach to now take would be to review any existing “equivalent” methodology based on multiple Goals and Targets that has been used to evaluate sustainable development when the environment is in issue?

In particular, to be aware of the key elements identified as essential for ensuring the methodology will be an effective decision-making aid for sustainable development; as well as to be aware of any limitations to avoid!

Multi-objective Analysis (also referred to as *Multiple Criteria Decision Aid Methodology*) is a well-accepted methodology for achieving sustainable development. It has been used as a decision-making aid to evaluate land use scenarios when the environment is in issue.

Its application has its basis in principles and concepts (4) from science, environmental planning (“*Multi-Objective Analysis*”) and conflict resolution (“*Principled Negotiation*”).

“Objectives” in Multi-Objective Analysis are equivalent to the 2030 Agenda’s “Goals”. “Criteria to evaluate the Objectives” are equivalent to the 2030 Agenda’s “Targets”.

The following key elements are a feature of Multi-Objective Analysis that warrant review and consideration if the 2030 Agenda – specifically SDG13 and its Targets - were to be adopted at COP21; they are discussed in this context for Climate Action:

❖ The 2030 Agenda’s Framework of SDG13 and its Targets needs to be seen as assisting the decision-making process on sustainable development for climate action – and not the decision end-point.

❖ Agreement on both the form of the Goal (SDG13) and its Targets is paramount. A critical dimension of the methodology is for the Goal and its Targets to be endorsed prior to commencing negotiations at COP21.

The UN General Assembly fulfilled this element in September 2015, subject to some concerns. This is a positive and significant feature of the 2030 Agenda.

❖ All Targets have equal weight and all must be complied with.

❖ Targets must be objective and able to be measured; and, in turn, to be used constructively to evaluate INDCs for sustainable development.

Review of this element for SDG13 and its Targets could arise if the 2030 Agenda were to be adopted at COP21.

❖ It is crucial that a scientific and information database exists to ensure that each INDC can be evaluated for its compatibility with each Target.

The aim must be to avoid problems associated with Targets which could not be evaluated because of the absence of a suitable information base; or using unnecessarily complex Targets. In addressing this element, the extensive range of IPCC Reports will serve as an invaluable resource.

❖ Each INDC would be evaluated against each of the 5 Targets for its compatibility with sustainable development.

Compatibility could be characterised as “compatible”, “non-compatible” or “uncertain”. Reasons are given for these conclusions. No numeric scores (e.g. a score out of 10) needs to be assigned to any Target.

❖ The 2030 Agenda acknowledges that “It is important to recognize the link between sustainable development and other relevant ongoing processes in the economic, social and environmental fields” (At para.55).

This element is a source of some uncertainty as the 2030 Agenda is silent on how to achieve this link: The 5 Targets defined in SDG13 are not categorized under these specific fields.

But it could be argued that: Target 13.1 comes within the field of an “environmental target”; Target 13.3 a “social target”; and Targets 13.a and 13.b, “cultural targets.”

As **Target 13.2** is now defined, it is difficult to see how this target would come within the “economic” field. For it to become an “**economic target**” would require some qualification to the Target’s existing phrase: “Climate change measures [in] national policies, strategies and planning”.

E.g. by adding to it “that enhance and promote cost-effective adaptation and mitigation measures and/or that develop a strong, growing and diversified economy”.

- ❖ ‘National Targets’ for Climate Action set by each government will be guided by the global level of ambition.

The number and dimension of the ‘National Targets’ should be minimal. Ideally, there should be scope to identify at least one ‘National Target’ - common for all UNFCCC Parties - that could be evaluated under SDG13: COP 21 would be an excellent Forum to act as a catalyst for this feature.

- ❖ For an INDC, to be compatible with sustainable development under SDG13, the **multiple and competing objectives of sustainable development** – economic, environmental, social (including cultural) - must be **balanced equitably**.

*But, what must not be overlooked is how **equity is a key consideration for sustainable development** for climate action. A sustainable solution seeks to minimize the extent to which **environmental costs and benefits** will be shared disproportionately between all Parties to the new climate agreement; and to secure as much available value as possible for all Parties.*

Conclusions

- 1.0 Adoption and an immediate start at COP21 for SDG13 – “Climate Action”- and its Targets in the 2030 Agenda would facilitate negotiations for reaching an ambitious and universal, new climate agreement.
- 2.0 It would enable a preliminary evaluation of the compatibility of the “*Intended Nationally Determined Contributions*” by UNFCCC Parties in their post-2020 climate actions - *adaptation measures, mitigation measures or a mix of both measures* - with sustainable development.
- 3.0 Adopting and implementing the 2030 Agenda’s SDG13 Framework for Climate Action at COP21 could also act a template for the methodology to guide future decision-making for achieving sustainable development for the other 16 Goals of the 2030 Agenda.

Dr Ted Christie and Environmental Dispute Resolution

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Read More “About Dr Ted Christie”:-

<http://www.environment-adr.com/uploads/Bio-Law-ADR-Christie.May2015.pdf>

End Notes and Hyperlinks

1. Transforming our World: 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>
2. **2030 AGENDA, GOAL 13:** *Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.*
Target 13.1 Strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters in all countries
Target 13.2 Integrate climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning
Target 13.3 Improve education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning
Target 13.a Implement the commitment undertaken by developed-country parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to a goal of mobilizing jointly \$100 billion annually by 2020 from all sources to address the needs of developing countries in the context of meaningful mitigation actions and transparency on implementation and fully operationalize the Green Climate Fund through its capitalization as soon as possible
Target 13.b Promote mechanisms for raising capacity for effective climate change-related planning and management in least developed countries and small island developing States, including focusing on women, youth and local and marginalized communities
3. IPCC Report “Climate Change 2014: Mitigation of Climate Change”
http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar5/wg3/ipcc_wg3_ar5_summary-for-policymakers.pdf
4. Read more about the methodology and applications of Multi-Objective Analysis for achieving sustainable development, **at pages 118-126** of the Google eBook, “*Finding Solutions for Environmental Conflicts: Power and Negotiation*”, by clicking on the following link:
https://books.google.com.au/books/about/Finding_Solutions_for_Environmental_Conf.html?id=RTQNCPp6EeQC&redir_esc=y