

CARISMA

Innovation for Climate Change Mitigation

Commentaries

ISSUE 1

February 2016

Reviewing Implementation under the Paris Agreement

By Harro van Asselt & Stefan Bößner

CARISMA intends, through effective stakeholder consultation and communication to ensure a continuous coordination and assessment of climate change mitigation options and to benefit research and innovation efficiency, as well as international cooperation on research and innovation and technology transfer.



In Brief

With the emergence of a system of voluntary pledges by countries from the Paris Agreement, attention will soon shift to the 'review' part of 'pledge and review'. Review of the pledged nationally determined contributions to climate change mitigation and adaptation is needed to ensure that the Paris Agreement will achieve its objectives. Moreover, reviews can help establish and enhance transparency, trust and accountability between Parties. Review processes could also increase countries' ambition by providing an opportunity for feedback and exchanges of ideas and approaches, and by encouraging additional reciprocal actions from other Parties.

This commentary discusses the types of review included in the Paris Agreement and highlights evaluation and assessment of climate policies and their implementation.





The Paris Agreement adopted in December 2015 is a major milestone in the development of international climate policy. The agreement commits all countries to undertaking meaningful climate action, with a view to keeping the increase in global average temperature below 2°C above pre-industrial levels, and pursuing efforts to limit it to 1.5°C. Although the Paris Agreement does not prescribe how countries should exactly achieve this objective (collectively or individually), it does stipulate that every 5 years countries need to submit their voluntary pledges – or, in UN jargon, nationally determined contributions – to the UNFCCC. These contributions will need to reflect countries' highest ambition in terms of taking climate measures, and need to be a progression beyond what was previously communicated.

Focus on review

With the emergence of a system of voluntary pledges, attention will soon need to shift to the 'review' part of 'pledge and review'. Although the pledges by individual Parties, and their subsequent implementation, are an indispensable element of the Paris Agreement, without any review of their implementation, it will remain unclear whether the treaty will actually achieve its overall objectives. Reviews can help ensure that the voluntary contributions are in line with internationally agreed objectives and can be considered fair. They can further help establish and enhance transparency, trust and accountability between Parties,

by creating shared understandings of Parties' contributions and implementation efforts, as well as clarifying the underlying information, data and assumptions. Moreover, review processes could increase countries' ambition by providing an opportunity for feedback and exchanges of ideas and approaches, and by encouraging additional reciprocal actions from other Parties.

The Paris Agreement provides for three types of reviews. First, it mandates a *review of implementation* – referring to the measures countries put in place to achieve what they pledged – through its 'enhanced transparency framework'. Second, the agreement establishes an implementation and compliance mechanism, allowing for a *review of compliance* – referring to whether countries achieve what they have pledged. Third, a new 'global stocktake' offers a *review of effectiveness* – referring to whether the objectives of the agreement as a whole being met – by taking stock of overall progress made in achieving the agreement's objectives. Together, these provisions offer a much-needed framework for reviewing how Parties – individually and in aggregate – fare in meeting their commitments under the Paris Agreement. This includes not only mitigation actions, but also actions to adapt to climate change impacts, and the provision of financial, technological and capacity-building support. The broadening of review to these issues – which are of vital importance to developing countries – shows that the Paris Agreement is not

solely concerned with emission reductions. While the establishment of these processes is encouraging, the devil will be in the details: crucial decisions on the modalities and procedures of the review processes have been postponed to the first Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement.

As a consequence, there will be a significant amount of debate this year on how to design the various review processes. Important questions in this regard include what exactly needs to be reviewed, how to build and draw on existing reviews under the UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol, how to differentiate between Parties, and how to organize the review process. A key question will be how to carry out reviews of implementation by individual Parties when the intended nationally determined contributions (INDCs) submitted by Parties ahead of the Paris conference are so different. The upshot of the 'national determination' of INDCs is that the plans and targets of different countries vary significantly. For instance, whereas the European Union's INDC specifies an absolute emission reductions target, India's INDC is expressed in part in emissions intensity of GDP as well as the increase in the share of non-fossil based power generation capacity. For a review of nationally determined contributions on the Paris Agreement – which will for many countries be based on the INDCs – it thus becomes important to better understand the specific policies and measures

adopted to achieve these varying pledges. Without a proper appreciation of the progress made through concrete actions taken by Parties to achieve their pledges, it will be difficult to review the pledges as such.

Policy knowledge needs

But improved understanding of climate change policies and measures is not only of importance for international review processes. It is also crucial for helping stakeholders to make competent decisions and to choose appropriate mitigation actions. Information about climate policies, their implementation and ultimate effectiveness is important for governments to know whether they are on track; for the private sector to make the right investment decisions; and for civil society to know whether governments are doing enough to protect their interests. Providing accurate, accessible, and up-to-date information about climate policies, as well as the relevant governance context applicable to different countries, will therefore be a key coming challenge for research communities.

Having said that, the UNFCCC process has already generated a wealth of information through existing review processes. Regular reports by parties (including inventory reports, national communications and, more recently, biennial reports) offer detailed and official accounts of emissions trends, the policies and measures adopted (not just limited to mitigation), and how progress is made

towards existing targets. It is likely that the newly created international review processes under the Paris Agreement will continue to generate this official information.

However, in addition, it should be noted that a variety of other organisations are already collecting and analysing information on climate change policies, and making this data accessible. Throughout the years, a variety of databases and other data sources have emerged, compiling information about countries' climate change policies. For example, it is noteworthy that a nongovernmental organization, the International Council on Clean Transportation, played a decisive role in discovering the Volkswagen emissions scandal by meticulously analysing data sets and comparing them against official regulation. Research institutions, think tanks and consultancies also play an increasingly important role in collecting, analysing and managing the vast amount of climate related data.

Meeting knowledge needs

It is against this backdrop that the CARISMA project takes place. As one of the first tasks in the CARISMA project, SEI Oxford has reviewed various databases which deal with climate change mitigation policies.

Preliminary findings from this analysis show that there is a lack of harmonized reporting and categorization standards and that information about climate

change policies tends to be concentrated on the global North. Generally, information on the costs of policies and on actual emissions savings are rarely found in the databases analysed. Likewise, existing information generally does not clarify (the effects of) policy interactions and impacts of contextual developments on policy effects. Data sets convey information mostly on energy policies, especially renewable energy support and energy efficiency, while other sectors such as transport or agriculture are underrepresented. Whether this is because fewer policies are enacted in these sectors or because knowledge of policy implementation in these sectors is scarcer is a question for further research given that those sectors account for almost 40% of global greenhouse gas emissions.

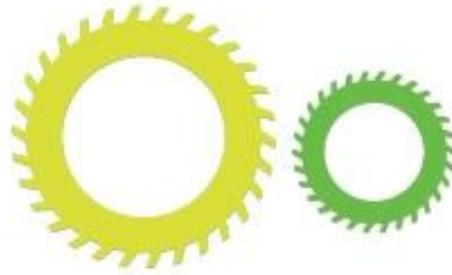
But even when information is relatively abundant, it is unclear whether the available information matches stakeholder expectations and needs. It is for this reason that CARISMA will aim to match available information with the knowledge needs of a variety of stakeholders such as policy-makers, private sector actors and civil society organisations. The continuous engagement with a large variety of aforementioned stakeholders will enable a better understanding of the context of climate change mitigation policies.

The fact that the Paris Agreement does not consider mitigation options in isolation, but supports embedding these op-



tions in national or local goals and priorities, makes it of crucial importance that policies to tackle climate change are well understood from a social, political and economic point of view, thus creating relevant knowledge for different types of stakeholders.

Building on this understanding, to which CARISMA contributes, continuous evaluation and assessment of those policies and their implementation in a transparent and accessible manner are of the utmost importance to facilitate effective climate action in the wake of the Paris Agreement. Only if we know the route and the direction of travel, and we continuously monitor our GPS to ensure we are not off track, is it possible to reach our destination, a low-carbon, more sustainable society. The route might be different for each country but a flexible yet reliable GPS should ensure that everybody gets to the final destination on time.



CARISMA

Innovation for Climate Change Mitigation

Commentaries

ISSUE 1

February 2016

Authors

Harro van Asselt

Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI)
harro.vanasselt@sei-international.org

Stefan Bößner

Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI)
stefan.boessner@sei-international.org

Project Coordinator

Heleen de Coninck

Radboud University
H.deConinck@fnwi.ru.nl

CARISMA Project started in February 2015 and received funding from the European Horizon 2020 programme of the EU under the Grant Agreement No. 642242. The sole responsibility for the content of this Commentary lies with the authors. It does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the European Union. Neither the EACI nor the European Commission is responsible for any use that may be made of the information contained therein.