

Paris 2.0 or bust?

Blog post by Practice Lead Elizabeth Beall, 29 November 2018

We're a few days away from the start of the annual climate negotiations - or Conference of the Parties (COP) - this year happening in Katowice, Poland. It is already being hailed as Paris 2.0 or the COP that puts the agreement found in Paris into action with associated rules and procedures. With Ireland on the verge of becoming the first country to require its Strategic Investment Fund to divest from fossil fuels, the EU committing to net zero emissions by 2050, and the Greens surging in Germany, it would appear that there is a growing trend of climate action and general agreement. But the UN emissions gap report issued yesterday and the IPCC report of a month ago paint a different story about how many of the countries thought to be leading on climate, are nowhere near achieving their Paris agreement pledges or the measures that it will take to keep warming to 2 degrees. So, is Paris burning with the stage set for a return for pre-Paris deadlock? Four things to watch next week.

First, creating a rulebook with standardised procedures for reporting, monitoring, and verifying emissions' reductions is daunting in its own right, but within the current context of growing nationalism may be a potential non-starter. Many countries will arrive to COP24 already bruised and battle-worn from fights at home without a strong collective mandate to push forward. One of the key elements of the Paris Agreement was the idea that all countries were subject to the same agreement but were allowed to set their own plans, without the Kyoto style dichotomy of developed vs. developing country responsibilities. There is already backsliding on this as many countries (including China, which continues to attempt to position itself as a developing country) try to reinstate differentiated responsibilities for the reporting requirements and methodologies to be agreed next week. Countries are even less likely to be motivated to compromise to address what is a global multilateral problem with growing movement of 'us first' back home.

Second, and related to backsliding, is that one of the key clauses that helped get climate advocates to agree on the Paris Agreement was that of 'ratcheting up' commitments to ensure that what was agreed in Paris was not the end, that there would continue to be further progression. But beginning to discuss increasing commitments when the majority of countries' commitments don't even meet the 2 degrees target of Paris will be a hard sell. Even Germany is likely to show up in Katowice empty handed as it has failed at home to find agreement on the phase out of coal. There will be some surprises from unexpected places like Indonesia and Argentina which have already submitted revised national plans which illustrate further reductions from the plans submitted in 2015.

Third, since Paris there are a few key leadership changes that will play a role in finding agreement. The US, Brazil and Australia all with new leaders that are in vocal opposition to action on climate change and collectively account for more than 16 per cent of global emissions will be emboldened by each other's stripping away of climate legislation and funding. Not to mention the absence of the key role played by the US in Paris in reaching agreement. And then there's China. Xi may be a known quantity, but China isn't. At times China seems to be stepping into a climate leadership role - even leading preparatory meetings ahead of COP24 - and at other times seems to be moving in the

opposite direction as they move forward with fossil fuel intensive Belt and Road Initiative investments. The question will be which Xi will show up next week.

And finally, for the first time at COP, 'the people' will be invited to take part. Potentially hoping for the similar effect that David Attenborough has had with Blue Planet and action on plastics, the UN will invite input from around the globe which David Attenborough will present to the general assembly. The groundswell of support and commitments coming from brands following the increase in public attention on plastics has been dramatic and could achieve the Attenborough effect with climate. If you look at the US as one example, even without national legislation, if all of the states, cities and private corporations implement their climate commitments the US as a country may still achieve its pledged 26-28 per cent reduction by 2025.

So, while it's clear that Katowice - the capital of Poland's key coal region - is unlikely to capture the exuberance of 2015 in Paris, some are still hoping for a remote chance that governments will be able to whittle down the 300-page draft to find some agreement after 14 days.