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The Fiji UN Climate Change Conference 2017, COP23 – what is at stake in Bonn?

1 November 2017

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The 23rd meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 23) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) will convene from 6 to 17 November in Bonn, Germany, under the presidency of the government of Fiji, the first time that a small island nation has served in this role.

Expect the most contentious issue, as at most COPs, to be how to mobilize financing to assist poor countries to lower their greenhouse gas emissions and especially how to increase funding significantly to help them adapt to the effects of climate change. Add to that another hot-button issue re-emerging prominently in the wake of high profile hurricanes and typhoons, how to compensate countries for “loss and damage” already caused by climate change. This and much more will play out against the backdrop of the Trump Administration’s notification that it plans to withdraw the United States from the Paris Agreement – putting the U.S. in the same category as international pariah Syria as the world’s last climate holdouts.

This article provides a short overview of key issues at stake and a summary of our expectations for COP 23. It does not claim to be comprehensive or complete and is necessarily biased towards the issues that the authors and the Heinrich Böll Foundation follow more closely and consider relevant for the overall debate.

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¹ The authors would like to thank Hans Verolme and Julie-Anne Richards for their comments and contributions to the text.

SUMMARY

What's at stake at COP 23?

Fiji intends to bring vision to what would otherwise be a technical COP through the Pacific tradition of “talanoa,” derived from “tala” meaning “talking or telling stories,” and “noa” meaning “zero or without concealment” and thus laying the ground for a frank and open dialogue between governments and other stakeholders.

Fiji is meant to be a “Loss and Damage” COP. But there is no money on the table to compensate the victims of climate change and, so far, little appetite to hold talks about mobilizing finance for loss and damage in the official negotiations. An outcome leading to a substantive plan for finance of loss and damage would be a major breakthrough for the Pacific COP. Otherwise, expect strong opposition and protests from civil society.

Reports from the pre-COP in Fiji indicate broad commitment to the \$100 billion per year by 2020 goal and the need to highlight progress at COP 23 to reach it. Climate finance remains high on the agenda for negotiations in Bonn. The sixth review of the operating entities of the Financial Mechanism, a process mandated every four years under the Convention, will occur at COP 23.

While the Green Climate Fund (GCF) is making progress, very little of its money has gone out the door by COP 23. Expect governments in Bonn to demand that the GCF Board and Secretariat further increase their efforts so that direct access entities are ready not only for accreditation but also to bring forward bankable projects.

Almost all of the elements mandated in the Paris Agreement and Decision text are scheduled to be adopted next year at COP 24. Serious progress, in the form of clearly distinguished options in draft texts, must be made at COP 23 if the Paris Rulebook will be ready for delivery and adoption in 2018. The Human Rights language from the preamble of the Paris Agreement must be embodied in all key elements of the Rulebook currently being negotiated.

While it is likely that COP 23 might approve a gender action plan, its implementation is far from secured. For any gender action plan to have traction in the UNFCCC, its champions must compel negotiators to include gender considerations across all negotiating tracks of the Paris Agreement.

The Paris decision also mandates the COP to convene a “Facilitative Dialogue” in 2018. The Dialogue is essentially a test run for the “Global Stocktake” which all countries will conduct every five years starting in 2023 to assess and strengthen individual countries’ NDCs and global progress toward reaching the goal of the Paris Agreement. The technical and political details of the Facilitative Dialogue must be hammered out at COP 23 to ensure that it actually happens in 2018.

The agriculture, forestry, and land use sectors will play a key role in the implementation of the Paris Agreement, and will be the subject of negotiations on mitigation in the Paris Agreement track and in the Subsidiary Body on Scientific and Technical Advice (SBSTA). The instruments discussed in Bonn could help trigger a positive transformation. They could, however, also intensify industrial agriculture and forestry, lead to further evictions of indigenous and local communities, and open new back doors to offsetting fossil-fuel emissions through dubious compensation measures. Much is at stake and the crucial political issues are often hidden behind the complicated and technical items on the SBSTA agenda.

The lack of climate action and ambition in the national climate plans creates a sense of urgency that is bringing risky and dangerous technofix proposals of geoengineering to the surface of the climate policy agenda. Negotiators at COP 23 need to ensure that they do not open new backdoors for the fossil fuel

industry to sustain their old business model by promoting geoengineering. Instead, COP 23 could send a strong signal to the world by denouncing outdoor experiments and deployment of Solar Radiation Management that would violate the de-facto moratorium agreed in the CBD. Any debates on closing the emissions gap and increasing ambition need to seriously consider real radical and transformative emission reduction strategies that rely on proven technologies and contribute to climate justice in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals and Planetary Boundaries.

Tens of thousands will join the People's Climate Summit from 3-7 November at various locations, the Climate March and redline demonstration on Saturday the 4th, and Ende Gelände, a peaceful mass civil disobedience action against coal mining in the Rhineland, from 5-7 November. All of these events will articulate a message of global solidarity and climate justice and highlight feasible alternatives to a corporatist approach to climate negotiations with false solutions in addressing the climate crisis.

TALANOA: TELLING STORIES WITHOUT CONCEALMENT

This is the second COP since the historic adoption of the Paris Agreement at COP 21 in 2015 and since the Agreement entered into force, with unexpected speed, on 4 November 2016, just three days before the start of COP 22 in Marrakech, Morocco.

Thousands of delegates from 197 countries along with representatives from the private sector, civil society, and cities and states will gather in Bonn amidst global evidence that the effects of climate change have arrived, right now. Back-to-back Category 5 hurricanes causing widespread destruction to several Caribbean islands, another storm dumping more than 40 inches of rainfall in Texas, wildfires from Spain and Portugal to California, deadly floods in Africa and South Asia, droughts and heatwaves affecting nearly one-third of the world, ice melt in the Arctic and Antarctica, and a series of catastrophic typhoons in the Pacific over the past few years – the list goes on.

Fiji, which will preside over COP 23, like all Pacific islands, is on the front lines of climate change. It was pummeled last year by Typhoon Winston, the strongest ever to make landfall in the southern hemisphere, which destroyed 40,000 homes, killed 44 people, and created economic losses estimated at nearly a third of the country's GDP.

Fiji intends to bring vision to what would otherwise be a technical COP through the Pacific tradition of "talanoa," derived from "tala" meaning "talking or telling stories," and "noa" meaning "zero or without concealment." In the Fijian context, frank expression without concealment, in face-to-face dialogue, can lead to all participants understanding each other's feelings and experiences.

At a ministerial "Pre-COP" meeting in Fiji in October, Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama outlined his key priorities for a COP 23 outcome which include advancing the [Paris Agreement Work Programme](#) (the so-called "Paris Rulebook") with some form of text, a focus on finance to deliver the \$100 billion per year by 2020, managing climate risk and building resilience, and raising the ambition of countries' voluntary Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to lower greenhouse gas emissions.

The [UNFCCC echoed Fiji's deliverables](#) for a successful COP 23 outcome, and added the creation of a robust framework for reporting of climate action and progress, investment plans that attract sufficient finance, including from the private sector, the empowerment of women in decision making on climate-related projects and legislation, and the full support of a mechanism being developed to deal with loss and damage.

Let's not forget, though, that the Paris Agreement was successfully adopted in 2015 largely because the technical details were postponed until 2018. The Agreement states basic obligations for all countries – surely a milestone – and introduces new procedures in its articles, which have now become the workstreams or negotiating tracks on Mitigation, Adaptation, Finance, Transparency, a new process known as Global Stocktake, and many more.

The difficult task of negotiating the complex details in those workstreams to create the Paris Rulebook began last year at two sessions including the Marrakech COP, continued at the Bonn inter-sessional meetings in May, and must advance at a far more rapid pace at COP 23 if the Rulebook is to be completed next year at COP 24 in Katowice, Poland.

The Rulebook is not the only complexity that delegates will encounter in Bonn. The climate summit actually comprises six different bodies conducting often overlapping negotiations:

- The [Conference of the Parties \(COP 23\)](#), the formal meeting of all 197 Parties who are signatories to the 1992 UNFCCC;
- The [Ad Hoc Working Group on the Paris Agreement \(APA\)](#), charged with the on-time delivery of the Paris Rulebook;
- Two “subsidiary bodies,” on [Implementation \(SBI\)](#), and on [Scientific and Technical Advice \(SBSTA\)](#);
- And the [Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol \(CMP\)](#), comprising signatories to that 1997 Agreement, and a new body, the [Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement \(CMA\)](#).

27 NATIONS HAVE STILL NOT RATIFIED AND THE U.S. INTENDS TO WITHDRAW

The Paris Agreement entered into force faster than anyone expected. By May 2017, ratifications totaled 146 countries, and as of 30 October, 169 Parties have ratified. Nations still missing include Colombia, Iran, Iraq, the Russian Federation, Turkey, and several African countries. Of the 197 Parties to the Convention, 195 originally signed the Agreement – only Nicaragua, which argued it was not strong enough, and Syria, in political disarray, did not. Just two weeks before COP 23, however, [Nicaragua acknowledged that there is no alternative to the Agreement](#), and ratified it.

That leaves the United States as the only other global climate pariah. The election of Donald Trump last November stunned delegates in Marrakech but diligent work carried on despite worries of a U.S. withdrawal from the Agreement or even from the Convention. Although the U.S. announced its intended withdrawal from the Agreement on 1 June, the formal process won't take effect until 4 November 2020 at the earliest, one day after the next U.S. presidential election.

So far, the major nations of the world have doubled-down on their support for the Agreement. The [G20 Leaders' Declaration](#) following its July Summit pulls no punches highlighting U.S. isolation. The communique reads: “We take note of the decision of the United States of America to withdraw from the Paris agreement,” adding “The Leaders of the other G20 members state that the Paris Agreement is irreversible.” Even more direct is the [European Parliament resolution of 4 October](#) which “expresses its disappointment with the announcement” and “regrets this decision as representing a step backwards.”

The U.S. clearly has no intention of meeting its commitments under the Paris Agreement. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced on 10 October that it intends to rescind the Obama administration's Clean Power Plan which would have cut emissions from the power sector an estimated 32 percent by 2030 relative to 2005, a significant portion of its commitment to lower overall emissions up to 28 percent by 2025 from 2005 levels. U.S. states, cities and regions, however, have rallied in support of keeping American commitments with now 14 states and Puerto Rico representing 36% of the U.S. population forming the [U.S. Climate Alliance](#), and an initiative of [382 mayors in cities representing 68 million Americans](#). [Major U.S. businesses](#) have also reiterated their support for climate resilient investments and urged the United States to remain in the Paris Agreement.

The U.S. will send a delegation to COP 23 led by career diplomat Thomas A. Shannon, undersecretary for political affairs at the State Department, but it will face the [contradiction of how to negotiate the terms of a deal they say they're walking away from](#). Most expect a small delegation to keep a low profile with limited direct engagement on the negotiations. If, however, EPA administrator Scott Pruitt shows up, as rumored, expect some outspoken criticism and maybe some creative protest actions among civil society.

A LOSS AND DAMAGE COP? – BUT THE MONEY IS MISSING

Loss and damage has become one of the most sensitive issues at the climate change talks and, as with so many controversial topics, one of the biggest problems is money – or rather, the lack of it. The term refers to irreversible loss (lives and livelihoods, land, cultural heritage) and recoverable damage (mainly infrastructure such as roads, buildings, power lines) related to the impact of events likely caused by, or made worse by climate change, including extreme weather and slow onset events.

Indeed, multiple island nations have been largely destroyed and literally drowned in just the past two months. Under the UNFCCC's core principle of common-but-differentiated-responsibilities (CBDR), it is clear that developed countries due to their historic and cumulative emissions bear the brunt of the responsibility and should compensate climate victims. But developed countries simply refuse to discuss finance for loss and damage for fear of acknowledging their financial and legal liability. The unwillingness to address this in the context of the UNFCCC has also led to a growing number of climate litigation efforts by individuals and groups outside of the formal climate negotiations.

In December 2010 at COP 16 in Cancun, countries agreed to consider how to address loss and damage as part of the [Cancun Adaptation Framework](#). The [Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage](#) (WIM) was agreed at COP 19 in November 2013 and contains three main functions: enhance knowledge, strengthen dialogue and coordination, and enhance action and support, including finance for loss and damage. That third function has yet to be addressed.

Tense negotiations followed over the next two years on whether loss and damage would become the third “pillar” of climate policy (joining mitigation or adaptation) or continue to be subsumed under adaptation. A standalone [Paris Agreement Article 8](#) on loss and damage was a major victory for developing countries, although it is tempered by one sentence in the [Paris Decision](#) stating that the article on loss and damage in the Paris Agreement “does not involve or provide a basis for any liability or compensation,” a redline requirement for the United States.

The executive committee established to implement the Warsaw Mechanism produced a draft [five-year rolling workplan](#) on 12 October 2017 at its sixth meeting. It calls for more workshops and submissions to enhance knowledge and strengthen dialogue but still includes no plan on creating a financial mechanism to deliver funds to poor countries who have actually suffered loss and damage. The workplan's finance section refers to “financial instruments” (insurance) but there is no indication who would pay the premiums.

The executive committee will present its report and launch a “Clearing House for Risk Transfer” and a “Task Force on Displacement.” Expect a “working group” to be formed to discuss the workplan although those negotiations will most likely occur behind closed doors.

As noted before, the Fijian COP 23 presidency lists “managing climate risk and building resilience” through enhancing the mechanism of loss and damage as one of its four key priorities for a COP outcome. A substantive plan for finance of loss and damage would be a major breakthrough for the Pacific COP. Otherwise, expect strong protests and engagement of civil society.

This is a highly political and deeply moral issue, arguably one of the central issues of climate justice. So where will the political will and moral authority be found?

Back in the real world, perhaps, where legal cases abound pointing the finger of climate change responsibility directly at the fossil fuel industry which has undermined climate science and hijacked political discourse on climate policy for decades. From a [Peruvian farmer demanding that Europe's largest emitter, RWE, pays its fair share of adaptation costs](#) to the [National Human Rights Commission in the Philippines investigating the biggest fossil fuel companies and their human rights abuses in the context of climate change](#), from [Canadian municipalities demanding that the fossil fuel industry pay its part of the adaptation bill](#) to [Norwegian youths suing their government over oil drilling in the Arctic](#) – the battle for climate justice has reached the courtrooms.

Civil society has made a [strong case](#) for the feasibility of providing adequate loss and damage finance. Expect it to continue to push in Bonn for a tax or levy on the fossil fuel industry to raise the hundreds of billions of dollars needed each year to finance loss and damage for poor countries and climate change victims around the world.

CLIMATE FINANCE: WHERE IS THAT ANNUAL \$100 BILLION, AND WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

Conditions were frigid and snowy in December 2009 at the contentious and ultimately disastrous COP 15 in Copenhagen when the commitment of developed countries to jointly mobilize “USD 100 billion dollars a year by 2020 to address the needs of developing countries” first surfaced, and was enshrined in the [Copenhagen Accord](#).

This commitment was repeated in the [Cancun Agreements](#) in 2010, which also established the [Green Climate Fund](#) (GCF). The actual quantity (How much?) as well as the quality (As loans or grants? New and additional or relabeled development aid? Public or private money?) of climate finance mobilization and delivery to assist developing countries to reduce emissions and adapt to climate change has been controversial ever since, threatening to deadlock the talks on an almost annual basis. The [Paris Decision](#) reiterates the Copenhagen goal, although somewhat more weakly. Developed countries who “committed” to mobilize the \$100 billion in 2009 are only “strongly urged” to do so, while the [Paris Agreement](#) only has them “continue to take the lead” in such efforts, not restating their joint responsibility for raising that sum.

A Roadmap to reach \$100 billion by 2020

Just before Marrakech last year, a group of developed countries, led by the UK and Australia, did indeed publish a “roadmap” to achieve the goal as requested in the decision. The [OECD report](#) estimated that \$41 billion on average had been provided by developed countries in 2013-2014, that \$62 billion had already been mobilized, and that the \$100 billion annual average by 2020 – perhaps even more -- was achievable by leveraging private funds.

The OECD roadmap, however, was received with widespread skepticism by developing countries and international civil society which challenged its questionable accounting. An [Oxfam report](#), for instance, estimated that the net climate-specific assistance for 2013-2014 was only about \$11 to \$21 billion per year, 50-75 percent less than the roadmap claimed. Only an estimated \$4 to \$8 billion was earmarked for adaptation, far from the balance between mitigation and adaptation called for in the Paris Agreement.

The [COP 22 decision on long-term climate finance](#) ignored the roadmap, reiterated the Paris Agreement language on balance, and merely, and weakly, welcomed “the progress by developed country Parties towards reaching the goal of jointly mobilizing USD 100 billion annually by 2020.”

Eight years after Copenhagen, and barely two years out from 2020, how much money has been mobilized and where, exactly, is it?

Without a uniformly accepted definition, climate finance is difficult to measure and no agreed upon measuring, verification, and reporting format exists. The narrowest definition includes only the public money provided by developed to developing countries in addition to, and distinct from, development

assistance. While public money can be used to leverage private funds, private climate finance is much less transparent and accountable, rarely available for adaptation measures, and its true purpose and intent is often hidden behind accounting and confidentiality restrictions. All of this needs to be kept in mind as the discourse moves away from the US \$100 billion obligation (which is concrete) to the also important need to “shift the trillions” more broadly so that all financial transactions and the larger financial system (for example the [funding of infrastructure projects around the globe](#)) contribute toward a climate-safe and just global economy.

Reports from the pre-COP in Fiji indicate broad commitment to the \$100 billion goal and the need to highlight progress at COP 23 to reach it. “I have made access to climate finance a key pillar of our upcoming COP 23 presidency,” said Fiji prime minister Frank Bainimarama when the [World Bank announced](#) that Fiji would issue a sovereign green bond to raise 100 million Fijian dollars (about US \$50 million) to support climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Mobilizing private sector finance will also be central to a [summit to be hosted by French President Emmanuel Macron](#) in Paris on 12 December. It will “chiefly focus on the issues of financing climate actions and aligning financial flows in order to reach the objectives of the Paris Agreement,” and, in particular, call on “private sector and financial actors to play a decisive role to shift the trillions towards the low-carbon transition.”

Opening up financial pathways

The sixth review of the operating entities of the [Financial Mechanism](#), a process mandated every four years under the Convention, will occur at COP 23. The COP will discuss and act on the recommendations of the [Standing Committee on Finance](#) (SCF) on whether the [Global Environment Facility](#) (GEF) and the [Green Climate Fund](#) (GCF) have been responsive to COP guidance in order to fulfill their function as the financial channels which support implementation of the Convention and the NDCs of developing countries under the Paris Agreement. The SCF in its report to the COP will analyze the predictability, accessibility, timeliness and speed of the delivery of financial resources, transparency of the funds’ decision-making process, and country ownership of the process and programs. In addition to reviewing the mitigation and adaptation results achieved, the SCF also looks at capacity building, and for the first time at gender-sensitive financing approaches, and how [social and environmental safeguards](#) are being respected.

Key asks from the COP to the GCF over the past few years are to simplify the proposal review process, ensure faster disbursement of funding of approved projects, continue scaling-up readiness and preparatory support to make it easier to access funding, and, in particular, to speed up its accreditation of “direct access entities,” through which developing countries can access GCF funds without having to rely on multilateral development banks or UN agencies, which would simplify access to GCF resources.

Although the GCF has now accredited 32 direct access entities and 27 multilateral entities, most finance (US \$2.65 billion to 54 funded projects to date) continues to be directed to multilateral entities, particularly MDBs and UN agencies. Thus, while the GCF is making progress – it was created only six years ago at COP 17 in Durban and approved its first projects merely two years ago – and while there has been significant ramping up of its approved funding, very little of that money (just a little over US \$100 million) has gone out the door by COP 23. Expect COP guidance in Bonn to demand that the GCF Board and Secretariat further increase their efforts so that direct access entities are ready not only for accreditation but also to bring forward bankable projects, not just for micro and small projects for which they currently typically do, and to eventually graduate up to more complicated levels of project implementation.

MUST SEE PROGRESS ON PARIS RULEBOOK AND DESIGN OF FACILITATIVE DIALOGUE 2018

Almost all of the [elements mandated in the Paris Agreement and Decision text](#) are scheduled to be adopted next year at COP 24. Some countries, however, are reportedly determined to delay the finalization of the Rulebook. This is a task that cannot be deferred. Serious progress, in the form of clearly distinguished options in draft texts, must be made at COP 23 if the Rulebook will be ready for delivery and adoption in 2018.

The Paris decision also mandates the COP to convene a “[Facilitative Dialogue](#)” in 2018. The Dialogue is essentially a test run for the “[Global Stocktake](#)” which all countries will conduct every five years starting in 2023 to assess and strengthen individual countries’ NDCs and global progress toward reaching the goal of the Paris Agreement to hold the increase in global average temperature to well below 2°C and pursue efforts to limit the increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.

How the Facilitative Dialogue will be organized and function, and in what negotiating space it will be held, have not been agreed. The Morocco and Fiji ambassadors held consultations with delegations earlier this year in Bonn and at a September meeting of heads of delegation in Rabat, Morocco, but the technical and political details must be hammered out at COP 23 to ensure that the Dialogue actually happens in 2018.

There is a risk that the Dialogue, as currently outlined, will be limited to assessing countries’ mitigation efforts, while the Global Stocktake will also assess adaptation, financial support, and other criteria. Civil society, however, considers it essential that financing also be included on the Facilitative Dialogue agenda since the NDCs of most developing countries clearly indicate what they can achieve with domestic support alone and which of their intended actions are conditional on provision of international finance. Increasing global ambition in the Facilitative Dialogue is simply not possible without considering how to increase financial transfers to developing countries.

The Dialogue must also take into account the findings of the [special report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C](#) which will be released by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) shortly before COP 24. This report will surely generate concerns and debate and a first draft already has. Deferring discussion on the assessment of the 1.5°C limit until the 2023 Global Stocktake would constitute a serious tactical error. Another important instrument to take stock of the adequacy of the long-term global goal in the light of the [ultimate objective](#) of the Convention will be the [Second Periodic Review](#), scheduled to provide recommendations to COP 25 in 2019.

LAND USE IN THE PARIS RULEBOOK

The agriculture, forestry, and land use sectors will play a key role in the implementation of the Paris Agreement, and will be the subject of negotiations on mitigation in the APA and in the Subsidiary Body on Scientific and Technical Advice (SBSTA).

The SBSTA deliberations – from which observers were excluded at the Bonn inter-sessional in May – are crucial because they focus on cooperation between industrialized and developing countries and on [market-related provisions of the Paris Agreement](#). One provision (Article 6.2) establishes “internationally transferred mitigation outcomes” (ITMOs) for countries to meet their NDCs, but measures must be created to guarantee that countries who do so do not double count. Another (Article 6.4) establishes a new “Sustainable Development Mechanism” (SDM) to generate tradeable emissions units. The design of this mechanism is in its early stages and there is a great danger that any future SDM projects actually do not reduce carbon emissions beyond what the climate plans of respective countries already promise, which would thus repeat the mistakes of the widely-criticized Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) under the Kyoto Protocol. A third provision (Article 6.8) calls for a framework for non-market approaches

to assist countries to implement their NDCs, and there is much to be done to define what that means or will entail.

The instruments discussed in these fora could help trigger a transformation away from industrial agriculture to one that protects land rights and stops deforestation. They could, however, also intensify industrial agriculture and forestry, lead to further evictions of indigenous and local communities, and open new back doors to offsetting fossil-fuel emissions through dubious compensation measures. Much is at stake and the crucial political issues are often hidden behind the complicated and technical items on the SBSTA agenda.

The carbon budget leaves no room for offsets in the Paris Agreement. Industrialized countries can no longer paper over their lack of ambition in transitioning away from fossil fuels with cheaper emissions reduction projects in developing countries or in sectors such as agriculture and forestry. Carbon markets should not expand or introduce land use activities.

HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE PARIS RULEBOOK

One of the most significant victories of the Paris Agreement was the inclusion of language on human rights in its [preamble](#), although hopes for an anchoring in the articles of the Agreement were shattered. In the end, civil society campaigners and a few country delegates had to fight hard to ensure that mention of key principles and of Parties' existing human rights obligations were not removed from the final text, including specific references to poverty alleviation, rights of Indigenous Peoples, public participation, gender equality and women's empowerment, food security, just transition for workers and decent work, intergenerational justice, and ecosystem integrity.

But that win was only the start of the battle. Now they must be embodied in four key elements of the Paris Rulebook currently being negotiated: the reporting guidelines on countries' NDCs, Adaptation Communications, the Transparency Framework, and the Global Stocktake.

Which countries will prove willing to defend this agenda as human rights champions? Not enough, apparently. Less than a handful have stepped up at the three negotiating sessions since Paris to introduce the cross-cutting language necessary to enshrine these principles in the Paris Rulebook.

The preambular language of the Paris Agreement regarding human rights refers to obligations which countries already have under other international frameworks such as the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#). Incorporating these principles throughout the Paris Rulebook will not create additional burdens but, instead, will ensure policy coherence.

GENDER AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Women in developing countries are particularly vulnerable to climate change because of persistent gender discriminations and restrictions that deny them access to resources such as land, finance, and political power. Women remain underrepresented in decision-making bodies, including those related to mitigation and adaptation efforts, although the IPCC and prior COP decisions recognize that addressing global climate change needs the effective participation of women as agents of change in climate actions.

Recognizing these issues, the two-year "[Lima work programme on gender](#)" was initiated at COP 20 in 2014 to advance gender equality measures throughout the climate negotiations. A [COP 22 decision](#) extended it for three more years until 2019 and calls for enhancements including the development of a "gender action plan" to support the implementation of gender-related decisions and mandates under the UNFCCC. The development of such a plan is long overdue. In this regard the Convention overall is lagging behind its own Financial Mechanism. Both the GEF and the GCF pursue a gender mainstreaming approach with separate gender policies and action plans.

At the [gender and climate change workshop](#) at the Bonn meetings in May, Parties and civil society representatives discussed the elements of what a gender action plan should include, priority actions, responsibilities, and indicators on how gender integration can be improved in climate policy. This goes significantly beyond the still important goal of achieving gender balance within the composition of delegations, and all bodies established under the Convention, the Kyoto Protocol, and the Paris Agreement.

While it is likely that COP 23 might approve a gender action plan, its implementation is far from secured. The gender mandate is not seen as a core task of the Convention and thus not funded under the Secretariat's core administrative budget, so the process is dependent solely on voluntary contributions by the Parties.

Identifying the elements of the gender action plan is an essential exercise, but the challenge will be to find entry points for gender actions in the negotiations. This must be the task of the technical experts negotiating mitigation, adaptation, finance, and technology provisions, not a sidelined conversation among gender experts – who are often the weakest link in a country's delegation. Thus, for any gender action plan to have traction in the UNFCCC, its champions must compel negotiators to include gender considerations across all negotiating tracks of the Paris Agreement.

[A CHANGE OF COURSE: 1.5°C AND THE FALLACY OF GEOENGINEERING](#)

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) will publish a [special report](#) in autumn 2018, just prior to COP 24, presenting the effects that global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels would have and which options remain for staying within this limit. As noted above, the findings should also serve as input for the 2018 Facilitative Dialogue on the review of NDCs.

Meanwhile, [CO₂ levels in the atmosphere have reached their highest level in 800,000 years](#), and many climate scientists believe that we will have exceeded our emissions budget for staying under the 1.5°C threshold in as little as five years. The scenarios contained in the IPCC's fifth assessment report are therefore based on the [concept of negative emissions](#) (which to a large extent also applies to the 2°C goal). In other words, the planet will be allowed to warm by more than 1.5 or 2°C, provided we have created enough carbon sinks by the end of the century to make it back under the threshold. Carbon sinks are seen mainly in technological terms, for example, in the form of [bio-energy with carbon capture and storage](#) (BECCS).

BECCS and other forms of [geoengineering](#) – the large-scale manipulation of the Earth's natural systems – have been popularized as a means of counteracting the negative effects of climate change. Geoengineering technologies are not yet deployable globally, but support for them is advancing fast, thanks to backing by powerful advocates eager to start experiments.

Each of the engineered technologies being [discussed](#) carries dangers and uncertainties. For example, the only way to test the effectiveness of solar radiation management (SRM) on a global scale would be to carry out [experiments](#) in the environment – either by spraying particles into the stratosphere, or by artificially modifying clouds. While [such tests](#) would be designed to determine whether SRM could reflect enough sunlight to cool the planet, experimentation itself could cause irreversible damage. [Current models](#) predict that SRM deployment would alter global precipitation patterns, damage the ozone layer, and undermine the livelihoods of millions of people.

Beyond the ecological risks, critics [warn](#) that, once deployed globally, SRM could spawn powerful weapons, giving states, corporations, or individuals the ability to manipulate climate for strategic gain. But perhaps the most important criticism is a political one: in a world of challenged multilateralism, how would global ecological interventions be governed?

Similar questions surround the other major group of climate engineering technologies under debate – so-called carbon dioxide removal (CDR). Proponents of these technologies propose removing CO₂ from the atmosphere and storing it underground or in the oceans. Some CDR approaches are already prohibited, owing to concerns about possible environmental consequences. For example, fertilization of oceans with carbon-sequestering plankton was [banned](#) by the [London Protocol on marine pollution](#) in 2008. Parties to that decision worried about the potential damage to marine life.

But other CDR approaches – BECCS in particular, which aims to integrate biomass with carbon capture and storage (CCS) techniques – are gaining support. This method seeks to pair the CO₂-absorption capabilities of fast-growing plants with underground CO₂ storage methods. Proponents argue that BECCS would actually yield “negative” emissions.

Yet, as with other engineered solutions, the promises are simply [too good to be true](#). For example, huge amounts of energy, water, and fertilizer would be required to operate BECCS systems successfully. The effects on land use would likely lead to terrestrial species losses, and increase land competition and displacement of local populations. Some forecasts even suggest that the land clearing and construction activities associated with these projects could lead to a net *increase* in greenhouse gas emissions, [at least in the short term](#).

Then there is the issue of scale. In order for BECCS to achieve emissions limits set by the Paris Agreement, between 430 million and 580 million hectares (1.1 billion to 1.4 billion acres) of land would be needed to grow the required vegetation. That is a staggering [one third of the world’s arable land](#). Simply put, there are safer – and proven – ways to withdraw CO₂ from the atmosphere. Rather than creating artificial CO₂-binding “farms,” governments should focus on protecting already-existing natural ecosystems and allowing degraded ones to recover. Rainforests, oceans, and peatlands (such as bogs) have immense [CO₂ storage capacities](#) and do not require untested technological manipulation.

By pushing unproven technologies as a cure for all climate-changing ills, proponents are suggesting that the world faces an unavoidable choice: geoengineering or disaster. But this is disingenuous. Political preferences, not scientific or ecological necessity, explain the appeal of geoengineering.

No silver bullet for climate change has yet been found. And while geoengineering technologies remain mostly aspirational, there are proven [mitigation options](#) that can and should be implemented vigorously. These include scaling up renewable energy, phasing out fossil fuels (including an early retirement of existing fossil infrastructure), wider diffusion of sustainable agroecological peasant agriculture, and decreased energy and resource input into our economy.

Negotiators at COP 23 need to ensure that they do not open new backdoors for the fossil fuel industry to sustain their old business model by promoting geoengineering. Talks in Bonn must not contribute to a normalization of the geoengineering debate that offers risky and dangerous technologies as yet another option in our toolbox when we take stock in 2018. Instead, COP23 could send a strong signal to the world by denouncing outdoor experiments and deployment of Solar Radiation Management that would violate the de-facto moratorium agreed in the [Convention on Biological Diversity](#) (CBD), a sister convention to the UNFCCC. Any debates on closing the emissions gap and increasing ambition need to seriously consider real radical and transformative emission reduction strategies that rely on proven technologies and contribute to climate justice in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals and Planetary Boundaries.

WE ARE ALL IN THE SAME CANOE – BUT NOT EVERYONE HAS THE SAME STEERING POWER

Thousands of delegates and observers will attend the official COP 23 negotiations in the designated “Bula Zone” on the grounds of the UNFCCC headquarters on the Rhine River. Thousands more with accreditation only for the “Bonn Zone” will participate in events 1.4 km south in Rheinaue Park.

Tens of thousands more will join the [People's Climate Summit](#) from 3-7 November at various locations, the Climate March and redline demonstration on Saturday the 4th, and [Ende Gelände](#), a peaceful mass civil disobedience action against coal mining in the Rhineland, from 5-7 November. All of these events will articulate a message of global solidarity and climate justice and highlight feasible alternatives to a corporatist approach to climate negotiations with false solutions in addressing the climate crisis.

COP 23 is expected to be a technical meeting without much excitement. It could prove to be a turning point, however, if Fiji, the first small island developing state to hold a COP presidency, can bring to it the full moral weight of countries whose survival is already threatened by climate change. This, in conjunction with the renunciation of American climate responsibility by the Trump Administration, should be sufficient to compel developed countries and the wider community of Parties to take a clear stand in Bonn to advance quickly, and not retreat.

The timing of such messaging couldn't be more crucial as 2018 will be a pivotal milestone in international climate policy with three core events. Firstly, the IPCC will present its [special report on 1.5°C](#). Second is the planned completion and adoption of the Paris Rulebook at COP 24. Thirdly, the Facilitative Dialogue will examine national goals and measures – the NDCs. As things stand today, the combined commitments under the NDCs still put us on a path toward an estimated 3°C of warming or more and thus are contrary to the well below 2°C and 1.5°C limits. This trajectory, as Fiji and other small island states on the forefront of climate impacts remind us, threatens the survival of millions of people. It is up to those holding the steering wheel at COP 23 to [change course](#) – and up to all of us to grab the paddles and row into safe waters.