

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF A PARIS CLIMATE AGREEMENT



The U.N. Climate Change Conference in Paris presents a critical opportunity for parties to the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to strengthen the global response to climate change. In this brief, the Center for Climate and Energy Solutions outlines essential elements of a successful outcome in Paris. This vision of the Paris outcome draws on C2ES's Toward 2015 dialogue, a series of in-depth consultations among senior climate negotiators from two dozen countries. The report of the Toward 2015 dialogue co-chairs, and additional background on the Paris talks, are available at <http://www.c2es.org/international/2015-agreement>

OVERVIEW

The negotiating mandate for the Paris talks calls for a post-2020 climate agreement under the UNFCCC “with legal force” and “applicable to all Parties.” In fulfilling this mandate, the Paris conference should produce a package: a core legal agreement and related instruments and decisions.

The core legal agreement should constitute a binding treaty under international law, with some provisions binding and others not.

Key components of the Paris package should be:

- Contributions from each party that are “nationally determined.” This bottom-up flexibility allows countries to match their contributions to their circumstances, enabling broad participation.
- A set of international rules and norms, including binding procedural commitments. These top-down elements should provide for strong transparency and accountability, and promote rising ambition.

The Paris outcome must reflect the UNFCCC principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities,” though differently in different provisions.

Specific elements of the Paris package should include:

LONG-TERM DIRECTION

Parties should reaffirm the goal set in Copenhagen and Cancún of limiting average warming below 2 degrees Celsius. The agreement should note the long-term transformation required to achieve this goal, as G7 leaders did earlier this year in calling for “decarbonization of the global economy over the course of this century.”

MITIGATION

The agreement should establish binding commitments by all parties to:

- Submit and maintain nationally determined contributions (NDCs);
- Identify the measures by which they intend to achieve their contributions;
- Report regularly on their emissions and on their actions; and
- Update their contributions at common 5-year intervals.

Countries’ contributions should include an unconditional, quantifiable mitigation component, and may also include a conditional mitigation component that can be achieved with international assistance.

Countries’ initial NDCs should be submitted on their

formal acceptance of the agreement, following domestic approval procedures. NDCs should be housed in an online registry.

The agreement should set clear expectations that:

- All parties, through their self-differentiated contributions, are striving to put forward their best efforts;
- Subsequent contributions will represent a progression (e.g., in form, scope, or scale); and
- All parties will progress ultimately to absolute, economy-wide targets.

The agreement should provide for common emissions accounting rules, including for land use-related emissions and withdrawals, and for international transfers of emission units. It also should establish a central project crediting mechanism, building on the Kyoto Protocol flexibility mechanisms, to accelerate links between carbon pricing systems. Supporting Mitigation and Adaptation in Developing Countries. A stronger support system should include:

TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The agreement should provide for a transition from existing, bifurcated transparency procedures under the UNFCCC to a common transparency framework that:

- Requires all parties to report on their emissions; progress in implementing their NDCs; and support provided or received; and
- Subjects parties' reports to review by experts and by other parties.

This transparency framework should provide flexibility (e.g., in the timing or depth of review) to accommodate differences in capacity. The agreement should provide support to strengthen capacity in developing countries, with the clear expectation that all countries are working toward common standards.

The agreement also should establish a facilitative implementation body comprised of experts and/or parties to consider questions of implementation raised by parties or arising from the review of a party's implementation, and to provide recommendations to strengthen implementation.

STOCKTAKING

The agreement should establish a process to take stock of collective progress on mitigation, adaptation and

finance every 5 years. The initial stock-take should take place no later than 2020.

UPDATING NATIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Following these periodic stock-takes, all parties should be required to submit an updated NDC, with the expectation a Party's updated NDC will represent a progression beyond its earlier contribution.

At the first updating, parties whose initial NDCs end in 2025 must submit new contributions through 2030; those whose initial NDCs end in 2030 must offer a new submission reaffirming or adjusting their contributions upward. After 2030, all contributions should follow a common 5-year timeframe.

The updating process should include: the submission of new intended NDCs; an analysis of their aggregate effect on global emissions; in-session presentation and discussion of parties' intended NDCs; and submission of final NDCs.

ADAPTATION/LOSS AND DAMAGE

To strengthen adaptation efforts, the agreement should:

- Set a collective aim of reducing the climate vulnerability and strengthening the climate resilience of ecosystems, economies and societies;
- Commit all parties to prepare, implement, and report on national adaptation efforts, with support provided to vulnerable countries with the least capacity to adapt; and
- Provide the opportunity, through regular stocktaking, to assess adaptation progress and priorities, and to exchange experiences and lessons learned.

The agreement also should establish the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage as a standing mechanism to develop approaches to address severe, irreversible climate impacts to particularly vulnerable developing countries.

FINANCE

The agreement should set a collective aim of mobilizing finance and investment to support the transition to a low-carbon, climate-resilient economy. All countries should commit to invest their own resources in domestic climate efforts and to provide enabling environments for climate-friendly investment.

The agreement should reaffirm the commitment of developed countries to provide support to developing countries, and should encourage complementary support from other countries willing or in a position to provide it.

Developed countries – having committed in Copenhagen and Cancún to mobilize \$100 billion a year in public and private finance by 2020, in the context of meaningful mitigation and transparency – should reaffirm this goal as a floor beyond 2020.

At five-year stock-takes, parties should assess aggregate climate finance flows and consider opportunities to scale up climate investment.

NON-STATE ACTORS

The Paris outcome should recognize and encourage the contributions of non-state actors – including subnational governments, businesses, international institutions and civil society organizations – in support of countries' nationally determined contributions.

C2ES believes that an agreement of the type outlined here will represent a significant turning point in the international climate effort and in time could prove transformative. An agreement that achieves broad participation, ensures strong accountability and works to raise ambition over time can strengthen confidence that all parties are contributing their fair share to the global effort. This confidence can in turn enable each party to strengthen its contribution in the years ahead.

Other C2ES Resources:**Vision for Paris: Building an Effective Climate Agreement,
Report of the Co-Chairs of the Toward 2015 Dialogue**

<http://www.c2es.org/publications/vision-for-paris>

Paris Climate Talks Q&A

<http://www.c2es.org/international/2015-agreement/paris-climate-talks-qa>

Statement by Companies Supporting Climate Action in Paris

<http://www.c2es.org/international/paris-statement>

Comparison of Submitted INDCs

<http://www.c2es.org/indc-comparison>

Key Legal Issues in a 2015 Climate Agreement

<http://www.c2es.org/publications/key-legal-issues-2015-climate-agreement>

Addressing Finance in a 2015 Climate Agreement

<http://www.c2es.org/publications/addressing-finance-2015-climate-agreement>

Addressing Adaptation in a 2015 Climate Agreement

<http://www.c2es.org/publications/addressing-adaptation-2015-climate-agreement>

Differentiation in a 2015 Climate Agreement

<http://www.c2es.org/publications/differentiation-2015-climate-agreement>

In Brief: Legal Options for U.S. Acceptance of a New Climate Change Agreement

<http://www.c2es.org/publications/brief-legal-options-us-acceptance-new-climate-change-agreement>



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The Center for Climate and Energy Solutions (C2ES) is an independent nonprofit organization working to promote practical, effective policies and actions to address the twin challenges of energy and climate change.