

A Crunch Issue in Lima: Workstream 2 (“Science Safety Net”)

Closing the Ambition Gap in the pre-2020 period represents the most important crunch issue for the negotiations because it will determine whether or not anything that is decided within these negotiations will actually matter in terms of limiting warming to 2C. This process cannot replace ambitious emission reductions under a new climate agreement, but without it we will not be able to secure a safe, climate resilient future.

What is the background?

The Ad-hoc Working Group on the Durban Platform created a Workstream (ADP Workstream 2) as part of the decisions made at COP 17 in Durban when it was decided that governments would reach agreement on a new climate deal 2015 that would enter into force in 2020. In essence the 2015 agreement on its own would mean that the existing emission reduction commitments on the table would stay locked in until after 2020. It is clear that governments do not have the appetite to revise these commitments. The Mandate of ADP Workstream 2 is to address the pre-2020 ambition gap. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has been clear that the later emissions peak, the more difficult it becomes to reduce emissions at levels that secures the shared vision of limiting global warming to between 1.5 and 2 degrees Celsius. In fact, in order to reach this goal, emissions would need to peak before 2020, yet, the new climate agreement would only enter into force in 2020.

Workstream 2 contains two parts. First, it aims to increase the efforts to reduce emissions by developed and developing countries in the pre-2020 period. Developing countries would need to identify how they can enhance their existing mitigation actions with additional financial and other means of support from developed countries. Second, it aims to outline a process for countries and their stakeholders to work together on collaborative initiatives or actions that would contribute to further closing the gap between current pledges and what is required to keep warming below 2 degrees Celsius. This would include finding concrete ways for emission reductions efforts such as scaled up Renewable Energy, doubling energy efficiency, actions from cities and other local governments, and get these efforts recognized and supported by the UNFCCC institutions.

What has happened thus far?

The work under this workstream has happened mainly through technical expert meetings during 2014 where experts, stakeholders and organizations outside the UNFCCC explored areas where further actions could contribute to closing the emissions gap. This represents a completely new way of working for the UNFCCC because you get expert opinions from the outside and also get Parties working together to find solutions. It also can serve to build trust between Parties as they work together to develop solutions.

The challenge however is that, while the meetings have been good and created a solutions-oriented and collaborative approach, at this stage parties are still just at the level of identifying ideas and it is not clear how these ideas will move forward to implementation. What we need in Lima is a clear agreement that this collaborative way of working will continue, be improved and strengthened. From the results of the technical process of 2014, they should select a few initiatives that show high potential and create a space to launch actions based on the shared ideas to close the emission gap.

We cannot leave Lima without decisions about this Workstream’s strengthened role up to 2020 or we risk losing our “science safety net” for any deal that might be struck in Paris in 2015.

Where do governments stand on Workstream 2?

Unsurprisingly, the Association of Small Island States (AOSIS) is a primary champion for Workstream 2 because limiting warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius will determine their survival - waiting for 2020 is too late. The Association of Independent Latin American and Caribbean States (AILAC) are also supportive, as well as the Africa Group. Like Minded Developing Countries (LMDCs) are supportive, and have been pushing for the Workstream to focus on developed countries obligations to increase emission reduction and finance and not so much on the shared ideas collaborative elements.

Developed countries have been largely silent about Workstream 2. They have been happy to discuss the shared ideas space, but are reluctant to discuss increased emission reductions targets, finance and technology support.

WWF's Proposal for Workstream 2 Process:

