IDEAS FROM THE SOUTH

In 2011 experts from the BASIC countries proposed a reference framework based on science and fairness for the equitable apportionment of the remaining global carbon space, allowing for adequate time for development and fair provision of support. Building on this, MAPS held an EASD Lab (see separate box) where the 30 participants identified a number of challenges in the existing approaches to equity as is explained in a reflection paper coming out of the workshop. Adding to the discussions, Sonja Klinsky and Harald Winkler refer to the centrality of sustainable development in any conversation about equity and acknowledge the need to move beyond the earlier focus on mitigation.

Xolisa Ngwadla looks closely at these challenges in his paper, “EASD: Relevance to Negotiations”. He finds that several equity metrics provide for the historical and capability components of responsibility, but continue to fail to address development needs. Secondly, he references the EASD framework proposed by the BASIC Group of Experts (BGE) which makes the case for linking mitigation and adaptation in the equity discussion, arguing that an inability to meet a temperature goal has a multiplier effect on costs of adaptation. The BGE further emphasise this link by noting how the development of infrastructure will both, be necessary for adaptation, and use up carbon space. Thirdly, the author argues for the consideration of means of implementation as part of the equity framework.

Equity is a sensitive issue!

The ideas and opinions put forward in this brief do not necessarily align with those of MAPS International nor the four MAPS countries unless explicitly stated.

INTRODUCTION

The MAPS Programme has commissioned a series of papers to further explore the concept of equity and allocation processes within the UNFCCC climate negotiations. This builds on the work of MAPS over the last few years, particularly the outcomes by the BASIC Group of Experts on Equitable Access to Sustainable Development (EASD). This brief synthesises and poses questions to these varying, sometimes provocative viewpoints to look forward to an agreement in Paris 2015.

Addressing these issues, Ngwadla makes a case for an Equity Reference Framework (ERF) that covers a number of considerations in the conceptual and operational approach to equity. This framework considers equity in terms of the ultimate objective of the UNFCCC - to stabilise GHG emissions, and therefore embraces a temperature goal, a timeframe, mitigation and adaptation and means of implementation.

Given the attention and support that the ERF has received, particularly in the context of the Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDC), MAPS continues to endorse further related research. In their paper “Operationalising an equity reference framework in the climate change region”, authors, Ngwadla and Rajamani looked at legal and technical perspectives of operationalising the ERF. The paper made the case that science (the question of adequacy of contributions meeting the temperature goals) and equity (the question of fair burden sharing amongst states) must underpin a multilateral assessment. The authors argue that the ERF is highly adaptable on substantive, assessment inputs, legal form and architectural options and may prove to be an invaluable framework in a conflicted environment.
WHAT IS FAIR?

INDC LAB

In July, 2014, MAPS hosted a two day Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDC) Lab in Lima. The lab brought together experts and decision makers from Colombia, Peru, Chile and South Africa. The purpose of the lab was to facilitate regional collaboration and support country processes by sharing knowledge currently being used to inform governments in the development of their INDCs.

During the lab each country presented their results, illustrating the different contexts across each MAPS country. It was apparent that countries have good and robust data with regard to the MAPS processes, but the bridge between MAPS and the INDC process is challenging and more work is needed. Further discussions centered on the crucial institutional arrangements for the development and approval of INDCs such as the technical and political narratives. Other important issues included analysing the national processes and narratives, understanding the economic results, observing the mitigation pathways and the current ambition of the different scenarios.

For more information on the outputs of this workshop please visit the MAPS Website, Workshops Page.

This research brings attention to potential solutions to the challenges of defining the overall required global effort, including both mitigation and adaptation efforts. It asserts that with a required global effort having been defined, the perception of fairness and assessment of contributions can be tackled.

Moving to the domestic level, the need to improve the integration of sustainable development and climate is a day-to-day challenge. This came forward strongly during The Development and Mitigation Forum, a gathering of over 100 climate and development experts. Whereas equity was not directly discussed, the Forum heard that adaptation is inextricable from development and mitigation. It also argued that relying on the scientific assumption of a knowable future in order to determine the degree of mitigation effort required might not be helpful any longer - the past should not constrain our choices for the future. Achieving ‘multiple benefits’ was spoken of as the overarching objective, to be met on multiple scales, achieved through transformative change. It was proposed that a language of ‘shared aspirations’ may provide a starting point for agreeing on immutable aspects of our desired future, such as emissions levels. And then the work begins to achieve these. Could that become another way of looking at equity?

WHAT IS HAPPENING ON THE GROUND?

Equity discussions are also occurring within the MAPS country processes. Country teams have been exploring ‘relative fair effort’ by developing a low-emission scenario informed by science and equity. The scope of the equity debate has varied from country to country, but a common objective has been to drive greater mitigation ambition at the national level. For Chile and Peru the starting point has been the Required by Science (RBS) scenario. This is understood as the global emissions scenario that enables a temperature increase of less than 2°C above pre-industrial levels. The local teams, together with the stakeholders, have then analysed different criteria from which one could define a domain in which the RBS may vary at a national level. The sum of these national emission trajectories should fall within the RBS scenario. Chile has been the first country to publish their results on their RBS Domain which can be found on www.mapschile.cl. This domain includes 3 different scenarios that follow the GDP per capita, emissions per capita and the percentage of global emissions criteria respectively.

While MAPS encourages national conversations on equity, particularly in the context of INDC, it continues to generate ideas to provide means for increasing ambition of mitigation action in the context of sustainable development.

In which forums should engagement on equity occur in order to increase ambition of mitigation action at national and subnational level, and who is at the table?
Differentiation of mitigation efforts has worked before, notes Dian Phylipsen and Kornelis Blok’s paper on the 1997 EU burden sharing of the Kyoto target for 2010. Here the allocation of the mitigation burden took individual country circumstances into account, resulting in an agreement. The approach, called the Triptych Approach, was concerned with the most important negotiating barriers: differences in economic structure, differences in energy sector structures and renewable energy potentials, and differences in standard of living. The approach was not meant to be a substitute for a negotiations process, rather a tool to provide insights to negotiators to deepen the understanding of the differences in national circumstances and how these differences impact emissions, potentials and costs.

“A lack of understanding of the differences in national circumstances is reducing the window to reach an agreement” stated Phylipsen and Blok.

Phylipsen and Blok argue that a key success factor of this approach was the consideration of both analytical and political activities, as well as the addition of facilitation. Moving away from the standard way of conducting these discussions, which focussed on narrow national interests, revealed that more agreement existed on the headline positions than was previously thought. Certainly, MAPS would subscribe to this approach, and encourage a conversation of the importance of process, that in conjunction with indicators and tools can assess equity.

A different experience in allocating responsibilities emerges from looking at the governance of the National Allocations Plans (NAPs), developed under the EU Emissions Trading System (EU ETS). This tells a story of the increasing need for transparency, consistency and ambition, but equally important, the need to pursue equal treatment between similar industrial installations in different EU Member States. As Tomas Wyns, author of a paper looking at governance and equity in EU climate policy states, it is interesting to note that the EU ETS cap setting evolved from what could be called a “bottom-up” process towards an approach, which was almost “top-down”. Are we seeing a parallel here with the process to assess national contributions post Paris?

The Wyns paper found that the authority and scope of the European Commission contributed to the improved legitimacy and rigour of the assessment of the NAPs post 2008, including the ability to develop a quantified methodology based on robust data and modelling. Would it be possible to set up an independent entity in the UNFCCC process to assess post 2020 contributions by Parties, with similar governance standards? Beyond this, the European experience prompts other questions: is it better to have an accurate review of contributions based on projections or to enable the possibility of updating elements of the contributions after 2015? In other words, do we assess what is fair today or what will be fair in the future?

Wyns alludes to the efforts made to improve harmonisation of the EU ETS in its phase III (2013-2020), but similarly to the Triptych Approach, not at the expense of neglecting the significant differences in the economic development stages and the energy infrastructure among EU Member States. Specific provisions were put in place to account for this: a financial compensation mechanism and gradual transition to full credits auctioning in the power sector. The author indicates that in practice these provisions did not materialise as planned, partly because of external factors such as the economic crisis highlighting that what is fair on paper, might remain unfair in practice.

Given the complexity of the equity-based approaches discussed above, how can we explain the “simple” effort...
sharing approach adopted by the EU Member States to define country contributions for emissions not covered by the EU ETS in the period starting in 2013. Here only one metric was used, the GDP per capita in 2005. Wyns interrogates this occurrence by looking at a range of factors that could have contributed to the (smooth) agreement but sees no reasons that can be systematically applied to future equity processes. Are there other disciplines we could use that could explain this “simple” outcome?

Sonja Klinsky, in her paper looking at social psychology, equity and the climate negotiations argues that current discussions of equity in the international climate negotiations have overlooked the importance of human psychology: the innate way humans react to perceived unfairness. She explains that psychologically, different kinds of equity logic may resonate differently across the varying subjects of mitigation, adaptation, and loss and damage. Different frameworks or approaches may be needed for each of the three categories in order to find a ‘fair enough’ deal.

Klinsky notes that the more direct causal lines are seen to be, the more intentional the action, and the greater the level of control of actors, the stronger causal responsibility arguments may need to be. Causality is more closely linked in mitigation than in adaptation; yet ironically the latter – and loss and damage – relates to one of the deepest inequities in the climate problem. Perceptions of how “close” actors are, the degree to which they are seen as useful, and the extent to which they are in competitive relationships will shape the overarching frameworks people decide are appropriate for any given situation. In situations of high uncertainty, mistrust, or when inputs and outputs are varied or difficult to compare, procedural justice is likely to be felt to be particularly important, says Klinsky.

Klinksy considers the paper as a contribution to an ongoing conversation about equity. It recognises that equity has been, and will continue to be, a central component of climate negotiations, and argues that there is a need to widen the current way of thinking about these issues in order to achieve progress.

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