Equitable Access to Sustainable Development

Reflections on Operationalising EASD

Reflections on a workshop held in Cape Town, 5-7 March 2013
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Disclaimer: Individuals participated in this workshop in their personal capacity, and the reflections on this workshop do not represent the views of any institution or organisation. The reflections were developed through participation in a number of sub-groups and the MAPS workshop organisers on their responsibility did the final compilation. This document reflects the experiences of the group but does not necessarily represent the experiences of each individual.
The EASD workshop

A workshop on operationalising equitable access to sustainable development (EASD) was held in Cape Town from 5-7 March 2013. Over the three days, 30 participants from a wide range of institutions and countries discussed conceptual approaches to EASD; various approaches to numbers; and how EASD might be operationalised in the UNFCCC climate negotiations.

The aim was to unpack the highly politicised issues around EASD in an informal space, seek better understanding of approaches to this issue and thereby narrow differences. Participants brought many ideas, papers, posters and views to the discussions. The discussions were rich and innovative, and this document seeks to communicate new insights found (and new angles on old problems) to the broader community.

1. Equity Reference Framework (ERF)

Participants discussed a proposal for an equity reference framework (ERF) drawn from a discussion paper (which can be downloaded [here](#)). An ERF is understood as a mechanism for benchmarking against principle-based criteria that operationalise notions of equity. Participants affirmed that metric and non-metric approaches were important and a potentially fruitful means of operationalising equity in the UNFCCC negotiations. Many participants emphasised the importance of impacts, mitigation, adaptation, and means of implementation to achieving equity. Participants also highlighted the centrality of responsibility, capability and sustainable development.

Participants considered specific suggestions on how an ERF could be integrated in the UNFCCC negotiations. It was suggested that the existing field of effort/burden/risk/resource – sharing approaches often fail to adequately advance a clear moral justification, explain how these are translated into indicators and transparently quantifying these indicator into burden sharing frameworks. An ERF was considered to be an important mechanism for addressing these shortcomings and operationalising equity.

ERF & the Architecture of the 2015 Agreement

Participants framed the discussion of the range of possible architectures for the 2015 agreement along one primary spectrum from the prescriptive to the facilitative. Participants discussed the role that the ERF could play in such a range of possible different architectures. In particular they discussed the form the ERF could take and the functions it could perform, for instance whether it would inform, encourage or prescribe ambition in relation to all commitments (mitigation, adaptation and means of implementation) for Parties or categories of Parties. An ERF needs to address mitigation, adaptation and means of implementation (finance, technology and capacity-building) and the relationships between them.

Participants then discussed how the ERF could be constituted: at the prescriptive end it could be perhaps through a COP decision that could engage the IPCC and SBSTA and at the facilitative end it could be outside the formal UN process but exert influence through informal channels. Further discussion focused on the possible content of the ERF: it could contain objectives for adaptation and mitigation, based on global temperature goals (2 and 1.5 °C); and corresponding relative fair efforts by countries. Participants identified a list of functions the ERF could perform: it could inform the types of commitments countries could take, their timing, the legal form these commitments could take and the compliance consequences that could follow.
2. Adaptation

- Adaptation is central to equity; a deal is not fair if it excludes adaptation as any level of emissions implies impacts. But how best to reflect adaptation in the form of commitments, institutions and procedures within the 2015 deal?
- Are the adaptation discussion and loss and damage discussions the same or different? Are they all about finance or is there another way in which to reflect these priorities in an equitable agreement? Does an equity framing assist in generating additional support and more ambition around both adaptation and mitigation?
- What is the role of metrics in adaptation discussions and loss and damage discussions? Are metrics valuable in raising resources or in the allocation of resources? Are vulnerability indices useful or more problematic than helpful? Is there a value in the costing of impacts and the attribution of impacts to emissions, for example to highlight the need for greater attention to mitigation? If one were to go down the path of attribution, could metrics and objective criteria even be determined or agreed?
- Participants discussed how social science research might help us better understand whether the public perceives its responsibilities toward communities impacted by climate change, based to a greater degree on a sense of need or based more on an understanding of justice. Does the public respond better to a narrative based on culpability for impacts or on charity related to perceived or observed needs?

3. Historical responsibility

Historical emissions are an important aspect of corrective justice but a less important aspect of distributive justice. Historical responsibility needs to be taken into account when considering different approaches to operationalise EASD in various contexts.

- **Contribution vs. responsibility:** The causal contribution to global emissions does not necessarily equate to responsibility. One needs to consider alternative terms that convey more specific meanings, such as causal responsibility and accountability. For example, one could exclude from calculations of cumulative emissions per capita those emissions to satisfy basic needs or account for technology progress over time, assuming there is global access to technology.
- **Agreeing on appropriate start dates and end dates is important.** In considering a start date some convergence around 1970 seemed possible. An end date could be defined as the most recent year. Future emissions are far more controversial. Agreeing a start and end date gives a period over which cumulative emissions can consistently be assessed.
- **Gases and sectors:** The inclusion of non-CO₂ gases and LULUCF sources makes a major difference. There is no analytical basis to exclude any gases or sources, incl. LULUCF. The effect of uncertainty around these sources can be estimated.
- **Per capita:** Historical responsibility should also be represented in per capita terms, i.e. cumulative emissions per capita.
- **What to use it for?** It is clear how to use historical responsibility for future carbon budgets, but how can it be used to evaluate bottom up pledges? It has been used for reduction below BAU, financial contributions, time of participation and groupings of countries with similar commitments.
- **Which conclusions are robust over choice of different parameters:** The historical contribution per person in developed countries is 3 – 5 times higher than for developing countries. Assumptions and what is included makes a significant difference.
- **Historical responsibility on its own is too simple:** Capability and current commitments / leadership need to also be included in any discussion around historical responsibility, and its relation to capability. To take this debate forward, further research is needed on the impacts of potentially shifting the focus from responsibility to capability.
4. Common parameters and possibilities of narrowing ranges

The workshop discussed the sometimes-complex issues around choosing common parameters used in allocation frameworks. Participants at the workshop presented analysis of the literature, including work since the last IPCC report. The allocation frameworks emerging in the literature now result in a wider range than in AR4’s Box 13.7.

It will be helpful to understand the overall resulting range for different allocation frameworks and stabilisation levels. The current literature is still scattered and cannot be compared in a straightforward manner. Initially, it may be that ‘envelopes’ (or broader ranges of results) might emerge.

There was a sense that it might be possible narrow the ranges. In order to narrow down from broader ranges, an initial step might be to define a short list of critical parameters, that are used across various approaches to quantifying equitable allocations. Parameters could include:

- **Stabilisation level:** The remaining future global carbon budget is important. For carbon budget approaches, this defines the remaining future global carbon budget; for effort-sharing, it is area under desirable future pathways.
- **Risk of high temperature increase:** The choice of global carbon budget relates to the risk of exceeding 2 or 1.5 °C that is considered acceptable.
- **Historical responsibility:** Many approaches include historical responsibility (though not all make this the only parameter). From the discussion reflected in section 2 above, some important parameters include: the period over which cumulative emissions are assessed (starting and end year); and gases and sources; others may be needed.
- **Capability:** Indicators for capability, such as GDP/capita, the human development index (HDI), and others
- **Assumed prices for financial transfers:** If carbon markets are used for financial transfers, it may help to assume a range of carbon prices (as IPCC often uses $20, $50 and $100 per ton CO₂-eq).

As a further step, a group of modelers could use the parameter set to undertake a modeling exercise that produces consistent results, so that differences would not be due to the parameters mentioned above. Initial runs might create envelopes around different future allocations – which would be as a result of other choices – which might help decision-makers further define criteria.

5. Social justice in time and space

It is apparent that the equity problem cannot be solved by adopting one quantitative principle or approach. In recognising the fundamental importance of moral imagination in resolving what is a very complex problem, perceptions of fairness could be a way of overcoming the current stalemate. Parties need to perceive that outcomes are sufficiently fair in terms that are important to them. In ordinary life, actors commonly regard different criteria for justice as being appropriate for different situations. In the climate context, which has many different aspects (mitigation, adaptation, development, finance, timescale, etc.), different rules for justice may be appropriate for or resonate with Parties for different aspects of the problem. Fair outcomes in some areas of the negotiations are more important for some Parties, and in other areas for others. Applying different rules for justice to different aspects of the climate problem, and at specific temporal and spatial scales, would support the differentiation required as one part of the principle of CBDR&RC. It might also provide enough flexibility to allow Parties to find sufficient common ground, and to make necessary tradeoffs. This ‘fairness’ approach would also require Parties to develop a clear understanding of each others’ perspectives, which would require the development of a dialogue process free of the strategic dimension dominant in many UNFCCC processes. The following starting points may be useful:

- Equity in the context of mitigation might best be reflected by discussions of causality and metrics that reflect historical responsibility. The question of intentionality could be one way to find areas for compromise.
• Equity in the context of adaptation may require a focus on needs, and metrics that reflect capability (see also section 2 above).
• Equity in the context of financial transfers may require a focus on flows of investment and reflect both historical responsibility and capability.

6. Equity and conflicts over data, interests and values

The workshop reflected on the attention that should be given to both the substantive components of an ERF and on the process journey that will take us there. Participants recognised that there is seemingly intractable conflict around the equity issue: we are very far apart on this issue at present. The range of issues addressed in the workshop highlighted the diversity of issues within EASD, that need to be considered in an integrated manner.

There is no easily acquired magic formula of fairness in this constellation of problems that make up the equity issue. It is characterised by extra-ordinary levels of complexity – a shrinking time-frame, a trust deficit, multiple players, deep interests, to name but a few. Such highly complex problems (and the design of the processes that solve them) require more attention than has been the case up to now. The UNFCCC processes has relied on formal UN procedures, and procedural conflicts have been key sticking points. Explicit design of process would be a different approach.

Attention on “process” should cover both process dynamics (the way people and their conflicts are managed as they approach the problem) and process design (the sequencing, objectives, dialogue methods, problem solving and so forth). Under dynamics, for example, people/parties come to the equity problem with deep levels of distrust of each other, with grudges and conspiracy theories, with real and imagined fears. Discreet and focused processes should be set in place to deal with these dynamics: for example there may be issues that can be ring-fenced and resolved. One example considered is dealing with historical responsibility and “clearing the slate”.

The resolution of the equity issue manifests in part as an allocations process, a process of design of instruments, and a process seeking to attain justice and fairness. But behind this lie power, influence and vested interests. These constantly trump science-based objectives. Governments struggle with the sheer size of the gigatonne gap, and repeatedly fail against vested interests; they bring this pessimism to the international negotiations.

Designing an ERF would require attention to the conflictual state the designers find themselves in. This “equity conflict” contains a constellation of disputes of data, interests and values. And as in other conflicts, these need attention in the form of different focused process designs.

Narratives may be an important process element for an ERF. There are several different narratives and approaches to low emissions development, loss and damage, adaptation, markets and so on. A common Equity Reference Framework would need to have the flexibility to process these disparate approaches/narratives and translate them against a common objective in a way that is transparent and effective. Ambition could then be ratcheted through mechanisms in the ERF. Some conflict could be resolved by suggesting such a flexible approach.

Under process design we can advance learning from other processes that have worked in other fora. The UNFCCC should be more outward looking in this regard, actively engaging with these processes. While there are serious process problems in the UNFCCC track, it still is the only fully representative (and therefore just and legitimate) forum to resolve the climate change problem. On one hand, process design must be focused on the objective: there is no time for excessive process creativity. At the same time some elements of the UNFCCC approach are clearly not working and could be improved. Statements, text-based design etc. have all seen limited success.
Other ideas include process tracks, communication and inputs from ‘neutral’ spaces. Alternative process tracks need to be explored, trapdoors when failures occur need to be set in place, and some thought can be given to the question: “What if failure occurs?”. There are also communication differences; data is not freely available, and a lot can be achieved by open source approaches to the thinking taking place around the problem. Inputs from “neutral places” are important and very useful; creating safe spaces to work through issues of substance is a priority. Such safe spaces would allow people to lose the attachment to their flags and try creative design without fear or quotation.

Overall, more time and effort should be given to the human and process dimensions of the “equity problem” so that we stand a better chance of beating the time limit for its resolution.

7. Prioritising equitable access to carbon space versus energy access: the role of zero-carbon technologies

If focusing on the bulk of global GHG emissions (energy related emissions rather than agriculture and LULUCF emissions), then zero carbon technologies are in reach (noting limitations in some transport and industry sectors). This fits very well with the energy sector, not yet with LULUCF and agriculture.

Carbon emissions are a proxy for what we really care about: access to energy services. When zero-carbon technologies become economically competitive and affordable, the proxy is no longer that useful. Thus, from an equity perspective regarding energy-related emissions, it is worth questioning whether to focus on equitable access to carbon space, or rather equitable access to energy services. Given that a) there is no harm-free use of the carbon space, and b) we are not interested in actually producing emissions, is there such a thing as a carbon space at all? Therefore using the carbon space to operationalise equity could be perceived as a fair approach by some but certainly not by all.

Taking this into consideration, a possible approach to consider would be to operationalise EASD through distributive justice in the following ways.

On the mitigation side:
  - Equitable access to energy services. This points towards equal per capita emission allowances between two people, if they share the same technology, environment and resource-endowment.

On the adaptation side:
  - Equitable access to a climate-safe future.
  - There is a strong corrective justice element given that historical emissions caused the harm. So the corrective justice and cumulative emissions still have a role to play, but rather in terms of adaptation finance related equity considerations than in regard to mitigation.

The design of any transition period is paramount. We will not jump from one system to the other. Managing the transition period is a challenge. For example, while not directly energy-related emissions, building up infrastructure entails one-off emissions. Countries that did not sufficiently develop their infrastructure in the past, need to do so in the future; and all countries need to undertake efforts (possibly related to transitory one-off emissions) to build low and zero carbon infrastructure for the future.

In summary, as we have more and more affordable and available zero-carbon technologies for our energy-related needs, the concept of carbon budgets for energy-related emissions becomes less relevant. However, in the transition period to the zero carbon economies, a carbon budget concept can have high relevance in relation to emissions related to building that new infrastructure.

On the more general point of a global carbon budget, it is seen as useful concept as it incentivises the international community to get clarity about the urgency of mitigation, as well as the fact that
the emissions, even if low, will result in climate impacts, costs and additional barriers to development. Using up any specific global carbon budget embeds a certain level of climate impact risks.

8. Markets in theory and practice and their relationship to EASD

There were diverse views in terms of the role of markets. Participants shared the view, however, that markets in themselves do not provide justice or equity.

There were differences in the perceptions of equity and in the approaches to operationalising of equity (EASD). One view operationalised equity principles through the allocation of the carbon space (inclusion of the principle of historical responsibility), while another focused on achieving equity through the distribution of revenues generated by global trade in carbon.

One view was that rights of access are allocated based on equity principles and then allow transfers between countries. It is possible that some part of the allocation may be traded, but not always stated clearly in proposals. The other view assumes allocation of access rights based on efficiency (free market auction of allowances) and that the revenues generated from the trade would be allocated equitably.

Once resources are made available through either system, there are certain requirements or conditions necessary to ensure equitable access to sustainable development. In the allocations approach, development would still require good institutional arrangements, technology transfer (for both mitigation and adaptation) and an enabling international environment. In the distribution of revenues approach, a full elaboration of the system would need to meet similar conditions as well as accountability.

An important area for future research and discussion is an appropriate financial architecture to deal with the level of efforts and associated impacts of mitigation, adaptation and loss & damage. This discussion would require a consideration of barriers at a national level, as well as an examination of the international financial system with the aim of facilitating the mobilisation of resources at a scale commensurate with the challenge.

9. Starting from the bottom up – national approaches

How global equity considerations relate to (intra)national equity is still unclear. The workshop spent some time considering national and regional approaches to operationalising EASD. Countries may include a ‘relative fair effort’ in planning their low-carbon development, as a low emission scenario. The EU has looked at burden-sharing among its member states. Discussions tended to start from the perspective of multi-lateral negotiations, but participants felt that more attention was needed to this issue at a national level. In these considerations, political economy was crucial, and a better understanding of that would help to identify drivers of greater ambition at the national level. Some participants commented on ‘success factors’ in national plans, which might not only be financial, partly may include CDM, but mostly might rely on political will and human-institutional capacity. Voluntary bottom-up approaches at the national level may help, but be more effective with clear policy signals and regulatory frameworks. The aforementioned are not exhaustive, and deserve further thought. A ‘home-grown’ identification of needs, gaps, capabilities, priorities and opportunities might help. Some participants expressed interest in further research and discussions on how the global climate regime might support, enhance, and amplify national and sub-national actions to achieve equitable and effective climate protection?