

**International equity and national climate policy ambition after Paris**  
Proposed research agenda for Bonn workshop, May 2017

Bård Lahn  
CICERO Centre for international climate research, Oslo  
bard.lahn@cicero.oslo.no

The Paris Agreement signals a new approach to international equity in climate change mitigation, replacing the top-down structure and binary Annex I/Non-Annex I distinction of the Kyoto Protocol with a bottom-up, self-differentiation approach based on the periodic formulation of “Nationally Determined Contributions” (NDCs). It is sometimes argued that the new approach renders irrelevant questions of justice in effort-sharing between nations. Within a finite carbon budget, however, decisions regarding the mitigation ambition level of any one country will necessarily have distributive effects. Therefore, it is more accurate to say that the Paris Agreement shifts the locus of justice considerations from top-down deliberation in the multilateral arena, to the “nationally determined” politics of formulating NDCs.

This raises an important question for research on climate justice: *How, and to what extent, does international equity considerations come to matter in national climate policy ambition after Paris?*

The question has an empirical side as well as a normative one. Empirically, it will be important to understand the extent to which international equity is considered when countries decide on climate policy ambitions and/or formulate NDCs; which actors formulate justice concerns in such decision-making processes, and how these concerns are discursively constructed in different national contexts; and what types of knowledge-claims and knowledge-producing processes come to be relevant in these discourses.

On the normative side, we might ask what kind of politics would allow for national climate ambition to be influenced by considerations of international equity: What does it take for international justice to matter in national climate politics, and how should the processes that determine the level of ambition in national climate policy be designed to allow for equity considerations? At stake here is (among other things) the question of whether climate ambition is best served by consensus-seeking deliberative processes, or by agonistic processes of politicization and contestation.

While Paris shifts the main locus for negotiating the distributive justice implications of climate change to national politics, the multilateral process continues to be relevant. The “global stocktake” established by the Paris Agreement to provide a basis for increasing national ambition over time is explicitly said to be conducted “in the light of equity and the best available science”. This raises questions such as: How can the stocktake take equity into account, and how should scientific expert advice be organized to enable justice considerations in the stocktake process? To what extent and under which conditions does the stocktake process influence national processes for determining climate policy ambitions and/or formulate NDCs?

**Planned work and potential collaborations**

In August, CICERO launches the three-year “CONNECT” project, combining STS and IR approaches to understand the changing international context of national climate policy. One part of the project will investigate how the Paris Agreement’s global stocktake is operationalized, including how equity considerations are included in the negotiations under the UNFCCC and the associated IPCC-produced knowledge basis. Such a focus on the international context should be well suited for collaboration with projects that look at the national politics of climate ambition in different national contexts, and comparative analyses of national climate policy in general.