

Time to be bold: how to make the Madrid Climate Summit a success

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UN climate talks have a bad track record.

Over and over again, governments meet to find practical solutions on how to tackle one the most urgent and dramatic global challenges we face as humanity: climate change. The majority of participants if not all, are in agreement about the need for action. However, when delegates book their flights, you can be sure they add an extra day, as they know that the meeting will run overtime over hard talks and negotiations. What changes do we need to make this summit in Madrid, COP25, a success?

To begin with, when I say “success” I mean a summit that delivers on goals. The same goals that are enshrined in the Paris agreement. If we were to listen to scientists, and we definitely should, success means that in Madrid governments should commit to increase their ambitions rather than behave like business as usual. The recent “Gap report” from UNEP, raises the stakes. It makes it clear that all parties need to reconsider their current approach to climate change, revise their national plans, and support international rules and agreements which can facilitate and promote more climate action.

At COP 25 the finding of the report should inform a number of critical decisions. First, the planned review of the current work with “climate change-induced loss and damage”, must deliver a commitment to continue the work, with a more ambitious agenda, which includes support to people affected by climate change. Talks about loss and damage are difficult! Developed and developing countries are far apart in their positions. However, communities in need of support cannot be left behind. The Paris agreement is quite clear about it: loss and damage must be addressed and acted upon.

Secondly, the Madrid summit is expected to deliver rules for international cooperation, including ways on how to trade with carbon. This is a risky element of the Paris agreement and it has so far not been further developed. If the objective to reduce global emissions is truly at the center of our work as the international community, any type of rules must be strict and must ensure that there are no loopholes, double counting or cheating. Delivering weak rules will be a giant failure as it may enable a continued fossil fuel-based development.

Finally, and this may not be directly linked to the summit itself, the parties to the treaty need to step up their national ambition. The Paris agreement is built with a bottom-up approach, where each country needs to make its own climate plan (the so-called National Determined Contributions). In 2020 the parties should submit their new plans, and COP25 is a great opportunity to share news about their forthcoming, and more ambitious, intentions. At the same time developed should declare that they will scale up their climate finance, to support developing with the implementation of their plans, and to deliver on the commitment to annually mobilize 100 bn USD from 2020 and onwards.

COP25 will of course cover many other topics but if parties deliver on these three points, they will at least be moving in the right direction.

I hope COP25 will be a success!

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