About mitigation, adaptation and the UNFCCC's 21st Conference of the Parties*

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Introduction

Concern over global climate change increases daily as extreme weather events multiply and scientific evidence accumulates on planetary borders, challenging humankind to take effective measures to both counteract the drivers of ongoing climate change and improve public response to its consequences. Global governance on this matter is critical and the Conference of the Parties (COP) is the highest decision-making body of the UN Convention Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). All the States that are part of the Convention are represented in the COP, whose main tasks are to review the implementation of the Convention and any other legal instruments that the COP adopts, and to take decisions necessary to promote the implementation of the Convention.

As shown in Annex, there have been twenty Conferences between 1995 and 2014 and overall results have admittedly been less than spectacular. Well-known political obstacles and the general lack of enthusiasm at the level of participating countries for necessary measures in the economic domain are generally at the root of these disappointments. This note, however, focuses on two other less prominent aspects of the negotiations that have obstructed analyses and problem-solving efforts at the technical level: the failure to deal with mitigation and adaptation within a balanced approach and the insufficient consideration of population dynamics in the overall structure of both problems and solutions in mitigation and adaptation.

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COP21

The 21st Conference of the Parties will take place in Paris during November-December of 2015. Great expectations surround this meeting, wherein the Parties aim to reach "for the first time, a universal, legally binding agreement that will enable us to combat climate change effectively and boost the transition towards resilient, low-carbon societies and economies" (UNITED NATIONS, 2015). In practical terms, this means achieving the goal of keeping global warming at or below 2ºC.

COP21 has some very ambitious new goals. First, the final agreement (to enter in force in 2020) should focus *equally* on mitigation (gas emissions reduction) *and* adaptation, while taking into account each country's need and capacities.[1] Second, countries should make public their intended nationally determined contributions (INDCs)[2] to the reduction of emissions before the realization of COP21, in order to have an indicator of the cumulative impact of these contributions by the time of the meeting.[3] Finally, the COP21 aims to mobilize $100 billion per year by developed countries, to be applied to enabling developing countries to combat climate change and promote sustainable development (UNITED NATIONS, 2015).

These are challenging goals and compromises will likely be needed in order to advance. Just working on a negotiated draft to be discussed and agreed upon during the COP21 has already been a daunting task.[4]

Mitigation and adaptation in the "road to Paris"

Seeing that mitigation and adaptation are the core elements of the Convention, this section focuses on the aforementioned first goal of the COP21, exploring the extent to which the goal of a balanced approach has been actually present in the negotiations so far.

The UNFCCC conceptualizes mitigation and adaptation from different angles. On the one hand, mitigation[5] is approached in terms of *actions* needed for stabilizing greenhouse gases (GHGs) concentrations in the atmosphere, either by reducing GHG emissions, enhancing

[1] In agreement with the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities" (art 4 of the UNFCCC, available at ‹https://unfccc.int/resource/docs/convkp/conveng.pdf›).

[2] An outcome of the COP19 (Warsaw, 2013), the INDCs replace the traditional model of setting a global central target for tackling emissions and then dividing commitments amongst different countries (the model which collapsed in Copenhagen, 2009). In the new system, countries submit their individual plans for reducing emissions, collectively agreeing to limit temperature rise to two degrees above pre-industrial levels. On paper, this approach would encourage countries to commit to emission reductions at the national level, and to be transparent about what they're prepared to do (WEBSTER, 2015).

[3] As in October 11, 122 parties (out of 196) have presented their INDCs, a list is available at ‹http://www4.unfccc.int/submissions/indc/Submission%20Pages/submissions.aspx›.

[4] The draft text for discussion, prepared in the COP20 (Lima, December of 2014), illustrates this over 43 pages, with numerous items marked for further discussion and many options presented for some of the more heaty debated articles. This text grew to 86 pages by February 2015 at the Geneva meeting, but the current (as of October 5th, 2015) version of the text is just 20 pages long, although it will very likely get longer again before the actual COP21 discussions.

[5] Available at ‹http://unfccc.int/focus/mitigation/items/7169.php#intro›. This concept agrees with the IPCC 5AR WGII and III, which define mitigation (of climate change) as "a human intervention to reduce the sources or enhance the sinks of greenhouse gases (GHGs)". Available at ‹http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar5/wg3/ipcc_wg3_ar5_annex-i.pdf›.

sinks and reservoirs, or both. It is recognized that the capacity to implement any or all of these reduction paths will depend on socio-economic and environmental circumstances, and on the availability of information and technology. A wide variety of policies and instruments are available to governments to create the incentives for mitigation actions, essential for meeting UNFCCC's objectives.

On the other hand, the UNFCCC defines adaptation[6] more broadly as *adjustments* in ecological, social, or economic systems in response to actual or expected climatic stimuli and their effects or impacts. These adjustments include changes in processes, practices, and structures to moderate potential damages, or to benefit from, opportunities associated with climate change. The five general components of adaptation activities are: observation; assessment of climate impacts and vulnerability; planning; implementation; and monitoring and evaluation of adaptation actions.

Mitigation and adaptation have had a somewhat uneasy relationship during the history of the UNFCCC, which would explain the emphasis of the COP21 on equal focus. Venturini et al. created an interesting "map" of the network space of topics discussed in the COPs between 1995 and 2013 (VENTURINI et al., 2014, p. 6, fig.1), locating the relative position of the mitigation and adaptation frameworks. They found that the "climate diplomacy" around mitigation and its sub-topics (e.g. carbon sinks, measurement of GHGs, technology transfers, etc.) have had a preeminent role (VENTURINI et al., 2014, p. 16). This assessment is echoed by Briner and collaborators (BRINER et al., 2014, p. 12). Meanwhile, adaptation has been a very specific, clearly defined topic included in the negotiations since the beginning of the UNFCCC, but mainly centered on the issue of *adaptation finance*.

However, these authors conclude that there could be an "adaptation turn", judging by the emergence and rising visibility of the topics of "vulnerability" (from the COP9 to the COP 14) and "climate impacts" (COP15) (BRINER et al., 2014, p. 17). The Loss and Damage agreement (outcome of the COP19, in Warsaw 2013) would be yet another example of this apparent "turn". Officially, the "Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage",[7] aims to be the main instrument – under the Convention – to address loss and damage associated with climate change impacts in those developing countries that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change in a comprehensive, integrated and coherent manner.

[6] Available at ‹http://unfccc.int/focus/adaptation/items/6999.php›. As with mitigation, this concept agrees with the definition of the IPCC 5AR WGII and III: "the process of adjustment to actual or expected climate and its effects. In human systems, adaptation seeks to moderate or avoid harm or exploit beneficial opportunities. In some natural systems, human intervention may facilitate adjustment to expected climate and its effects". Available at ‹http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar5/wg2/WGIIAR5-AnnexII_FINAL.pdf›. It is interesting to observe that the WGII glossary also includes a definition of mitigation related to disaster risk and disaster, and to some extent, to loss and damage: "the lessening of the potential adverse impacts of physical hazards (including those that are human-induced) through actions that reduce hazard, exposure, and vulnerability".

[7] Available at ‹http://unfccc.int/adaptation/workstreams/loss_and_damage/items/6056.php›. The Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage associated with Climate Change Impacts was established in the COP19 (Warsaw 2013), after two years of deliberations on this issue (see decision 2/COP19 for the details).

These differences as to how mitigation and adaptation are addressed seem to mirror the never-ending controversies between developed and developing countries during the different COPs. Their disagreements range from what issues to include in the negotiations, to how to address the respective responsibilities in GHG emission reduction goals (usually involving the interpretation and re-interpretation of the "common but differentiated responsibilities" article 4); and to how to address human impacts and adaptation, including the touchy issue of how to address financial support for adaptation actions (OTT et al., 2014; SOLÓN, 2015).

Mitigation, adaptation and the road to Paris

In the discussions leading to Paris 2015, the handling of mitigation and adaptation seems to have followed the familiar path, at least judging by the texts of the Annex of the Call for Action (December 2014) and the October 5th draft agreement (2015).[8] As on previous occasions, mitigation and adaptation are first considered in separate chapters and references to each other are minimal or non-existing. This is not necessarily an issue since the stated goal is to focus on them *equally*, but not necessarily *jointly* (UNITED NATIONS, 2014, p. 6; AD HOC WORKING GROUP ON THE DURBAN PLATFORM FOR ENHANCED ACTION, 2015, p. 1).

One such mention is found in the Adaptation Section of the Draft Agreement, effectively recognizing the links between mitigation and adaptation: "Parties recognize that, the greater their mitigation efforts, the less adaptation will be needed" (AD HOC WORKING GROUP ON THE DURBAN PLATFORM FOR ENHANCED ACTION, 2015, p. 2, art. 4.2). A second one is in the Mitigation Section of the Draft Decision (but marked for discussion), suggesting to finance adaptation with funds from mitigation:

> Requests the SBSTA[9] to elaborate modalities and procedures for the mechanism for sustainable development [...] that inter alia: (a) Provide, where desired by the participating Parties, for the creation and issuance of real, permanent, additional and verified mitigation outcomes that may be used to meet nationally determined [contributions] [commitments] [other] in a manner that is supplementary to domestic action, is consistent with the rules and guidance for accounting, and **provides for a share of proceeds for adaptation** (AD HOC WORKING GROUP ON THE DURBAN PLATFORM FOR ENHANCED ACTION, 2015,p. 20, art. 34 [Option 1], emphasis added).[10]

[8] This note is based on these two drafts, the first and last ones available at the moment of this writing. More draft texts are likely to be available before the actual meeting in Paris at the end of November, for example the draft document of the Bonn Climate Change Conference October 19-23, 2015 (formally the Eleventh Part of the Second Session of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action).

[9] Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice.

[10] Articles 22 (Mitigation Section) and 28 (Adaptation Section) of the Annex to the Call for Action (Lima 2014) asked for Parties to take into account joint mitigation and adaptation approaches for the integral and sustainable management of forests. In the Draft Agreement, there is instead a mention to forests in Article 6 (Finance), "Parties should strive to balance adaptation support relative to mitigation support, bearing in mind country-driven strategies, priorities and needs, including in relation to forests, technology transfer and capacity-building".

There are several other instances in both draft texts where the urgent need to balance mitigation and adaptation actions is mentioned, outside the specific Mitigation and Adaptation chapters. A sample of those that were still alive in the October 5th document are listed in Table 1, including the section from where they were taken.

TABLE 1
Selected examples of paragraphs mentioning both mitigation and adaptation

A. Draft agreement	B. Draft decision
Purpose Art.2.1: The purpose of this Agreement is to enhance the implementation of the objective of the Convention and strengthen and support the global response to the urgent threat of climate change by further addressing its causes and by further increasing resilience and the ability to adapt to its adverse impacts, with a view to promoting the global transformation to low-emission and climate-resilient societies and economies. It reflects common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, in light of different national circumstances. Finance Art.6.6. Parties should strive to balance adaptation support relative to mitigation support, bearing in mind country-driven strategies, priorities and needs, including in relation to forests, technology transfer and capacity-building. Technology development and transfer 7.1. All Parties, noting the importance of technology to support the implementation of mitigation and adaptation efforts under this Agreement and recognizing existing deployment and dissemination efforts, [shall] [should] [other] strengthen cooperative action to promote and enhance technology development and transfer, improve enabling environments for and address barriers to the dissemination and uptake of technology, and foster cooperative approaches to research and development. Capacity-building Art.8.1. Capacity-building under this Agreement should facilitate the ability of Parties, particularly developing countries, to identify, design and implement adaptation and mitigation actions; facilitate technology development and the absorption of technology and finance; and facilitate the transparent, timely and accurate communication of information. Art.8.4. [Option 2: An international capacity-building mechanism shall be established to serve this Agreement with the intention of enhancing the planning and implementation of mitigation and adaptation actions, including by improving coordination and coherence in the provision of capacity-building and by identifying gaps and needs.] Transparency Art.9.2. The purpose of the system for transparency of action is to: (b) Ensure clarity and tracking of progress made in implementing and achieving individual Parties' respective nationally determined mitigation [contributions] [commitments] [other] under Article 3, as well as tracking progress in implementing adaptation actions under Article 4.	III. DECISIONS TO GIVE EFFECT TO THE AGREEMENT Technology development and transfer Art.48. ***Decides*** to strengthen the technology needs assessment (TNA) process taking into account existing efforts, including under the Poznan strategic programme on technology transfer, by enhancing: (b) The synergy between the TNA process and other arrangements related to the implementation of mitigation and adaption actions, as appropriate; IV. [WORKSTREAM 2][1] Art.69. ***Resolves*** to strengthen, in the period 2016–2020, the technical examination of opportunities with high mitigation potential, including those with adaptation, health and sustainable development co-benefits, with a focus on accelerating the implementation of actions,

Source: Ad Hoc Working Group on the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action (2015), emphasis added.
[1] Enhancing pre-2020 mitigation ambition.

These texts suggest that, in addition to equal attention, mitigation and adaptation should be considered simultaneously, and be provided with similar levels of funding. Similarly, both should be included in technology transfer and capacity-building efforts, and both should have ways to evaluate progress. Finally, there is a call for taking advantage of opportunities that could improve both mitigation and adaptation efforts.

It should be pointed out that a particular aspect of adaptation, Loss and Damage, is still not included in this conversation, and actually, the topic is hardly mentioned in the October 5th text. However, even when it is a contested and contentious issue (OTT et al., 2014; FLANNERY, 2015), there is still hope it will be reinstated during negotiations in Paris, and that it will be part of the final agreement.

Also missing from the draft text is any mention of potential conflicts between mitigation and adaptation measures or actions. And yet, it has been noted that mitigation and adaptation measures influence each other in complicated ways, requiring integrative approaches that also take into account their tradeoffs, conflicts and disconnections (MOSER, 2012). For example, actions and measures may present different spatial and temporal scales (BERRY et al., 2015) or may involve different social groups within a country, or even different countries (e.g. AYERS; HUQ, 2009; DE SHERBININ et al., 2011, p. 456).

Mitigation, adaptation and population dynamics

Several characteristics of current population dynamics are important for understanding potential changes in population-environment relationships under climate change and yet, have not been given sufficient consideration in the COP process. Regional differences in socio-demographic dynamics (for instance in aging, lower or higher fertility, changes in socioeconomic status, variations in spatial distribution related to increasing spatial mobility and to the urban transition) are critical in both mitigation and adaptation efforts. Demographic characteristics, structures and dynamics are linked, for example, to changes in consumption patterns (CURRAN; DE SHERBININ, 2004; LEVY; MOREL, 2012; THE ROYAL SOCIETY SCIENCE POLICY CENTRE, 2012), and to changes in the patterns of exposure and vulnerability to environmental events, including those related to climate change such as rising sea levels or changes in water availability (see for example ADAMO; DE SHERBININ, 2011; CEPAL; UNIVERSIDAD DE CANTABRIA, 2012; RUNFOLA et al., forthcoming).

Population dynamics, then, are yet another important link between mitigation and adaptation. They have a role in the implementation of mitigation policies, and in understanding the differences in vulnerability, exposure and adaptive capacity among diverse social groups that may be crucial for adaptation practices. Aspects such as age structure, gender or spatial distribution have a direct connection to adaptation and mitigation (JIANG; HARDEE, 2011; LUTZ; STRIESSNIG, 2015), and more aspects of population dynamics are being incorporated into models, scenarios and forecasts (HUNTER; O'NEILL, 2014; O'NEILL et al., 2014).

New approaches to scenario building are taking these links into consideration. For example, one of the incentives for the development of the Shared Socioeconomic Pathways[11] was to identify challenges common to both mitigation and adaptation, which may need to

[11] The Shared Socioeconomic Pathways is a set of possible socioeconomic futures combining emissions drivers and mitigative capacity with exposure, sensitivity and adaptive capacity (HUNTER; O'NEILL, 2014, p. 233).

be considered *together*, especially at the local level (see for example AYERS; HUQ, 2009; LAUKKONEN et al., 2009; FIELD et al., 2014, p. 89).

In conclusion

This brief note looked at mitigation and adaptation in the context of the COP21's preparations and through the consideration of selected draft texts for negotiation. Even when the goal of focusing equally on both aspects is clear in the discussions, there are still certain aspects that would need to be incorporated in order to address adaptation in equal terms with mitigation.

Following the international climate negotiations can sometimes be an arid and even dull endeavor. Nevertheless, it is crucial that analysts from different scientific fields scrutinize this process and help transform the obvious connections between mitigation and adaptation efforts in the context of climate change into more effective policy agreements. Population dynamics are an important component of problem solving and practical implementation. In return, the population-environment field benefits from the analysis of the COP processes because they offer a clear example of the recursive relationship between demographic behavior, population dynamics, and environmental processes and impacts.

The World Science Report 2013 states that "global environmental change is about humans changing global environments, and about humans, individually and collectively, shaping the direction of planetary and social evolution" (INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL SCIENCES COUNCIL AND UNESCO, 2013, p. 4). This conceptualization is behind the growing interest on mitigation and, specially, adaptation issues within the social sciences in general, and within the population-environment community in particular.

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Annex

Sessions of the UNFCCC's Conference of the Parties

Session year	Location	Session
2015	Paris, France	COP 21
2014	Lima, Peru	COP 20
2013	Warsaw, Poland	COP 19
2012	Doha, Qatar	COP 18
2011	Durban, South Africa	COP 17
2010	Cancun, Mexico	COP 16
2009	Copenhagen, Denmark	COP 15
2008	Poznan, Poland	COP 14
2007	Bali, Indonesia	COP 13
2006	Nairobi, Kenya	COP 12
2005	Montreal, Canada	COP 11
2004	Buenos Aires, Argentina	COP 10
2003	Milan, Italy	COP 9
2002	New Delhi, India	COP 8
2001	Marrakech, Morocco	COP 7
2001	Bonn, Germany	COP 6-2
2000	The Hague, The Netherlands	COP 6
1999	Bonn, Germany	COP 5
1998	Buenos Aires, Argentina	COP 4
1997	Kyoto, Japan	COP 3
1996	Geneva, Switzerland	COP 2
1995	Berlin, Germany	COP 1

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