



Asia-Pacific Centre for Environmental Law Report 2001

UNFCCC COP25 Madrid 2019

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Uploaded January 2020

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Introduction

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) 25th Conference of the Parties (COP25) was held in Madrid, Spain, between 2nd and 14th December 2019. Eric Bea (APCEL) was part of the National University of Singapore (NUS) observer delegation to COP25. The NUS delegation included a broad spectrum of delegates from the NUS community. In addition to APCEL and the Energy Studies Institute (ESI), this year's NUS delegation included students and alumni of the Geography department, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, and Yale-NUS College, as well as researchers from the Centre for International Law (CIL).

* Research Assistant, APCEL. I would like to express my gratitude to Melissa Low (Research Fellow, Energy Studies Institute, NUS) for facilitating my participation at UNFCCC COP25 and for the photos and details on the NUS-organised side events included in this report.



(The NUS delegation at COP25)

With the market mechanisms in Article 6 of the Paris Agreement on the line, there was much interest on this aspect of the ongoing negotiations at COP25. More on the progress on this issue will be covered in a briefing paper co-written with Melissa Low of the Energy Studies Institute, NUS, the delegation leader, to be published soon. This report will focus on the events which NUS organised, the procedural aspects of COP25, as well as future plans for developing the experiences from this COP.

Events

NUS delegates were involved in several side events throughout the COP. Side events at the COP are generally designed as capacity-building events which aim to assist negotiators and observers to get more knowledge about a given negotiation topic, or to showcase an institution's efforts in climate action. These events may be held in the Blue Zone (restricted to accredited delegates), the Green Zone (open to the public and co-located with the COP), or off-site (usually by registration only). NUS only organised Blue Zone side events this year.

Capacity-Building Hub (Blue Zone) event: Contributions of higher education to climate action and implementation of the Paris Agreement (4 December 2019)



On 4 December 2019, Melissa Low (Research Fellow, ESI), and Eric spoke on a panel at the Paris Committee on Capacity Building (PCCB) 2nd Capacity Building Hub on “Innovative Partnerships for Bridging Capacity Building Gaps: Lessons from Communities, Youth and Education Organizations”.

Melissa and Eric joined speakers from the Guangdong Harmony Community Foundation and Care About Climate to share on the importance of partnerships in climate change capacity building efforts. The speakers also shared best practices, resources and tools for successful collaboration. Melissa and Eric’s presentation was on 'Training the Trainers: Partnering with Educators to Build Capacity on Climate Change Negotiations'.

The event was attended by over 30 representatives from government delegations and civil society organizations attending COP25.

Blue Zone NUS exhibit (6-7 December 2019)



From 8-9 December 2019, NUS hosted an exhibition booth at COP25. The exhibition booth was led by ESI, together with APCEL and CIL. The showcase featured ESI Policy Briefs and APCEL and CIL reports on climate change, energy and environmental research and the international negotiations on climate change.

Off-site event: Climate Law and Governance Day (6 December 2019)



Two students from NUS Law, Eric Bea '19 and Teo Tze She '19, were awarded bronze medals at the Global Climate Law and Governance Student Essay Competition 2019. This essay competition was organized by the Climate Law and Governance Initiative to encourage student involvement in addressing the legal and governance challenges posed by climate change. Essays were related to various aspects of law and governance related to climate change or sustainable development. The awards were presented at the Climate Law and Governance Day event, held on 6 December 2019 at the Autonomous University of Madrid.

Eric's essay, "If you like SDGs, then you Shoulda Put a Price on It" advocates for the implementation of a price signal for Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) co-benefits in the future market mechanisms in Article 6.4 of the Paris Agreement, supported by a baseline of no net negative impact to the SDGs generally, as well as using the transparency and stocktaking guidance adopted under Article 13 and 14 of the Paris Agreement to foster SDG co-benefits in Article 6 approaches.

Tze She's essay, "Synergies between Climate Change & Biodiversity: An ecosystem-based approach under the Paris Agreement", proposes to harness the synergies between the Paris Agreement and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) to promote an ecosystem-based approach to climate change, by focusing on the adoption of ecosystem-based approaches to mitigate carbon emissions and adapt to climate change under Articles 4 and 7 of the Paris Agreement respectively.

On receiving the award, Eric said it was an honour to receive the award, and that he hopes that his essay can add to the growing body of work on the Paris Agreement, and that it contributes to the creation of the healthy development of the international climate law regime. Tze She said that she was humbled to have received international recognition for her work, and hopes that her paper will inspire a more dynamic and multifaceted approach in developing climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies.

Meeting with Singapore's Minister for Environment and Water Resources at the Singapore Delegation Office at COP25 (10 December 2019)

The NUS delegation, along with representatives from City Developments Limited, Miniwiz Singapore, and the Singapore National Youth Achievement Award, were honoured to be able to have a closed-door discussion with Singapore's Minister for Environment and Water Resources, Mr Masagos Zulkifli, as well as Singapore's Chief Negotiator to the UNFCCC, Mr Joseph Teo. Topics discussed included the role of the government, private sector and civil society in advancing Singapore's climate action goals as reflected in Singapore's Nationally Determined Contribution, as well as future transport energy technologies that Singapore is planning to adopt and adapt to local circumstances.



Blue Zone side event: Increasing Climate Ambition through Capacity Building Among Youth and Educators (12 December 2019)



On 12 December 2019, ESI, APCEL and the Asia-Europe Foundation co-organised a side event at COP25 on “Increasing Climate Ambition through Capacity Building Among Youth and Educators”. The panel discussion highlighted evidence-based case studies of practices that advance climate action and ambition while promoting the effective and lasting implementation of the Paris Agreement and was moderated by Melissa Low from ESI.

Eric kicked off the presentations by sharing about the Climate Change Negotiations Training Workshop for Youth and Educators co-delivered by ESI and APCEL in 2019. He also focused on plans for 2020. Other speakers include Professor Gregg Walker, Oregon State University; Research and Independent Non-Governmental Organisations (RINGO) Steering Committee member and representative to the Paris Committee on Capacity Building; Mr Terry Godwaldt, Executive Director, The Centre for Global Education; Ms Sarah Flynn, Program Director, TakingITGlobal Youth Association; Mr Zhang Jian, Deputy Secretary, Global Alliance of

Universities on Climate; Ms Zhang Jiaxuan, Youth Delegate, Tsinghua University and Ms. Susana Guerreiro, Senior Programme Officer/consultant, Asian Institute of Technology.

The event helped raise the level of awareness of best practices in Singapore, the United States, China and Thailand. Panellists also discussed collaboration opportunities to continue to inspire and empower youth and educators in increasing climate ambition at a local and national level. They also expressed interest to work with regions such as Africa for future projects. The event was attended by 30 representatives from Government delegations, civil society organizations attending COP25.

COP25 negotiations – the procedural aspects

The negotiations, as with past practice, opened with the Opening Plenaries of the COP, the Conference serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP), and the Conference serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement (CMA). The COP then handed over to its two subsidiary bodies, the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA), and the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI), which proceeded with their plenaries. These subsidiary bodies then split up into informal negotiations to discuss individual agenda items throughout the week, usually meeting twice or thrice in the first week of the COP. Informal negotiations differ from the plenaries in that while all state parties to the UNFCCC are welcome to attend, they are not obligated to do so, especially if the state concerned is of the opinion that the agenda item does not affect their national interests.

Particularly notable was the informal negotiations Article 6 negotiations under SBSTA, which met practically daily during the week. As this agenda item was carried over from COP24, where Paris Agreement parties were unable to conclude this chapter of the Paris Rulebook, this meant that this was effectively in “overtime” and was the foremost priority of this COP. Not surprisingly, Article 6 negotiations attracted the most attention from parties and observers alike.



(Article 6 informal negotiations room)

However, these negotiations were treated as a *de facto* plenary session for Article 6, with the co-facilitators (Hugh Sealy of Barbados, and Peer Stiansen of Norway) appointed by the SBSTA chair (Paul Watkinson of France), proposing to meet delegations in private bilaterals and closed “informal-informals”. As such, parties used Article 6 to repeat their positions, including the options which they were willing to accept (or not). Few parties used the main informals to propose trade-offs, or in the COP parlance, “landing zones”. Incidentally, the term “landing zone” suggests a lowest common denominator approach, rather than an ambitious proposal. Not surprisingly, from the proceedings of the main informals, parties reported incremental, if glacial, progress towards these “landing zones”. The draft texts released every other day by the co-facilitators were more informative as the results of the closed-door negotiations could be seen on the text by the elimination of options and alternatives, leading towards a more consolidated and streamlined text.

However, after the close of SBSTA on 9 December, the draft texts were delivered to the COP25 Presidency. Again, as with usual practice, the Presidency held closed-door high-level negotiations with ministers from the party states. This meant less transparency, and was compounded by the Presidency’s relative tardiness in releasing updated draft texts, leaving it until 13 December to release new texts, and then followed up with clean texts for Article 6.2 and 6.8 the next day.

Even though it was obvious that parties were attempting to tuck in negotiations to keep the most sensitive (but possibly the most instructive) parts of the negotiations away from the observers, the combination of the openness and transparency which the co-facilitators promoted, as well as the reporting from the Earth Negotiations Bulletin, gave observers a good overview of the negotiations. This is unprecedented in international law-making, and should become the norm in other fields of international law as well.

Future NUS participation

It is recommended that NUS students, researchers, and alumni, participate in the COP process. On the one hand, it is possible to follow the COP process remotely through the webcast system, which provides a live broadcast of plenary meetings. This will allow viewers to have a broad understanding of each party's general attitude towards climate action.

However, this system does not provide for the informal sessions, which are more focused on specific agenda items, such as market mechanisms, transparency, adaptation, loss and damage, etc., and would be of the most use to researchers.

It is also recommended that delegates to the COP be equipped with the necessary information before proceeding to the COP. A background in either climate science and geography, or international *and* environmental law, would be recommended. Participants who have completed the ESI-APCEL Climate Change Negotiations Workshop would also be in good standing. This would allow delegates to follow the negotiations and understand the mechanics of the negotiations. Some form of commitment from future delegates towards applying the lessons learnt at COP to the local community in terms of capacity-building would be most welcome.

Delegates should also aim to follow negotiations closely, tracking a specific agenda item. A good practice would be to attend at least one of the Research and Independent Non-Governmental Organisations (RINGO) daily co-ordination meetings to get one's bearings. NUS has always been well-represented in RINGO, and it would be good to continue. We have tended to serve as the sole Asian, or even Global South, voice in the room, and we have been valued for our perspectives.

Future plans for developing the experiences from this COP

The experiences from this COP will go towards the development of the APCEL-ESI Executive Programme (slated for April 2020), and the ESI-APCEL Climate Change Negotiations Workshop (tentatively August/September 2020).

In addition, this will also lead to the compilation and publication of a toolkit for teachers and educators to bring the COP experience to the classroom. The toolkit will guide participants on how they can run a model negotiations session in their classrooms and communities, depending on the age group/education level, time, and objectives of the negotiation and the audience. As the toolkit will adopt a modular format, educators can design the negotiations around their own needs

in their classrooms. This toolkit will take the form of a (e-)book which educators can refer to as a saved or printed copy.

It is hoped that this toolkit will enable educators and students to identify the structural issues which need to be overcome if we are to accelerate action on climate change, and to empower participants to knowledgably share the important of the international multilateral negotiations and see where they and their work intersect.