

Shaping the Durban Platform: Latin America and the Caribbean in a future High Ambition Deal

Key messages

- LAC countries supporting high ambition at the international climate negotiations need to continue to shape a more ambitious climate narrative by acting together, domestically and internationally, and strengthening existing work with experts on bold action both within and outside the COPs.
- Informal exchanges inside and outside of the UNFCCC process to jointly define key milestones for the Durban Platform and identify areas of convergence and divergence must take place within LAC countries and with Africa and Asia between now and 2015.
- Both at home and abroad, the LAC region needs to improve how it communicates its successes on low carbon, climate resilient strategies to keep building confidence and generating a stronger impact at the international climate negotiations.
- LAC countries need to continue to explore how best to advance national conversations linking climate change issues such as mitigation and resilience plans to national interests and potential losses in food security, infrastructure and trade.

After the longest session on record, governments at the COP17 in Durban in December 2011 agreed to negotiate by 2015 a climate deal to enter into force in 2020. The Durban Platform for Enhanced Action defied predictions that the meeting in South Africa would lead to a collapse of the UN climate talks. Many parties from Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) have worked many years to make possible the political compromise achieved in the final hours and included in the Durban Platform. Today, the challenge is to make this platform ambitious enough to avoid dangerous climate change. In this policy brief, we discuss these outcomes, the contribution LAC made, and the implications of the Durban Platform for the region. We end by offering a set of recommendations.

1 Unpacking the Durban Outcome

The decision to negotiate a climate deal by 2015¹ represents a positive outcome, not only because the negotiations did not fail, but especially because obligations for parties to the UNFCCC will be set. This approach defeated attempts to delay stronger mitigation goals without a legal framework until 2020.

By 2015 countries will define the level and ambition of their reductions obligations; in the meantime, a more robust regime for compliance and accounting will be required. Among other things, the Durban Platform will further refine the structure of a system for measurement, reporting and verification (MRV) of emission reductions. Most countries will have to increase the transparency

of their actions through the agreed more frequent reporting, as well as processes for their international consultation and analysis (for developing countries) and for international assessment and review, (for developed countries). A registry for mitigation actions in developing countries and to match those actions with finance to support them will also operate.

In Durban, progress on the negotiations of MRV - a key priority for developed countries - secured support for the proposed design of the Green Climate Fund, which was a key deliverable for developing countries.

This Fund is expected to channel a significant proportion of the annual \$100 billion USD that developed countries committed to mobilise to developing countries by 2020. Key uncertainties remain due to the lack of specific capitalization commitments for this Fund. For now the commitments cover the Fund's start-up costs. By the end of 2012, the Fund's Board should be appointed and an interim secretariat starting to operate. This year, the Standing Committee will start functioning to provide guidance to the COP on climate finance and a work program on the mobilization of long-term finance to developing countries is to be deployed. The Durban outcome also prolongs the operation of the Clean Development Mechanism, and decides on the establishment of a new market mechanism under the Convention, yet to be designed.

The adaptation agenda moved forward in Durban through a number of modest results: the implementation of the Cancun Adaptation Framework agreed in 2010, including the operationalization of the Adaptation Committee which will coordinate the work of the UNFCCC on adaptation. A voluntary process was agreed to enable Least Developed Countries to formulate and implement national adaptation plans. Colombia won the case to include other countries in this process. A Work Program on Loss and Damage, of particular interest to the Caribbean, was established to identify the risks and needs of vulnerable countries.ⁱⁱ

The decisions on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) were not as satisfactory as expected. Essential progress related to the methodology on Baselines for REDD+ was recorded. However, tensions remain on issues around the weakness of safeguards, the sources of finance and the role of market and non-market approaches.

Greater progress was achieved on the Technology Mechanism, including a Technology Executive Committee and a Climate Technology Centre and Network, with delegates agreeing to select a host organization for the Centre in 2012. However, disagreement in Durban over

the composition of the Network's advisory board could delay the operationalization of the Mechanism until next year.

Despite the decision to extend the Kyoto protocol, the announced exit of Canada, Russia and Japan threaten to undermine its strength, and underline the importance of supporting it, and completing the regime under the platform.

2 Latin America and the Caribbean in Durban

The LAC region has never spoken with one voice in the climate negotiations, displaying instead a rich mosaic of perspectives. It has operated through formal and informal, regional and international groupings: the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), BASIC, ALBA, the Cartagena Dialogue for Progressive Action, the Environmental Integrity Group, the Central American Integration System, the Coalition of Rainforest Nations and the Group of Highly Vulnerable Countries.ⁱⁱⁱ

These groupings have diverse priorities. AOSIS has historically called for highly ambitious mitigation targets that BASIC, including Brazil, have found unacceptable. Bolivia has questioned market mechanisms that other LAC countries defend. Colombia, Peru, Costa Rica, Chile, Dominican Republic and Mexico have been acting along similar lines for a long while, and were instrumental in creating the Cartagena Dialogue's deliberate mixture of developed and developing countries. All LAC countries with the exception of Mexico, which is part of the Environmental Integrity Group alongside Korea, Switzerland and others, are part of the G77+ China. Cultural and linguistic differences further facilitate and hinder dialogue. In fact, the only official mechanism of the UN bringing the region into a formal setting is "GRULAC" at the United Nations.^{iv} Nonetheless, GRULAC's focus has been on nominations and candidacies, rather than the negotiations.

This diversity of views creates opportunities and challenges: lamenting the absence of a single regional position misses the point. This "creative diversity" might rather be an asset - tensions and divergences help maintain key issues on the table; from a push for higher ambition to the support of inclusiveness. By not adopting a single rigid position, LAC countries have had the flexibility to reach out to like-minded countries beyond regional boundaries, thus allowing our region to influence the international debate and to become a leader rather than a spectator.



Delegates trying to reach a solution in the final hours of the COP17

On key issues LAC does share some common goals, however, as demonstrated in Durban, such as the need for a second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol, a new and stronger mitigation regime and ensuring an outcome on the Green Climate Fund. Many LAC countries played a proactive role by facilitating the process in critical moments. Chile, Ecuador, Dominican Republic and Mexico facilitated discussions in market mechanisms, on mitigation, and on legal forms. Colombia and Mexico contributed substantially to the Bureau of the COP. Ecuador, Venezuela and –from a different perspective- Brazil also worked on key specific topics that helped build convergence at the later stages in Durban, and both Mexico and Brazil, made crucial contributions in what emerged as the Durban Platform.

The main challenge ahead, for LAC and for all, is to work with rather than against the differences, understanding their logic. This effort can strengthen the chances of progress around the Durban Platform and other sustainability issues.

The contribution to the Durban outcome started before Durban

The idea that developing countries can and should be supported to do more at home, that all mitigation must be measured - even if differentially - and that these efforts should be surpassed by developed countries is now centre stage. Many LAC countries have brought to the negotiations the much needed and often under-represented voices that show that in fact “the middle is beautiful”: both in reaching out for path breaking dialogues and coalitions, and on substance: on mitigation offers, on MRV, and on market mechanisms.

In fact, key aspects of the Durban outcome build upon and integrate a universal narrative that several LAC countries have worked on for a number of years. It was a group of Latin American middle income, low-emission countries who first put forward concrete offers to reduce emissions at home, and in exchange for further cuts abroad. Mexico, which has a slightly different economic

reality, was also part of the group. This developed a narrative anchored on the principle that everyone had to do as much as possible based on their own capabilities.

This daring and constructive position was picked up in Copenhagen, Cancun and now in Durban. These middle-income economies have for years been voluntarily putting on the table their own emission reduction targets in an attempt to pressure large emitters that refuse to act. What's worth highlighting is the unreserved component of this rationale. Peru, one of the first countries to take this step back at COP14 in Poznan in 2008, remains up to now the only one to have formally increased the level of its offer. Prior to Copenhagen others began to follow: Costa Rica and others announced very ambitious domestic climate objectives, and Mexico and Brazil followed suit with substantial offers. Many others such as in the Caribbean have had a long history of strong leadership in fighting for high ambition and obligations for all.

Mexico has worked increasingly as a broker of consensus, reaching out to developed and developing countries and playing an active role in assuming the presidency of the COP16 in 2010 and co-chairing the design process of the Green Climate Fund – a difficult task marked by mistrust between donors and recipient countries. In advancing this bridging role, Mexico has offered to host the secretariat of the Fund.

3 The Durban Platform: Implications and Recommendations for LAC

Durban offers a new window of opportunity for collective action; it remains highly uncertain, however, whether by 2015 governments will agree to a global legal framework that delivers the emission reductions required to prevent dangerous climate change. Working toward greater ambition is at the core of the tasks ahead for the LAC region between now and 2015. The following aspects must be tackled simultaneously.

Be bold in advancing a new political climate narrative

Durban revealed elements of a new climate narrative that has emerged stressing the urgency for collective action in both developed and developing countries. The principle of common but differentiated responsibility (CBDR) has been of vital importance in the UN climate regime and must be retained. To ensure climate objectives, however,

this principle should not be interpreted in a way that blocks ambition—or evades responsibility. As emissions increase both in developed and developing countries, no progress will be made unless we all increase, in differentiated but real ways, our responsibility and capacity to act.

A decisive moment in Durban happened in the final heated exchange between India, and to some extent China (arguing that legally binding commitments for developing countries went against equity and development) and the EU (arguing that Durban had to deliver a pathway for a legally-binding deal for all countries on scientific grounds).^v For the first time a majority of developing countries stated their support for a regime that created legal obligations for all. Ultimately, India conceded and the terms of their acceptance framed much of the last-minute legal wording of the Durban text.^{vi}

For those still resisting the growing calls for dynamic interpretation of the CBDR, the BASIC countries, in particular China and India, have argued that legally binding climate targets can harm their economies; they have insisted in their need for “atmospheric space” to emit and develop.

No one can question a country's right to develop. But the climate crisis calls for a political narrative that makes development compatible with the urgency of climate protection. In Durban, many in the developing world—the smaller and the medium sized, low-emitting nations, many of them in LAC—voiced concerns of using development as an excuse for withholding higher ambition. A more nuanced narrative accounting for the need for enhanced collective ambition and action can help balance the rigidity of views around “atmospheric space”, the “right to develop” by some larger economies which should not threaten the “right to exist” of the most vulnerable.

An implication for LAC is the need for making a proactive case of development and climate protection as complementary, not clashing, goals with an explicit narrative of collaboration and momentum that challenges the “North against South”, or “large vs. small” rationales that tend to antagonize and hinder consensus.

Recommendation: Countries supporting high ambition in LAC needs to continue shaping a more ambitious climate narrative. Existing work on bold action needs to be strengthened through further work with experts working inside and outside of the UNFCCC process. Innovative insights to shape the debate can help avoid LAC countries merely reacting to proposals by others. Brazil and South Africa, for instance, often show more nuanced views than China and India within BASIC, and

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could help bridge some of the stark differences between China and India on one hand, and the rest of the countries who call for an ambitious, flexible and robust regime. These nuances can be explored as a way to find further areas of convergence around the urgency of common if differentiated action at scale.

Help shape the emerging high-ambition coalition

Like-minded countries in LAC, Africa and Asia must break the tendency of working in isolation. While there is awareness of this problem, the task is to advance a pragmatic and legitimate dialogue. Some of the hurdles range from language barriers and cultural differences to the lack of negotiators' time. Whatever the case, one implication is that a functioning high-ambition coalition is unlikely to work if LAC, Africa and Asia do not increase collaboration. LAC could explore creative ways to use disagreements while not necessarily searching for a single position. This is necessary for ambition on mitigation with some in LAC demanding ambition from developed countries exclusively, while others in the region demanding action from both developed and developing

countries. Collectively increasing aggregate ambition to 2015 will only be possible if the strength of a sensible but realistic high-ambition coalition across the board can succeed.

Recommendation: It is critical to stimulate informal exchanges within LAC countries and with Africa and Asia between now and 2015 (not only at COPs but throughout the year) and jointly define key milestones for the Durban platform. Crucially, these efforts will need to identify areas of convergence and divergence. The differences may not disappear but it will be vital to sustain the dialogue and define a strategy to address the more uncompromising parties in developed and developing countries who may block early further ambition.

Build on a good track record at home

To maintain leadership abroad, LAC countries need to sustain strong climate agendas at home. A wide range of LAC countries are already designing low-carbon resilient plans. The levels of new investments in renewable energy in South and Central America are soaring with US\$13.1 billion recorded in 2010.^{vii} Several countries are starting



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The contour of Santiago de Chile

to mobilize domestic climate finance to complement the support that might be available from abroad from international assistance carbon markets and the Green Climate Fund. Much of the mobilization of new resources will hopefully stimulate debates about the use of tailor-made financial mechanisms (that respond to domestic sectoral realities) and more effective tax systems. Mexico, for instance, is in the process of crafting its own climate strategy and its links with finance –and others are also working on finance.

Much of the challenge between 2012 and 2015 will be about translating high ambition at home into high ambition abroad; and make the two mutually reinforcing. Stronger positions in the UNFCCC will be needed to foster the higher collective ambition of the Durban Platform.

Recommendation: The region needs to improve in communicating its successes at home and abroad. Many LAC countries have shown a willingness to be proactive by self-imposing early goals. Leading by example can build confidence and provide a stronger impact in the negotiations. At home it will be critical to sustain and publicly discuss low-carbon, climate resilient strategies in ways that increase their public appeal. These strategies need to include civil society and the private sector during their formulation, implementation and evaluation. Supportive constituencies outside government can protect these strategies against volatile political cycles.

Scale up and sustain the work on adaptation and vulnerability

Latin America and the Caribbean are highly vulnerable. Even with ambitious future mitigation action, the negative impacts of climate change will be unavoidable. Political leaders and public opinion across LAC are calling for greater international support. However, adaptation efforts are currently dispersed, considerably underdeveloped and unfunded. At present LAC countries are not prepared to confront the impacts of climate change due to insufficient technical and scientific knowledge.

But vulnerability is a politically sensitive issue in the negotiations, and the LAC region needs to think strategically on how best to advance its own case while avoiding a 'war' over adaptation funds or vulnerability rankings. Increasing joint work and pressure on the need to scale up global adaptation funding might be a way forward. LAC can also add to the debate by creating new development models that integrate adaptation and mitigation action and increase resilience.

The current emission reduction pledges do not put the world on a below 2°C trajectory. An ambitious coalition also needs to prepare both for high ambition and worst-case scenarios. LAC countries must increase their understanding of climate-risk scenarios, the uncertainty of global emissions trajectories, and their regional implications.

Recommendation: The region needs to continue exploring how best to advance a national conversation linking climate change to national interests. Countries need to work on adaptation and resilience plans, building on reliable data about potential losses in capital stock, infrastructure, food security, trade and the country's natural resources. Working on disaster management must continue but also in areas that merge mitigation and adaptation objectives – from adapting to the shifting resource base in energy, to developing synergies between conservation, adaptation and mitigation to protect forests, infrastructure and livelihoods and the creation of a built urban environment that increases cities resiliency and sustainability.^{viii}

Final thoughts: Deal-shapers not deal-takers

Climate change now features regularly in LAC politics and the media in unprecedented ways and citizens are acting and demanding action. However, the international climate debate often forgets that LAC countries are already relatively low-emission economies.

Reflecting explicit positions developed in LAC, both the Copenhagen and Cancun agreements noted the challenge is not solely to de-carbonise, as most LAC



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Bridge destroyed by floods in El Salvador

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countries are still low-carbon economies, but how to achieve long term prosperity while not continuing to increase emissions. From this perspective, LAC offers a vital perspective to developing economies that want to avoid locking into redundant growth models that render climate protection as incompatible with development.

This year, the Durban Platform offers the opportunity for the LAC region to be less shy about its pledges at home,

build stronger voices internationally and to ensure that perspectives such as “majority in the middle” are not left aside as the largest emitters fight their case. It is time to work outside the comfort zone and to reach out to similar voices in Africa, Asia and the Small Island States. Only an effective coalition of like-minded parties—inside and outside government—will ensure that the Durban Platform delivers ambitious outcomes consistent with climate science.

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- i At the 17th Conference of the Parties (COP17) to the UNFCCC and the 7th Session of the Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties (CMP7) to the Kyoto Protocol, countries agreed to “launch a process to develop a protocol, another legal instrument or an agreed outcome with legal force under the Convention applicable to all Parties”.
 - ii Adam Kotin, ‘Caribbean Paves the Way for Insurance-Based Climate Adaptation’ Intercambio Climático, 22 November, 2011 <http://www.intercambioclimatico.com/en/2011/11/22/caribbean-paves-the-way-for-insurance-based-climate-adaptation/>
 - iii Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América (ALBA).
 - iv United Nations Regional Groups: Latin America and the Caribbean Group.
 - v The US and other developed countries have made this case throughout the negotiations. The dispute involved mainly the EU because it was defined a legally-binding regime in a way that other developed countries (including US, Canada, Japan, Australia) did not.
 - vi Rather than using the term “legally-binding” the text says that the negotiations will lead to an outcome with “legal force.”
 - vii United Nations Environment Programme and Bloomberg New Energy Finance (2011) Global Trends in Renewable Energy Investment 2011
 - viii Adam Kotin, ‘El Salvador stresses adaptation to keep its head above water’ Intercambio Climático, 8 December 2011 <http://www.intercambioclimatico.com/en/2011/12/08/el-salvador-stresses-adaptation-to-keep-its-head-above-water/>

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