National climate governance and politics

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September 2016

In the wake of the Paris Agreement on climate change, multilaterals and aid agencies are shifting significant attention to the national arena, where the fulfilment of climate commitments will depend upon new legal and regulatory frameworks, supporting institutions, and the political support within and outside the government. The characteristics of climate change—complexity, uncertainty, irreversibility, and distribution of costs and benefits over space and time—make it a collective action challenge at the global and national level. However, the historical contexts of development, energy, political power structures, and the level of exposure to climate impacts mean that understanding national contexts and political factors is critical for external partners. Since many climate policies were recently enacted, the literature is weighted more heavily towards the governance and politics of climate policy development and adoption, with comparatively less opportunities to study implementation. This is particularly the case for framework climate legislation (i.e. economy-wide, including mitigation and adaptation).

Schmitz (2016) provides an excellent entry point for understanding who has driven or obstructed renewable energy policies in China, South Africa, India and Brazil. As a synthesis of rapid political economic analyses conducted by fellow researchers, this paper provides insight into the political economy of how path dependencies on fossil fuels can be avoided or diverted to low carbon alternatives. In all of the cases cross-sectoral alliances were critical to overcoming political opposition. In most cases, climate was viewed as a co-benefit, with the problem framed around energy access and security, new industries, jobs, and public revenue sources. Opposition from incumbent energy suppliers was staunch in South Africa and Brazil where there was competition for market share, but less so in China and India because of the rapidly growing demand in energy.

Naess et al. (2015) draw on research from Kenya and Mozambique to recommend that climate policy actors work with existing policy networks and power relations, while being aware of power fluctuations and new narratives and alliances. They urge external partners to understand the

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Suggested citation: Worker, J. (2016). National climate governance and politics. GSDRC Professional Development Reading Pack no. 51. Birmingham, UK: University of Birmingham.

incentives, financial flows, and power differentials between different government institutions and their allies. The design of policies and the framing of problems can trigger political levers by empowering new coalitions. The authors remind us that external actors can shape the decision-making space through their own implicit or explicit priorities.

National Climate actions must be perceived as credible if they are to achieve domestic compliance and international trust in future negotiations. Averchenkova and Bossi (2016) provide a useful framework for assessing credibility of Nationally Determined Contributions (towards global climate goals) based on rules and procedures, players and organisations, norms and public opinion, and past performance. How policy design and implementation can help "batten the hatches" against future political headwinds is an important consideration. Brunner et al. (2011) propose that commitment devices (such as a policy or law) are viewed as credible if the perceived costs of compliance are lower than the perceived costs of non-compliance. To do this, the authors note the importance of long-term targets to allow relevant sectors to plan accordingly, with sufficient incentives for future governments not to repeal the policy. They also propose transparent carbon budgeting and revenue distribution as mechanisms to increase scrutiny of implementation. Lockwood (2015) applies the concept of policy feedbacks to gain insights on how renewable energy policies have had more success in some countries than others. This can occur when policies shape institutions or politics through the distribution of new benefits, creating political interest groups who see their identity or livelihoods as linked to this policy. Examples from the past include the US social security system or Brazil's ethanol industry.

While politics shape policy, the effect can be reciprocal. Klinsky et al. (2014) draw from case studies in 23 countries to show how well-designed policies can build the capabilities of vulnerable populations and develop national capacities, while also distributing the benefits in ways that build political support. The capacity of national institutions to develop priorities is integral to greater country ownership and more effective allocation of adaptation finance.

Key readings

Reading 1: Schmitz, H. (2016). *Who drives climate-relevant policies in rising powers?* IDS Evidence Report 180. Brighton: Institute of Development Studies.
http://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/bitstream/handle/123456789/9933/ER180_WhoDrivesClimaterelevantPoliciesintheRisingPowers.pdf;jsessionid=76C24F7166894496EC52F4382139A020?sequence=1

Reading 2: Naess, L.O., Newell, P., Newsham, A., Phillips, J., Quan, J., and Tanner, T. (2015). Climate policy meets national development contexts: insights from Kenya and Mozambique. *Global Environmental Change* 35, 534-544.
http://www.ids.ac.uk/publication/climate-policy-meets-national-development-contexts-insights-from-kenya-and-mozambique

Reading 3: Brunner, S., Flachsland, C., and Marschinski, R. (2012). Credible commitment in climate policy. *Climate Policy* 12(2), 255-271.
http://www.mcc-berlin.net/fileadmin/data/pdf/Publikationen/Brunner_Flachsland_Marschinski_2011_Credible_commitment_in_carbon_policy.pdf

Reading 4: Averchenkova, A. and Bossi, S. (2016). *Beyond the targets: assessing the political credibility of pledges for the Paris agreement*. Policy Brief. London/Leeds: Grantham research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment and Centre for Climate Change Economics and Policy.
http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/65670/1/Averchenkova-and-Bassi-2016.pdf

Reading 5: Klinsky, S., Waskow, D., Bevins, W., Northrup, E., Cutter, R., Weatherer, L., and Joffe, P. (2014). *Building climate equity: Creating a new approach from the ground up.* Washington DC: World Resources Institute.
http://www.wri.org/publication/building-climate-equity

Reading 6: Lockwood, M. (2014). The political dynamics of green transformations: the roles of policy feedback and institutional context. EPG Working Paper. University of Exeter.
http://projects.exeter.ac.uk/igov/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/WP-8-The-political-dynamics-of-green-transformations.pdf

Questions to guide reading

- What are the conditions under which national coalitions supporting climate policies arise and how can these conditions be best supported by external partners?

- How can practitioners best evaluate the capability of national institutions to implement new policies, effectively manage climate finance, and be adaptive to dynamic conditions that affect the vulnerabilities of different groups?

- What kinds of commitment devices are effective in different institutional, legal, and political contexts and why? Is there an optimal level of "stickiness" given the need for future flexibility?

- What kind of policy tools or political levers may be helpful in avoiding or breaking path dependency on fossil fuels in countries where energy access is a critical barrier to resiliency?

- How can politically-smart development practitioners support national ambition in the context of an urgent global collective action crisis?

- What role can social movements and public participation play in ensuring that equity considerations are at the forefront of climate policy design and implementation?