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Quantifying ambitions: how do countries’ domestic climate change targets align with their commitments to the Paris Agreement?

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Countries, stakeholders and expert institutions have been making submissions to the UNFCCC’s **Talanoa Dialogue** in preparation for December’s COP24 climate conference. Parties’ collective efforts in progress towards meeting the long-term temperature goal of the Paris Agreement will be reviewed at the Conference, to inform further target-setting. To feed into the Dialogue, the Grantham Research Institute and the World Resources Institute have been taking stock of the quantified targets set by different Parties to the Agreement.

Implementing the Paris Agreement relies on translating countries’ commitments set out in their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) – that is, their post-2020 climate actions – into national laws and policies. Quantified and measurable domestic targets are a key part of this. However, for many countries there are significant gaps between the level of ambition in their NDC and in their domestic targets, creating doubts that the goals of the Paris Agreement will be reached.

What are quantified targets and why are they important?

By quantified targets, we mean those that contain a clear number. This could describe greenhouse gases – for example, ‘reduce emissions by 15%’ – but could also refer to sectoral targets, such as ‘double electricity generation from renewables’ for the energy sector, or to adaptation – ‘protect 100% of coastal communities’.

When countries set quantified targets for mitigation and adaptation, it informs the design, implementation, tracking and revision of policies and measures. It provides metrics against which progress is measured – holding policymakers accountable for their results and supporting political momentum.

Quantified targets are also important for showing how countries are ratcheting up their ambitions, in accordance with the Paris Agreement’s requirement for Parties to show progress every five years through revised NDCs.

How do countries’ quantified targets stand up to scrutiny?

Countries have been submitting their NDCs, since before the COP21 climate conference in Paris in December 2015. We have analysed these NDCs and compared them with around 1,500 climate change laws passed by national legislative branches and policies issued by national executive branches. These laws and policies can be accessed in the Grantham Research Institute’s **Climate Change Laws of the World database**, which covers every country.

Most Parties – 157 in total – have communicated an economy-wide greenhouse gas emission reduction target within their NDCs. These are high-level targets communicated on a national level without being assigned to a specific sector. They help countries to ensure that sectoral targets and policies add up to the necessary action.

Meanwhile, less than a third – just 57 countries and the EU – have quantified economy-wide targets within domestic laws or policies – leaving 139 countries with no targets of this nature at all. Further, only 16 countries have economy-wide targets in national laws or policies that are at least as ambitious as their NDC target. While this group does include a few large greenhouse gas emitters – Japan, Canada and Indonesia – the majority are not significant emitters. Another problem is that different types of targets are often found between the NDCs and national laws and policies – for example, an absolute emissions target versus percentage reduction target.

The situation in the European Union is somewhat complicated. The EU NDC sets a collective target for the 28 member states but does not specify individual state targets. It is therefore unclear if the national economy-wide targets of the 21 members that have set them to date are consistent with the EU NDC.

Sectoral targets are also important to climate change mitigation and adaptation. By focusing efforts on specific sectors or activities, there can be more detailed accountability for meeting associated targets, which are often applied to a named government ministry or department. More than half of Parties have communicated at least one sectoral non-greenhouse gas target in their NDC, and 140 countries have set national sector-specific targets. Unsurprisingly, energy is the most targeted sector while sectors related to adaptation, such as disaster risk management, receive the least attention, a gap that needs addressing.

Target planning horizons are inconsistent

Countries should be progressing towards setting long-term targets – up to 2050 and beyond – to show true commitment to ratcheting up ambition over time. However, the majority – more than 60% – of the targets set in national laws and policies (both economy-wide and sectoral) relate to 2020, while the target year for most NDCs is 2030.

We found only six countries that have set economy-wide targets beyond 2030 in their NDCs – Iraq, Cameroon, Brunei, Armenia, Bhutan and Palestine. Only 16 countries plus the EU currently look beyond 2030 in their national laws, policies and directives.

As well as helping to ratchet up ambition, extending the target horizons in national laws and policies would also serve to increase alignment with NDCs, which would mean working towards the same goals on the same timeframes.

A call for swifter action, greater alignment and improved clarity

Overall, our analysis shows there is a lack of consistency between NDCs on the one hand and national climate laws and policies on the other – largely because countries are being slow to reproduce their NDC commitments as targets in national laws and policies. This potentially limits the effective planning and implementation of policies, reducing the ability to address climate challenges, adapt to climate impacts and avoid costly action at a later stage. It also reduces the ability to hold countries to account for meeting both national targets and the global Paris goal.

Our findings point to three recommendations for national governments. First, all those that have not yet done so should introduce targets into national climate laws and policies. Second, most governments need to extend their targets to 2030, taking a cue from the NDCs. Finally, adding clarity and detail to targets would improve the ability to track progress, compare nationally legislated targets with international commitments, and hold countries accountable for their pledges.

Read the full policy brief, **Aligning national and international climate targets** by Michal Nachmany and Emily Mangan.

Enhanced data tools

A comparative view between quantified targets in the NDCs and in national laws and policies is now available for all countries at the **Grantham Research Institute’s Climate Change Laws of the World database** – www.lse.ac.uk/GranthamInstitute/countries (summarised for each country in country profiles, and also detailed on individual law and policy pages) and at the **World Resources Institute’s ClimateWatch platform** – www.climatewatchdata.org (summarised for each country).

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