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Geneva was quick – but how deep will Paris go?

Climate negotiators almost pride themselves on talks going beyond the deadline. So when the most recent round finished its main task, to agree elements of a draft negotiating text, on Day 3 of six, there was confusion. In a mild panic attack, the collective unconscious said “What do we do now?”

Various reasons may have contributed to fast work. The new Co-Chairs (from the US and Algeria) cracked the whip, with a refreshingly business-like style. The G77& China, chaired this year by South Africa, surprised many by not taking up a whole morning with opening statements. With the plenary done and dusted in barely over an hour, negotiators got down to work. And once the sessions started, could only add text. No deletions, no questioning of other Parties’ insertions. So in some sense, this was the easy stuff – and inevitably the text expanded with everyone’s “new” elements.

That meant by Tuesday, the main job was more or less done – the meeting ran from Sunday to Friday. The collective unconscious of the negotiators was at a bit of a loss at how to proceed. Negotiating into Saturday or Sunday has become almost de rigeur. “What, no late night drama on Friday?” But after a brief hiatus, the meeting continued to fiddle with the 86-page text until it was finally published, more respectably, on Thursday evening (download here). Meanwhile, negotiators without a text before them had some good conversations about substantive matters. Though sadly, in my view, the key topics of equity and common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBDR&RC) were discussed only informally, not under the guidance of the Co-Chairs.

But everyone’s ideas on key areas are on the table – on mitigation, adaptation, finance, technology, capacity-building and transparency of action and support. Plus some important norm-setting language in a preamble (not least for a long-term goal), and equally significant final sections on the cycle by which commitments will be reviewed, and fun things like compliance. When the discussion turned to ‘stream-lining’, actually removing text, things slowed down to the usual glacial pace. Even in cases where two paragraphs were identical, there was hesitation to remove anything. The good reason is that the text is “Party-owned”, so there is agreement what to negotiate. This text will now be translated into all official UN languages, and a negotiating text will be available. Having got some views on how this next step might be taken, perhaps things will move along similarly, when the negotiations convene again in early June (and Aug, and Sept), before moving to Paris in December.

So we have a text.

The challenge will become tougher, as the negotiations have to address deletions, changes to text – and eventually agreement. While Geneva was definitely a more positive mood, my concern remains that there will be an Agreement in Paris – but only because it may be very weak. A lowest-common-denominator agreement. One in which only that minimum acceptable to major players (the US, China, India, EU and perhaps a few others) will survive.

The mitigation pledges will very likely not put us on a path to limit temperature increase to 2 °C. They are “intended nationally determined contributions” – defined purely-bottom up, and unclear if they will become commitments. Or even housed within the Agreement.

Will adaptation – and loss and damage – get political prominence? Will the balance of funding – which the GCF Board has agreed should be 50:50 mitigation:adaptation be reflected in a Paris Protocol?

These and many other issues remain to be resolved. Geneva went fast – at least by climate negotiating standards. Will Paris go far? And deep?

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[#Mapsprogramme](#) team meeting, planning the year ahead and post 2015. What is the next narrative that MAPS can put down?

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