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Editorial: What next? Exploring ways forward in the climate arena

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Even as the United Nations Secretary General convenes a Climate Change summit in September 2014, and the world prepares for what hopefully will be major step forward in the UNFCCC meeting in Paris in 2015, it is clear that the urgency remains for further collective ambition and large-scale action to prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system. The good news from the Working Group III contribution to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Fifth Assessment Report is that it is still possible to limit climate change to 2°C. The bad news, however, is that current action is inadequate for such a target. Moreover, the assessment of the literature in the international policy chapter of this IPCC report provides few new insights on how global climate policy can help find a way out of the current impasse over more stringent climate action (in mitigation and adaptation).

The following collection of papers is intended to highlight specific opportunities, thinking frames and directions that could help move us towards climate-compatible, sustainable and equitable development. The ideas and approaches outlined in these papers were presented and discussed at the Global Climate Policy Conference in London in May 2014. The ensuing feedback was then incorporated into these papers. The aim of this event was to bring together climate researchers, original thinkers and negotiators to discuss and deliberate on new potential approaches that might catalyse action within and outside the UN negotiations. These new ideas could help to address the climate problem in a fair and effective manner, while being as efficient as possible. Therefore, these purposely are not traditional academic papers nor fully polished proposals but explorations of potentially fruitful innovative solutions and approaches.³

As scholars have proposed and argued in the past, the days of a single-issue climate treaty may be numbered. Climate change is just one junction in a complicated web of interwoven issues related to development, green growth, sustainability, equity and justice, trade, institutional structures, technology, investments and finance, innovation and competitiveness, to name but a few. Our hope is that these elements, as discussed in this publication, will tell a story that will make a difference in addressing climate change.

Much research suggests that economic and ecological aims can co-exist, and even reinforce each other. However, political tensions persist between economic growth and development on the one hand, and environmental sustainability on the other. For decades, the term 'sustainable development' has united the global community in its search for answers to these tensions, and it remains the predominant goal for development. Recently, however, 'green growth' seems to have emerged as a formulation that has greater political acceptability. Carlo Jaeger, in his paper, explores whether green growth could provide a new narrative for climate action and more. Although evidence that the concept of green growth can help advance climate resilience is still needed, many are suggesting that climate change mitigation and adaptation may need to be seen as being intimately interlinked with national green growth strategies, rather than the current approaches that often view targets and agreements in isolation. The concept of 'climate compatible development' can be seen as an important element of inclusive green growth. Although a healthy sceptical attitude towards this new approach may be warranted, Jaeger argues that it could also be seen as one way to explore possible ways to frame and organise climate action. This is a key step in accepting and embracing the complexity of climate policy.

The central importance of addressing fairness, equity and ethical issues was highlighted by the IPCC climate change mitigation and adaptation reports. However, how these concepts might be interpreted and implemented in practical terms is largely left open. It is challenging but necessary to make the connection between the concepts around equity and the practicalities of action on the ground. The framing of ethics and equity is another of the junctions in the web of connections in which climate change resides. Sonja Klinsky draws upon social psychology to suggest how issues of equity may be re-framed and approached in a more positive manner by, for example, avoiding a zero-sum perspective and by being more sensitive to how others perceive fairness. She provides insights for a constructive equity discussion by linking the 'backward-looking

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³ These papers were selected from submissions in response to an open call for proposals from researchers and practitioners that outlined innovative ideas that could advance climate action. Therefore, the collection of topics emerged in a bottom-up way and does not cover the full scope of climate action and spectrum of ideas, while still providing an interesting set of framings of the climate problem and potential solutions.

justice, forward-looking peace' approach in peace and reconciliation processes to the climate negotiations, in particular the contentious issue of historical responsibility. The debate on this paper at the Global Climate Policy Conference was lively, and emphasised the need to look at equity from the perspectives of many different stakeholders, as well as the probability that changing these perceptions could be a slow and gradual process.

'Common but differentiated responsibilities' (CBDR), in combination with capabilities, is one of the key principles of the UNFCCC and, accordingly, also a central element of fairness and equity discussions, with legal implications for obligations under the Convention. There is wide agreement that addressing climate change, both through adaptation and mitigation, requires huge investments, but can potentially also yield enormous benefits. Who should bear the burden of these investments and who will reap the benefits? How do we deal with the costs in the absence of adequate climate action? These questions go to the heart of the climate debate. Their resolution is contingent not only on the distribution of responsibility and capabilities, but also the distributional effects of climate action (and inaction). Drawing on the International Law Association's (draft) articles with commentaries, Christoph Schwarte considers how the legal principles embedded in the UNFCCC, particularly CBDR, can be interpreted and implemented under the Climate Convention. Xiaohua Zhang and Yue Qi explore CBDR with a more direct approach, entailing a refinement of the non-Annex 1 grouping. They argue that a more nuanced view of capabilities within the non-Annex 1 grouping could help refine the CBDR concept. This would create enhanced engagement from various Parties and help translate the Principle into concrete implementation. But some participants in the Global Climate Policy Conference debate cautioned that the 40-year history of CBDR could not be set aside lightly, while others questioned how CBDR should be treated in a landscape of pledges and national commitments, rather than binding international law.

In response to this increasingly complicated and interlinked set of issues, institutional structures may need to be modified too. Insights from the institutional economics, business administration and change management literature show that change in one leap is unlikely to succeed – whether this is change to a culture, or the introduction of new technologies or new practices for an entire organisation. A better strategy is to start with the early adopters, who are willing to take risks and who will improve the agreement. The laggards can then be enticed by the frontrunners' positive experiences. Single-issue, single-technology or single-sector coalitions of the willing (or clubs) may bring back some of the optimism that agreements can work, and may provide a basis for an agreement that has a wider scope. These efforts should be seen as experiments from which one must learn. This will inform and improve future policy-making (which is an essential ingredient of dealing with complexity, to harken back to Jaeger's point).

The final set of articles presents a range of perspectives on how to engage in policy or organisational experimentation to advance climate actions. Thomas Brewer discusses the feasibility of 'club goods' as an approach that might bring like-minded actors together to engage in climate-positive activities. Based on the example of international maritime shipping, some wider considerations are drawn for creating appropriate conditions and outcomes for a 'club'. As a more ambitious approach, Jose Alberti Garibaldi elaborates on the concept of the Quisqueya Platform. This idea is meant to offer a space that promotes and facilitates early action in developing countries and creates local synergies between mitigation and adaptation as a way to catalyse broader forward movement in the climate arena. But engaging in these kinds of mitigation and adaptation activities often requires funds for infrastructure development or modification. Christa Clapp explores a way to raise such funds: green bonds are an emerging and promising way to raise climate finance from the private sector. She notes that while the potential of green bonds is enormous, much hard work in building investor confidence through the setting of benchmarks and then assessment will be required. The Global Climate Policy Conference discussion suggested that the background of increasing company disclosure of climate risks and the first signs of divestment from high-carbon stocks could be helpful. Perhaps the most ambitious approach is outlined by Carlos Rossi. He proposes building large-scale public-private partnerships to help developing countries adapt and implement climate technologies. This approach would underpin and accelerate their mitigation and adaptation activities.

Creative thinking and ideas about possible solutions are desperately needed to overcome the climate negotiations/action impasse, along with greater engagement of the research and analysis community with the world of practical action. These papers and the discussions from the conference are a useful and positive contribution to presenting innovative thoughts and ideas to catalyse new thinking in both the academic and policy communities. In doing so, we hope this will contribute to dealing with the complexity of the climate issue and make a contribution to the path towards climate-compatible, sustainable and equitable development.