

National policies advance as climate summit approaches

Analysis suggests country-level commitments are a bridge to an international treaty.

Jeff Tollefson

27 February 2014

International climate talks may have stalled in recent years, but national legislative activity intended to curb greenhouse-gas emissions and better prepare citizens for global warming is on the rise.

Nearly 500 climate-related laws have been enacted in 66 countries that together are responsible for nearly 90% of the world's heat-trapping emissions, according to an international survey of climate legislation released today by the London-based Global Legislators Organisation (GLOBE) and the Grantham Institute at the London School of Economics.

"There's a significant amount of climate legislation being implemented, but it's sort of happening under the radar," says Terry Townshend, deputy secretary general of GLOBE, who led the survey. Although the efforts fall short of the goal of limiting global warming to two degrees Celsius, Townshend says that they could lay the groundwork for something more ambitious as countries prepare for the next annual conference of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Paris in 2015.

The report identifies a range of approaches to reducing greenhouse-gas emissions, from energy-efficiency legislation in Pakistan to broad carbon regulation in New Zealand. It highlights legislative initiatives targeting renewable energy and carbon emissions at the state and provincial levels in countries such as Canada and the United States, which have not adopted comprehensive climate policies. But much of the progress last year came in emerging economies such as Mexico, which Townshend says has not only adopted a comprehensive climate policy but is serving as a bridge between developed and developing countries.

Elliot Diringer, executive vice president of the Center for Climate and Energy Solutions, a think tank based in Arlington, Virginia, says that the study underscores questions about both the character and the value of the global agreement that countries hope to sign at the Paris climate talks. Climate negotiators agreed in Warsaw in November that the agreement will draw on commitments submitted individually by each country and based on each country's own national legislation. The question, he says, is how the international community will ensure that national commitments are being met.

"A meaningful agreement will compel countries to come forward and demonstrate that they are actually implementing the policies they have enacted and producing tangible results," Diringer says.

Those details remain to be worked out. The United Nations will hold a climate summit in New York in September in preparation for the next set of climate negotiations three months later in Lima, Peru. In the first quarter of 2015, countries are expected to submit their commitments for the talks later that year in Paris.

Nature | doi:10.1038/nature.2014.14786

1 comment

 [Subscribe to comments](#)



James Vance · 2014-02-27 07:48 PM

"Bottom up" and "top down" approaches across the globe may yet meet somewhere in a middle ground, but whether the combination or mash-up will actually produce an effective program that can somehow shift the planet's many industrial societies onto a different economic development track whose CO₂-emission trajectory is significantly lower than the current open-throttle "business as usual" scenario remains highly uncertain and awaits further determination. Ultimately, with little or no substantive change in that default trajectory humankind may be forced to undergo severe disruption in loss of long-existing developed coastal habitation zones as sea level rises by even small amounts, which will tend toward forcing hasty action in relocation of populated regions and introduction of politically-inspired geoengineering schemes that likely will not work well and may induce further damage to the biosphere from unintended consequences.

