



# From Negotiation to Fulfillment: The First U.N. Climate Conferences of the Paris Era

By Pete Ogden, Gwynne Taraska, and Ben Bovarnick

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An idiosyncrasy of the international negotiations under the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change, or UNFCCC, is that its annual Conference of the Parties, or COP, is hosted by a different country each year. The host country serves as the COP president and takes the lead both in shaping the broader themes of the session and in managing the mechanics of the negotiation process. Naturally, each host country wants to preside over a successful conference and leave its mark on the process going forward. Last year's host, France, left quite a mark: a new international agreement to address climate change.

This year—in which Morocco assumes the role of COP president—will be different. When countries convene in the city of Marrakech in early November 2016, they will do so with far less of the fanfare that surrounded last year's Paris conference—and without the need to negotiate a new agreement.

Morocco has indicated that it perceives this year's COP to be part of a trilogy that began at the COP hosted in Lima, Peru, in 2014. Hakima El Haite, Moroccan minister delegate to the minister of energy, mining, water, and environment, has claimed that “Lima is the COP [of] negotiations, Paris is one of decisions,” and COP 22 “will be the Action Conference.”<sup>1</sup>

However, COP 22 will not only be the final installment of the COP trilogy that El Haite envisioned, but also the first COP in a long line of conferences focused on the implementation of the Paris agreement. Morocco therefore has the opportunity to establish a successful model for future COPs faced with this task.

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## A dual approach to facilitating the fulfillment of the Paris agreement

In the run-up to Paris, the defining task for countries was to summon the political will to make commitments adequate to address the climate challenge in the context of a new international agreement. After the Paris summit, they must now ensure that those near- and long-term commitments are fulfilled. These include the collective goals to

limit warming to “well below” 2 degrees Celsius and to peak and rapidly cut greenhouse gas emissions in order to reach net-zero emissions between 2050 and 2100.<sup>2</sup> In addition, each country submitted national targets to mitigate greenhouse gas pollution and agreed to update those targets every five years, with the understanding that they should be as ambitious as possible and increasingly ambitious over time.<sup>3</sup>

Given that achieving the first round of national targets—which, according to Climate Interactive, would lower projected warming by 1 degree Celsius by 2100—are only the initial step to climate stabilization within the 2-degree Celsius threshold, the escalation of ambition will be essential.<sup>4,5</sup> Meeting the long-term goals of the Paris agreement will ultimately require sustained effort and unwavering perseverance from all national governments, as well as from subnational states, cities, rural communities, the private sector, and civil society.

COPs in the Paris era should therefore serve as forums to promote enhanced action from all stakeholders in order to meet the objectives of the agreement. As the host of the first COP since the Paris agreement was adopted, Morocco has an opportunity to set a constructive precedent for future COPs by taking a two-pillared approach:

1. Engaging with national, subnational, and nonstate actors that are driving progress toward delivering on—and even exceeding—the mitigation, finance, and other commitments already made in Paris
2. Providing leadership on the ongoing work of UNFCCC parties in order to fully operationalize the Paris agreement, such as creating a robust mechanism to facilitate transparency with respect to countries’ emissions and progress toward meeting their targets

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## Action pillar

We do not know if or when there will be another COP that attracts the same level of international attention as COP 21 in Paris. It remains critically important, however, that future COP presidents maximize the impact of these negotiation sessions in order to showcase success, expose areas of shortcoming, and drive progress toward a dramatic reduction in both national and global emissions.

One means of doing this is to build on the Lima-Paris Action Agenda—a collaborative initiative launched by the French and Peruvian governments that aimed to galvanize additional mitigation action from state and nonstate actors in the run-up to the Paris COP.<sup>6</sup> Morocco should continue this effort, with an emphasis on achieving and exceeding mitigation commitments made in Paris. Morocco could, for example, use COP 22 as a platform to launch new regional partnerships for public-private investment in clean energy technologies.

At first glance, the Middle East and North Africa, or MENA, region might seem an inauspicious location for the first post-Paris COP. A number of MENA countries submitted underwhelming national targets to reduce greenhouse gas pollution: Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Qatar, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates indicated that they would incorporate clean energy and sustainable priorities into infrastructure investments to varying degrees, but they did not establish targets to reduce emissions or set carbon intensity reduction goals.<sup>7,8,9</sup> Renewables are expected to account for almost two-thirds of global energy capacity additions between 2014 and 2020—but only 15 percent in the MENA region.<sup>10</sup>

There are, however, bright spots of climate activity throughout the region: Morocco, in particular, stands out for its efforts to diversify its energy sector away from fossil fuels. Morocco is on track to meet its target of reducing its projected emissions by 13 percent below business as usual by 2030.<sup>11</sup> Notably, the country is on a path to obtain 52 percent of its energy from renewables by 2030 as well—including 2 gigawatts each of solar, wind, and hydropower.<sup>12</sup> Morocco already derives 35 percent of its electricity generation capacity from renewables<sup>13</sup> and recently opened the Noor Ouarzazate Solar Complex, which, upon completion in 2018, will be the world's largest solar plant.<sup>14</sup> The massive project will ultimately provide 18 percent of Morocco's annual electricity generation, supply power to 1.1 million Moroccans, and reduce annual carbon dioxide emissions by 760,000 tons per year.<sup>15,16</sup> With only the first stage complete, the plant can already be seen from space and, when finished, will occupy 45 square miles.<sup>17,18</sup> Morocco is also home to Africa's largest wind farm: a 301-megawatt facility that began operating in December 2014.<sup>19</sup>

The private sector is increasingly taking notice. Ernst and Young recently ranked Morocco the most attractive MENA country—and the 25th most attractive country in the world—for renewable energy investments.<sup>20</sup>

These clean energy achievements position Morocco to establish a precedent and expectation that COP host countries in the new era of the Paris agreement will use the occasion to drive concrete action within their own countries in order to meet and exceed climate commitments; make new, more ambitious commitments; and showcase such progress in order to motivate action both throughout the region and internationally. This would be a natural evolution for the Lima-Paris Action Agenda, which—designed as it was in a pre-Paris world—did not have the advantage of a set of clearly defined national targets against which action can be measured.

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## Negotiation pillar

The Paris agreement is fully negotiated and will come into effect as soon as 55 percent of countries accounting for 55 percent of total greenhouse gas emissions have formally joined.<sup>21</sup> This does not mean the end of climate negotiations, however. In fact, the durability and long-term success of the Paris agreement depend on the ability of

countries to come together each year at the COP to stay on track and address obstacles that will inevitably arise. Success also depends on the ability of countries to elaborate on elements of the agreement that require further work if they are to achieve their agreed upon function. In the Paris agreement, the parties established several projects for future meetings, the outcomes of which will affect whether a low-carbon future is achieved.<sup>22</sup> The COP president, therefore, has an opportunity to play an important leadership role within the context of the negotiations.

One necessary condition for the integrity and success of the Paris agreement is a well-functioning and robust transparency mechanism that enhances accountability. In the Paris agreement, the parties decided to create such a mechanism—applicable to both developed and developing parties—that will require countries to provide information on their emissions; their progress toward meeting their mitigation goals; and the international climate finance they have provided or received. The parties are now beginning to develop the details of the transparency mechanism so that they may be adopted when the agreement takes effect. With respect to finance in particular, countries at COP 22 will begin to identify the financial information they will eventually disclose.

The parties also decided in the Paris agreement to create a committee of experts—in science, technology, and other relevant fields—in order to “facilitate implementation” and “promote compliance.”<sup>23</sup> The approach of the committee will not be combative or disciplinary; instead, it will function as a facilitative body to help countries reach their goals. As with the transparency mechanism, the parties are now beginning to develop the procedures for the implementation and compliance committee so that they may be adopted when the agreement takes effect.

Additionally, given that many parties participate in carbon markets—an effective and increasingly common tool to drive emissions reductions—the Paris agreement calls for the creation of a voluntary tradable offsets system. The agreement directs parties to adopt the rules and procedures for this system when it comes into force, and COP’s Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice is now beginning to develop them.

Beyond driving the expeditious completion of these projects, the presidents of future COPs can maintain the spirit of eagerness and collaboration that was evident in the negotiating halls of Paris. Such political pressure can help ensure that successive national mitigation commitments are maximally—and increasingly—ambitious and that countries meet them. COP hosts should also work to ensure that parties follow through on the progressive approach to international climate finance that emerged in Paris: improved mobilization of climate funds; a focus on the most vulnerable regions; greater attention to resilience finance; and an expanded donor base that includes all countries in a position to contribute to the global effort.

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## Conclusion

As the first COP host in the era of the Paris agreement, Morocco has an opportunity to establish a model for how these annual sessions can help fulfill the agreement's terms and goals. By taking a two-pillared approach that includes national engagement with actors outside of the context of the negotiations to implement and strengthen their climate commitments, as well as leadership within the context of the negotiations to create the internal mechanisms and spirit of cooperation necessary to implement the agreement, Morocco can contribute significantly to the Paris agreement's ultimate success. With the drop in international attention and pressure that is bound to occur as we move from Paris to Marrakech, current and future COP hosts can be pivotal in sustaining the collective understanding that weak targets—and weak efforts to meet them—are unacceptable.

*Pete Ogden is a Senior Fellow at the Center for American Progress. Gwynne Taraska is Associate Director of Energy Policy at the Center. Ben Bovarnick is a Research Assistant at the Center. The authors would like to thank Ori Gutin, an intern with the Energy Policy team, for research on the clean energy developments in Morocco.*

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## Endnotes

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