

There's a consensus that the COP30 was disappointing, although EU pressure prevented even more disappointing outcomes. It was just ten years ago that we were celebrating the emergency of the Paris Agreement as a big step forward. We have seen a bending of the curve since then, with the worst climate outcomes seeming increasingly unlikely. What have we learned and where do we go from here?

The biggest lesson is that shared interest of all countries in taming climate change is not enough to drive real progress. Where we have seen progress in the U.N. negotiations, it has been led by the major powers. The EU isn't strong enough on its own to play this role, but real progress has been made when it has acted in tandem with the U.S. Obviously this won't happen under Trump. If China decides to join with the EU, we could also see some big developments, but so far, China hasn't stepped into a leadership role. Support from other countries is obviously important, especially the other BRIC countries. But without leadership from the biggest economies, nothing will happen.

Another key lesson is that the big oil producing countries (essentially OPEC) are an important brake on progress. Their resistance to emission reductions may ease as these countries diversify their economies. But the fact remains that oil has been the source of their wealth and will be a huge part of their economies for years. One key role of the economic superpowers has been to pressure them into going along with climate action.

Finally, there are limits to how much can be done in other areas like adaptation if talks on mitigation are stalled. Developing countries, especially those at the bottom of the economic heap, will be heavily impacted by climate change, and they are looking for help and compensation. Developed countries have only a limited appetite for providing such help without serious emission reductions, and other major emitters like China and India don't see this as their role.

So, where do we go from here? I'd like to be proved wrong, but I think we can only expect incremental progress from the U.N. unless or until China takes a leadership role, particularly while the U.S. is also on the sideline. Incremental progress is better than no progress, obviously. But we're going to have to look elsewhere for productive international action.

Basically, that's going to have to rely on something less than the international consensus that drives COP. That means doubling down on some other options: bilateral climate agreements between countries, action by coalitions of interested

countries, and subnational agreements including states, provinces, and cities around the world. It also means looking for levers to pressure countries and companies into climate action, like disclosure requirements and carbon tariffs. Focusing on creating and spreading clean technologies changes incentives globally.

This is not where we wanted to be, or where we expected to be a decade ago. But the story of climate action has been finding creative alternatives when we've run into roadblocks. No one ever said that fixing the planet was going to be easy.