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Climate Conference in Cancún in 2010 Laid Groundwork for Agreements in Paris in 2015

by Carlos Navarro

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In November 2010, the global community met for the 16th annual talks on climate change in the Mexican resort of Cancún, setting specific goals to limit the global rise in temperatures and to create the Green Climate Fund to provide financing for developing countries to implement projects, programs and policies intended to reduce greenhouse emissions. By all accounts, the COP 16 conference marked a turning point for Mexico, which not only hosted the conference but also began a more serious effort to address climate change under the administration of former President Felipe Calderón (2006-2012) ([SourceMex, Dec. 16, 2009](#), [Jan. 27, 2010](#), and [Nov. 17, 2010](#)).

Calderón's commitment to addressing the impact of climate change built on the growing debate in Mexico on how extreme weather conditions, including major droughts and flooding, were affecting the country ([SourceMex, Oct. 11, 2006](#), [Aug. 1, 2007](#), and [Nov. 7, 2007](#)). In 2012, Calderón unveiled an ambitious long-term plan, dubbed the Estrategia Nacional de Energía, which proposed to increase by 35% the amount of electricity obtained from non fossil fuels by 2026 ([SourceMex, March 7, 2012](#)).

The COP 16 conference represented an important milestone for the fight against climate change in many other ways. At this gathering in Cancún, the global community formally established the Green Climate Fund (GCF), which had been proposed a year earlier at the COP 15 conference in Copenhagen. The COP17 conference in Durban, South Africa, further refined the GCF, a mechanism to manage a significant portion of the US\$100 billion annual pledge by wealthy nations to help the developing world adapt to climate change and mitigate climate change. Funding for the first eight projects under the GCF was awarded following the COP 21 conference ([NotiSur, Jan. 8, 2016](#)).

Regional effort centers on Yucatán Peninsula

The COP 16 conference in 2010 also featured a handful of smaller regional efforts to address climate change, including the Governors' Climate and Forest Task Force. Under the auspices of this task force, the states of Campeche, Quintana Roo, and Yucatán, which compose the Yucatán Peninsula, agreed to work jointly during the 2010 conference to protect the environment in their tourism-dependent region. The three states presented a formal proposal at COP 21 to prevent deforestation and reduce the impact of climate change on the region.

"The Yucatán Peninsula faces serious risks due to the changes in the climate, and because of that the three states that make up the region have decided to join forces to attract funding for mitigation and adaptation activities," said the daily newspaper *Excélsior*.

Specifically, the three states are working to secure financing via a special fund to take action to reduce deforestation by creating sustainable jobs in agriculture and forestry, strengthening ecosystems, and promoting energy efficiency.

"We share the same ecosystem, the Selva Maya," said Rafael Muñoz Berzunza, environment secretary for Quintana Roo state, who noted that this is one of the largest jungle areas in the

Americas. He said that financing would come from a variety of sources, including private investments and grants from international organizations.

Mexico embraces COP 21 targets

Mexico's presence at the COP 21 conference in Paris was less visible than that of other countries in Latin America, which as a region was an important voice at the summit ([NotiSur, Jan. 8, 2016](#)). Brazil played a significant role in hammering out the final agreement that came out of the gathering. Brazilian Environment Minister Izabella Teixeira was one of 14 ministers handpicked by French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius, president of COP 21, to iron out key details of the accord ([NotiSur, Dec. 18, 2015](#)).

Other areas of the region also received strong attention during COP 21 because of their strong vulnerability to climate change. Caribbean countries emerged from COP 21 cautiously optimistic about the talks. The island and low-lying nations that make up the region are extremely susceptible to sea-level rise, drought, and hurricanes, all of which are exacerbated by greenhouse gas emissions ([NotiCen, Jan. 7, 2016](#)).

Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto has fully embraced the global effort to address climate change. "We act now, we accept the challenge, we are the generation that made the necessary decisions to consolidate a sustainable development," Peña Nieto said at the Paris talks. "We will make 2015 the year of the planet. We understand that at COP 21 we decide the world we want to live in and what quality of life we want for the 21st century."

Peña Nieto also alluded to the impact of extreme climate on Mexico, including Hurricane Patricia, which slammed into the western areas of the country last October. Patricia was the most powerful tropical storm to hit the Western Hemisphere in recorded history ([SourceMex, Nov. 4, 2015](#)).

"Hurricane Patricia, the strongest in history, demonstrated once again the consequences and the risks associated with climate change," Peña Nieto said at the beginning of the Paris talks. "Weather phenomena such as these are becoming more frequent, extreme and dangerous. That is why there is an urgency to reach a global agreement that is dynamic, far-reaching, and with concrete targets."

Peña Nieto underscored Mexico's determination to address climate change with an early commitment ahead of the Paris talks. On March 27, 2015, Mexico became the first developing country to offer a specific pledge for the period 2020-2030. Under the pledge, Mexico committed to ensure that 35% of its electrical energy would be produced with clean sources by 2024, which would mean a significant increase in solar and wind energy. A recent study showed that Mexico's efforts have been uneven on renewable energy, with more emphasis placed on wind-generated power than on solar energy ([SourceMex, Dec. 2, 2015](#)).

Both Calderón's and Peña Nieto's governments have emphasized other high costs of climate change, including its impact on the economy. By some estimates, the costs of climate change to the Mexican economy reached 338 billion pesos (US\$19.2 billion) between 2001 and 2013, according to the daily business newspaper *El Economista*, which noted that more than 2.5 million people in Mexico have been affected directly by climate change.

According to a recent federal study, 319 municipalities in the country, about 13% of the total number of municipalities, are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, including drought, flooding, and landslides.

The study recognized that the negative consequences of climate change have a deeper impact on poor communities. "The geographic traits of Mexico and the unfavorable social conditions under which some members of the population live make our country highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change," said the report.

The report set some ambitious targets for Mexico, including a zero rate of deforestation by 2030, the creation of a system of early alerts at all levels of government for communities facing the threat of extreme weather conditions, and recovery plans for ecosystems and vulnerable communities.

A major challenge for Peña Nieto and other leaders is to promote the necessary actions to reduce greenhouse emissions while supporting economic development. This dilemma was evident for the president and the Congress during the debate on the Ley de Transición Energética (LTE), which had stalled in the Senate because of concerns that some of the targets were out of reach in the near term for the business community. After tweaking the measure to meet some of the concerns of the private sector, the Senate approved the LTE in time for the COP 21 ([SourceMex, Dec. 2, 2015](#)). Peña Nieto would have faced questions about Mexico's commitment to protect the environment if the legislative initiative had not been approved in time for the summit.

On the eve of the summit, Peña Nieto emphasized that economic growth is compatible with protection of the environment. "Yes, it is possible to grow economically to promote social well-being while at the same taking actions to protect our environment," the president said in his speech at the COP 21 conference.

Mexico City seeks to modernize transport system

For Mexico, an outdated public transportation system has been a major source of pollution and greenhouse gases. The situation has improved significantly in recent years, thanks to the efforts of former Mayor Marcelo Ebrard (2006-2012) and current Mayor Miguel Ángel Mancera (2012-2018), who have promoted alternative forms of transportation for residents of the Mexican capital and implemented creative projects to generate energy ([SourceMex, Aug. 10, 2011](#), and [March 14, 2012](#)).

Mancera was one of the 446 mayors who attended a gathering of municipal leaders in Paris a week before the COP 21 conference. A total of 640 cities from 115 countries were represented at the gathering. Most of the mayors stayed for the climate conference, including Mancera, who spoke of specific challenges facing the Mexican capital to reduce greenhouse emissions. According to Mancera, an ideal plan would be to replace all the taxicabs in Mexico City with electric vehicles. However, the city lacks the resources to make the conversion, which would cost about three to four times more than it would to just fix and renovate the taxis.

"The main issue is funding. If you want to replace 100,000 taxis in Mexico City, but the cost is almost four times as expensive as just fixing them, then we have no choice but to continue to use gasoline," Mancera said in an interview with the Mexico City English-language daily newspaper The News.

Mancera also acknowledged that 12,000 to 15,000 minibuses must be replaced.

"There is talk of clean public transport, but that is the most expensive in the world. Only the most developed countries or cities with direct support from national governments have that type of transportation," Mancera said.

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