




TISHMAN CENTER · DECEMBER 4, 2015

Students Negotiate Their Own Global Climate Commitments in COP21 Simulation

 [DSCN0352](#) With the [COP21 climate negotiations](#) ongoing in Paris, the Sustainable Cities Club and Change Forum held a student simulation of the UN Climate Conference, supported by the Tishman Environment and Design Center. Students played the part of delegates representing specific nations

and groups of nations as they engaged in their own negotiations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and support sustainable development using the interactive [C-ROADS](#) computer simulation to see in real-time how their decisions would impact the global climate system. The goal for the evening was to negotiate a set of commitments that would keep the increase in global average temperatures below 2 degrees Celsius. There is consensus among scientists that warming of more than two degrees will have catastrophic effects. As the activity commenced, student facilitator Tyler Burton, MS Nonprofit Management at the [Milano School](#), said that he wanted participants to take home the messages that the challenges are urgent and to learn that no single country is entirely responsible for climate change and no single country can fix climate change.

SETTING THE STAGE FOR NEGOTIATIONS

There were six groups of nations represented in the COP21 simulation: the European Union, the United States of America, China, India, Other Developed Countries, and Other Developing Countries. Briefing sheets distilled each group's context, their global landscape, and goals. The briefs

illustrated the fact that developed nations have higher emissions rates per capita than developing countries. Historically, developed nations used fossil fuels to industrialize and develop their economies, enrich their populations while also contributing the bulk of global greenhouse gas emission that have led to climate change.  While some developing nations like China and India have rapidly growing economies and are heavy emitters, many of their citizens still live in poverty meanwhile their emissions per capita are significantly lower than more developed countries. In this context, emissions reductions could amount to slowed economic growth. As low emitters, the goal for other developing nations was to gain monetary support for sustainable development and to offset possible economic losses from cutting emissions or investing in renewable energy sources. Students negotiated more than emissions reductions: developed nations made pledges to contribute to a \$100 billion annual fund to support sustainable development, emissions reductions, and climate change adaptation in developing countries. Depending on their geographic location, some countries and country groups were also asked to make commitments to reduce deforestation and increase reforestation.

SIMULATION

ROUND ONE:


INITIAL

COMMITMENTS

Country groups talked amongst themselves and gave their initial commitments:

Region	Stop Emissions Growth	Reduce emissions	Decline rate	REDD*	Afforestation**	Region's fund contribution (in billions)
US	2030	2035	2%	0.4	0.4	\$20
EU	1980	2016	3%	0	1	\$20
Other Developed Nations	2010	2015	1.7%	0.7	0.3	\$13
India	2030	2045	0.5%	0.5	0	Asked for \$10 No contribution
China	2030	2050	0.64%	0	0.4	contribution but did not ask for funds
Other Developing Nations	2030	2035	0.5%	1	0.25	Asked for \$50

(Reduction in Emissions from Deforestation and Land Degradation) (scale 1= no reforestation; 0=maximum reduction)(0= no new afforestation; 1= maximum afforestation feasible)* According to the C-ROADS software, the commitments the

student groups made would result in significantly less warming than a business-as-usual scenario, but they would not keep the rise in average temperature below the two degree threshold.  [DSCN0371](#)

SIMULATION ROUND TWO: NEGOTIATING AN AGREEMENT

In the second round of negotiations, representatives from the country groups moved around the room to negotiate addition emissions reductions and financial contribution with one another. Their updated commitments came in with complex contingencies attached, showing a willingness to commit to further emissions reductions if other countries were ready to contribute more to the \$100 billion fund, for example. After all the commitments and contingencies were recorded, the group agreed to run the C-ROADS software with the input values representing full cooperation between all countries. Even when all contingencies were agreed to, the group was not able to keep warming below two degrees.

DISCUSSION: IS THERE HOPE?

Students discovered first-hand what many analysts are already saying about the COP21 negotiations: the agreement reached in Paris will not keep warming below two degrees Celsius. Students recognized the difficulty of coming to a global agreement on an issue that affects everyone with varying impacts. They noted that recognizing the urgent need to address climate change did not erase centuries of historical context that made cooperation difficult. Yet the closing debrief was not marked solely by feelings of hopelessness or despair. Students also shared their reasons for continuing to have hope that the people of the world can collectively tackle this issue. They cited constant advancements in technology, climate commitments from private businesses, and the power of grassroots organizing among the forces they believe will contribute to a solution.

Thank you to the Sustainable Cities Club, Change Forum, and all the students who participated in the COP21 Simulation event. To share your own reflections on the evening's negotiations and lessons learned, please email tedc@newschool.edu.

