METHANE, THE VEILED THREAT

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Methane is one of the main greenhouse gases, along with C02 and nitrogen. Its concentration in the atmosphere is much lower than that of C02, however the consequences of its emission are much more devastating in the first instance, since it traps 28% more heat. Now, the Global Methane Balance Report 2016 warns that methane production has taken a huge quantitative leap in recent years, which threatens to offset the steps that have been taken in terms of

C02.

The study, involving more than 100 scientists, shows that methane emissions have grown explosively in the last decade. There was a period of stagnation in the early 2000s, with an annual rise of just 0.5 ppb per year, but since 2007 methane concentrations in the atmosphere have increased in a disturbing pattern at more than ten times the rate. By contrast, it can be seen that CO2 emissions have been stabilizing in the last three years. In the Paris Agreement, commitments were made along the lines of defossilizing the economy and reducing C02, however, methane was not discussed at COP21, and if methane production is not mitigated, the goal of staying below 2ºC of temperature rise cannot be reached even in the most optimistic scenario.

Where do methane emissions come from? More than 60% correspond to human activity, while the rest are due to natural causes (wetlands, geological methane, termites, etc.). As far as human activity is concerned, most of the methane comes from food production – livestock, paddy fields, manure management, etc. –, so reducing the part corresponding to this source can affect the food sovereignty of many countries, especially in the poorest regions of the planet. In other sources of methane such as the production and distribution of fossil fuels (34% of human activity) and the management of garbage and wastewater (18%), it is possible to act more quickly through the use of technology.

The good news is that in the long term, methane doesn't stay in the atmosphere as long as C02, just a decade, so any mitigation efforts will be noticed sooner.

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