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Lessons learned from Copenhagen

What you need to know following the Copenhagen climate summit

Adapted from a Grist article by Andrew Light, Daniel J. Weiss & Rebecca Lefton

The international negotiations on climate change wrapped up on 19th December in Copenhagen. The conference achieved an interim agreement, known as the Copenhagen Accord, which could put the major polluting nations on a pathway to reducing global warming pollution, and it continues to set the expectation for U.S. domestic action on climate change.

Much work remains, but there were also numerous notable achievements and meaningful insights into how the United States can gain from leading the world toward a new international clean-energy agreement.

• A "meaningful" deal on climate mitigation

Barack Obama left Copenhagen after personally working to secure agreement from China, South Africa, Brazil, and India on a "meaningful and unprecedented" climate change agreement.

The US president played a major role in crafting the Copenhagen Accord that was hammered out by 28 countries and accepted by 188 by the end of the meeting. Only five countries—Bolivia, Cuba, Nicaragua, Venezuela, and Sudan—refused the accord.

The Accord will go forward with committed parties now required to submit national action plans for emission reductions by the end of January 2010 that are consistent with the agreement's stated goal of limiting global temperature increases from carbon pollution from rising to more than 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) over pre-industrial levels.

The Accord stipulates that countries should consider further strengthening this goal by limiting temperature increases to 1.5 degrees C. Further, specific targets are not iterated in the accord and need to be added as soon as possible, but most parties are committed to strengthening it and taking the next step to turn it into a binding agreement by the 2010 U.N. climate summit in Mexico City.

The existing and proposed policies by the nations that produce large amounts of greenhouse gas pollution provide a good start toward the pollution cuts that we need. The Accord allows nations to undertake a full range of policies that reduce pollution, rather than limiting qualifying policies to economy-wide pollution caps. Preliminary results from a Center for American Progress report on carbon cap equivalents using recent data from Project Catalyst finds that current and pending policies among the world's 17 major carbon polluters will yield 65% of reductions needed by 2020 if all parties succeed in doing what they have promised to do.

• Responsibility from developing countries

The Kyoto Protocol called on developed countries to reduce emissions but did not demand reductions from developing countries. Major polluting developing countries, including China, India, South Africa, and Brazil, are now poised to make transparent emissions reductions or reductions in pollution rates.

This is the first time that developing countries have agreed to binding emission reductions in an international agreement. This represents a major shift from the schism between developed and developing countries that blocked progress in the past.

• First-ever compromise to measure, report, and verify pollution reductions

The Accord includes a compromise between the United States and China to verify pollution reductions according to rigorous and transparent guidelines depending on the source of financing for the reductions.

All reductions are subject to "international consultation and analysis." As a *New York Times* editorial observed, "China is now a player in the effort to combat climate change in a way it has never been, putting measurable emissions reductions targets on the table and accepting verification."

• Serious emissions reductions targets for developing countries

The ramp-up to Copenhagen and the United States' decision to put mid-term



March and rally in Lismore on 12th December

emission reductions targets and immediate financing numbers on the table prior to the start of the summit, stimulated unprecedented national commitments from key countries.

China announced on Nov. 26 a target of reducing carbon pollution per unit of gross domestic product by 40 to 45% from 2005 levels by 2020. Soon after the U.S.-India summit in Washington, India announced on Dec. 2 that it intends to decrease its carbon intensity 24% from 2005 levels by 2020.

More importantly, other clean-energy and climate policies in both countries will result in reductions in China of 13% below business-as-usual emissions by 2020 and 19% below business-as-usual emissions in India by 2020.

• Major financial commitments

Developed countries committed significantly more financial resources than ever before to developing countries for mitigation, adaptation, and forest conservation. This was despite disappointments

in negotiations over an international forestry deal and an international technology transfer regime.

The Accord establishes a "fast start" fund to provide \$30 billion from 2010-2012 for assistance to developing countries, including funds for forestry and a commitment to mobilizing \$100 billion a year to address the needs of developing countries by 2020.

Japan said that it will provide \$15 billion through 2012 toward the fast start fund, contingent on achieving an international agreement. And E.U. leaders will provide \$10.5 billion over the next three years as part of the fund. The United States promised a fair share of meeting this goal.

The United States will finance \$1 billion for avoided deforestation that will be matched by other countries for a total of \$3.5 billion to prevent the destruction of tropical forests.

The global goal is to cut deforestation by half by 2020, which would be equal to eliminating emissions from the entire global transportation sector.

• Australian climate change legislation

Australian Greens Leader Bob Brown says that next year's federal election will be a referendum on global warming.

"The 2010 poll is shaping up as a vote for or against Australia taking a lead in fixing global warming below 1.5 degrees. That means a 2020 target of reducing the nation's greenhouse gas emissions by 40 percent over 1990 levels and, in doing so, taking action for the rest of this threatened world to follow," Senator Brown said.

"Kevin Rudd's target range of 5-25 percent needs lifting to responsibly meet the need.

"Garrett has also dumped the long-awaited recommendation of a climate change trigger. This would have enabled the minister to review developments which resulted in huge greenhouse gas emissions.

"Tony Abbott's got no effective target - so he is taxing everyone's patience. Where is his plan to tackle the polluters?" Senator Brown said.



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