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MAKING SENSE OF THE POST-COPENHAGEN PICTURE: LINKS AND RESOURCES

Introduction

Two months after the UN Copenhagen Climate Change Conference, the prevailing opinion is that the event raised more questions than it answered. The conference ended with governments “noting” – but not endorsing – a “Copenhagen Accord” negotiated in its final hours by a small group of prominent countries. The Accord contains a series of commitments for parties that are willing to support it. But it is not legally binding, and was not universally welcomed.¹

The outcome of Copenhagen moved the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) process into uncharted territory. It raises uncertainties and questions about the future role of the United Nations and about how the changing power dynamics among countries will affect the negotiations. At the same time, climate science is once again being publicly challenged over a series of apparent errors in the work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which has the potential to affect public and political opinion.

Since Copenhagen ended, a flood of opinion pieces, newspaper articles and online blogs have been published that attempt to make sense of what happened and prognosticate over what the future holds.

This short review seeks to make sense of the overwhelming amount of reading material already available online. It identifies a select number of reliable online sources. This includes both stand-alone articles and ongoing blogs or publications.

¹ The Accord is online at: http://unfccc.int/files/meetings/cop_15/application/pdf/cop15_cph_auv.pdf

CHANGING POWER DYNAMICS?

A key focus of discussions among experts and the media since Copenhagen has been on the changing negotiating dynamics. In particular, many observers have been commenting on the impact of the BASIC group (Brazil, South Africa, India and China) and a possible “loss of face” on the part of the EU.² There has also been a lot of finger pointing as various stakeholders seek to interpret what happened in Copenhagen and lay the blame for what many regard as a less-than-perfect outcome.

Here are some of the most interesting articles/opinion pieces:

- 1) Mark Lynas, The Guardian, “*How do I know China wrecked the Copenhagen deal? I was in the room*”
(<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2009/dec/22/copenhagen-climate-change-mark-lynas>)
This was the article that (rightly or wrongly) questioned the initial NGO response that the US/Annex I was squarely to blame for the failure of the talks. Instead, it laid the blame firmly at China’s door.
- 2) Martin Khor, The Guardian, “*Blame Denmark, not China, for Copenhagen failure*”
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/cif-green/2009/dec/28/copenhagen-denmark-china>
In this article, Khor rebuts Lynas’ views.
- 3) Tom Athanasiou, EcoEquity, “*On being sadder but wiser, China, and justice as the way forward.*”
<http://www.ecoequity.org/2010/01/after-copenhagen/>
In this nuanced and thoughtful response from the NGO sector, Tom Athanasiou rebuts Lynas’ assertions and paints a more balanced picture of what happened in Copenhagen, and one more sympathetic to the South. While it is not as illuminating as his section on Copenhagen, he also presents some thoughts on the way forward.
- 4) Christian Egenhofer and Anton Georgiev, “*The Copenhagen Accord - A first stab at deciphering the implications for the EU.*”
<http://www.ceps.be/book/copenhagen-accord-first-stab-deciphering-implications-eu>
This article deciphers the Accord, itemizing the various outcomes. It also considers the way forward and lessons for the EU, which had less of an impact or leading role in Copenhagen than many expected. While their concluding suggestions relating to border tariffs would require far more consideration, the authors have some useful insights overall.

² The BASIC Group held its first official meeting a few weeks before Copenhagen, and its second meeting on 24 January 2010, where members pledged to continue to hold meetings in the lead up to the Mexico Climate Change Conference in late 2010. Details of the Group’s latest statement are online at:
<http://climate-l.org/2010/01/27/basic-group-ministers-call-for-additional-meetings-before-mexico/>

THE UN PROCESS

The Copenhagen Climate Change Conference has caused many observers to question the future role of the United Nations. Many are asking where the “real” negotiations will (should) take place. Some have suggested that the UNFCCC may end up playing just a monitoring role for a future “pledge and review” agreement, while the actual hard diplomacy will be conducted by a small group of key countries in an alternative forum such as the Major Economies Forum (MEF), G-20, or even the BASIC Group + the US (as happened in Copenhagen).

While the UN process is certainly open to charges that it is unwieldy and difficult, it is probably too soon to write it off. Those in Kyoto will recall that the final deal was cut by a relatively small group of countries, too. Also, while the status of the Copenhagen Accord and how it fits with the UNFCCC negotiating bodies (the *Ad Hoc* Working Groups or “AWGs”) is still not completely clear, the UN is pushing hard to subsume future talks on the Accord under the UNFCCC, and for the UN to be the implementing body for the Accord’s financial and other commitments.

For more on this UN push, see:

- a) The Hindu (newspaper), 28 January 2010, “*UN Chief asks to implement key elements of Copenhagen accord.*”
<http://beta.thehindu.com/news/international/article95934.ece>
- b) Climate-L.org Op-Ed, 22 January 2010, Yvo de Boer, “*Reflections on the Copenhagen Climate Change Conference*”
<http://climate-l.org/2010/01/22/guest-article-32-reflections-on-the-copenhagen-climate-change-conference/>

It is also worth recalling that the Accord begins by highlighting the ultimate objective of the Convention (Article 2) and endorses decisions on the AWGs:
http://unfccc.int/files/meetings/cop_15/application/pdf/cop15_cph_auv.pdf (page 2, preamble).

Additionally, the key groups involved in negotiating the Accord have recently reaffirmed this opinion. For instance, the BASIC group highlighted the “centrality” of the UNFCCC at a meeting of ministers on 24 January 2010:
<http://moef.nic.in/downloads/public-information/JointStatement.pdf>

For an independent opinion of the status of the Accord, see this short article published shortly after Copenhagen:
<http://www.wri.org/stories/2009/12/taking-note-copenhagen-accord-what-it-means>

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

The first noteworthy date post-Copenhagen was 31 January – the deadline for parties to communicate information on the Accord to the UNFCCC Secretariat. Prior to this deadline, the UNFCCC issued several notifications and clarifications on the legal character of the Accord.

By 31 January, a total of 55 countries accounting for 78% of global emissions had formally communicated submissions of national pledges/actions. These countries included the US, the EU, Australia, Canada, the Russian Federation, the BASIC countries, Indonesia, and the Republic of Korea. For more information, see *MEA Bulletin* (5 February): <http://www.iisd.ca/mea-l/meabulletin85.pdf> (page 1).

The next deadline is 15 February, when parties must submit their views on the meeting schedule for 2010. At this point, the next major UNFCCC meeting is due to take place in early June in Bonn, Germany. However, there are various opinions about holding additional meetings, both before and after this. Submissions on this matter will help determine the calendar of meetings for the year. For more information on this, two regular publications from IISD Reporting Services are worth checking regularly:

- a) *Climate-L-org*: <http://climate-l.org>
- b) *MEA Bulletin* (published twice monthly): <http://www.iisd.ca/email/mea-l.htm>

Our contacts suggest that a short meeting may be held in Bonn in late April. This will help address procedural and legal matters prior to the next major negotiating session in June. One or two further meetings are likely between June and November, when COP 16 will begin in Cancun, Mexico. However, more information will become available after 22 February, when the UNFCCC Bureau meets.

CHINA'S PERSPECTIVE AND INTERNAL TIMETABLE

Some interest has been expressed in understanding China's perspective on Copenhagen and on its "internal timetable" for moving forward on international climate policy. As a critical player in Copenhagen, China's stance is obviously an important consideration.

Regarding the dynamics in Copenhagen, sources close to the Chinese Government have told us that China strongly rejects the allegations in the Lynas article. They feel that China played a positive role and did not act as a "spoiler" in the talks. They view the Accord as a "significant step towards a [future] global agreement."

They also reject the notion that China had undue influence on Sudan's position (which was critical of the Accord) or that China wanted to take out all the numbers from the deal. They acknowledge that China did want the 2050 target removed on the grounds that they wished to focus on short and mid-terms targets for Annex I countries. China preferred the

25-40% target for Annex I parties for 2020 over a 2050 target. Also, China felt that the actual, lower 2020 numbers offered up by Annex I parties, including the US, were so modest that they rendered the longer term targets unrealistic. China was also concerned about the linkages between an 80% long-term target for Annex I parties and a 50% long-term target globally. It was not clear to their officials what this global target would mean for China or other developing countries. If it was agreed, Chinese officials were apparently concerned that they would have to accept legally-binding targets, which China is not willing to do now.

According to our sources, China's positions were based on considerations of "common but differentiated responsibilities," safeguarding its ability to continue its economic development, and attaching equal importance to both mitigation and adaptation. China also wanted to see developed countries meet their financing and technology commitments. China feels that it has the right to receive support and technologies, and that comments in the western media that China is now such a big economic player that it "does not need" such support are unfair and untrue.

China also supported a two-track system based on its strong feeling that Annex I countries must honor their promises and pledges.³

These views are unlikely to change, and will probably influence Chinese positions in the months and years ahead. While many now view China as an emerging superpower, Chinese officials still note that China's per capita GDP is only US\$3000 and it still has 150 million people living below the poverty line. Officials apparently feel that it will take "tremendous efforts" simply to reach China's commitment to reduce "per-GDP" carbon dioxide emissions by 40-45% by 2020 compared with 2005 – let alone take on extra burdens.

However, it is also worth noting that both the US and China had suggested previously that it might take up to a year *after* Copenhagen to make the sort of commitments that some expected, according to UK expert Michael Grubb. For a useful overview by Grubb on both Copenhagen and the road ahead, visit:

<https://earthscanevents.webex.com/ec06051/eventcenter/recording/recordAction.do?sessionId=wYl2LzjW4jC2Hn7P2LnbyLVb7YynjkmvzqYJGMXtcsbTMC17DMIL!985864091?theAction=poprecord&actname=%2Feventcenter%2Fframe%2Fg.do&apiname=lsr.php&renewticket=0&renewticket=0&actappname=ec06051&entapname=url0107l&needFilter=false&&isurlact=true&entactname=%2FnbrRecordingURL.do&rID=7305197&rKey=5b6ea8b875ad8acf&recordID=7305197&rnd=7964398133&siteurl=earthscanevents&SP=EC&AT=pb&format=short>

China and MRV

Interest has also been expressed on China's position regarding measuring, reporting and verification under an agreement – also known as "MRV." The general opinion in

³ Under the "two-track" approach, the question of industrialized countries' commitments is kept distinct from broader issues (such as actions by developing countries). Maintaining this distinction has been considered important by developing countries, which fear that allowing the two tracks to merge will let developed countries "off the hook" in terms of taking the lead on emissions reductions under the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities.

Copenhagen was that China was reluctant to accept an agreement that would involve international verification of actions undertaken domestically by developing countries, due to sovereignty-related concerns. Indeed, MRV of developing country actions was a major obstacle to progress in the lead up to Copenhagen. However, it is actually addressed in the Copenhagen Accord, with MRV of unsupported actions to be conducted domestically and reported to the Convention through national communications. According to the *Earth Negotiations Bulletin's* analysis, the Accord also contains some language, reportedly a compromise between the US and China, stating that there will be some provisions for "international consultations and analysis," a concept yet to be defined. Actions supported by international finance, technology transfer and capacity building will, however, be subject to international MRV. To read the ENB summary and analysis, visit:

<http://www.iisd.ca/download/pdf/enb12459e.pdf>

For another perspective on China and MRV, check Yale University's blog from Copenhagen: <http://climateprogress.org/2009/12/16/china-in-copenhagen-day-9-the-big-elephant-in-the-room-mrv/>

OTHER MEETINGS

As well as the UNFCCC events, other meetings/processes will also take place in 2010. These include:

- **Peoples' World Conference on Climate Change and Mother Earth's Rights**, 20-22 April, Cochabamba, Bolivia: <http://cmpcc.org/2010/01/05/call/>. This is viewed as an "alternative" approach to the Copenhagen/UNFCCC process, which Bolivian President Evo Morales labeled a "failure." The event is likely to be supported by members of the ALBA group (Venezuela, Cuba, Bolivia and some other Latin American/Caribbean countries). It may also be supported by Sudan and some other developing and island States that expressed deep reservations about the Accord. However, it remains to be seen if this event gains greater traction or support among the wider international community.
- **BASIC Ministerial Meeting**, South Africa, late April. The next meeting of the BASIC Ministerial Group has been scheduled for late April.
- **Major Economies Forum**. The MEF is expected to meet in the first half of 2010, although dates have yet to be announced: <http://www.majoreconomiesforum.org/>
- **G-8/G-20 Summit**, 26-27 June, Toronto, Canada. The G-8/G-20 Summits have focused on climate change during several sessions in recent years. However, it is unclear at this stage whether the Harper Government in Canada will seek to do so this year. One recent local news article suggests the focus may be on maternal and child health in developing countries: <http://www.thefreepress.ca/article/GB/20100128/CP02/301289966/-1/FERNIE/harper-urges-g20-countries-to-put-differences-aside-for-greater->

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- **IPCC-32** and related meetings, 11-14 October, Busan, Republic of Korea. Given the recent IPCC science scandals, this meeting may be the focus of media and public attention.
- **COP 16**, Cancun, Mexico, 29 November -10 December.

IISD Reporting Services recently launched a free service to help you monitor upcoming meetings. You can now import climate change meeting information from our Climate-L.org site into your desktop calendar program using an iCal feed at webcal://climate-l.org/subscribe/icalendar/

RE-EMERGENCE OF THE CLIMATE SCIENCE DEBATE

In recent months, the mainstream scientific community working on climate change has been stung by a series of scandals and allegations. These have called into question the accuracy of specific findings published by the IPCC and other groups, as well as the character/behavior of individual scientists, including IPCC Chief Rajendra Pachauri.

The IPCC has issued a series of statements in January and early February that seek to address these errors. These included statements on its assessment process (4 February), principles and procedures (2 February), and its previous assertions on disaster losses (25 January) and glacial melting in the Himalayas (20 January): <http://www.ipcc.ch/>

These statements have not prevented ongoing media interest and political pressure on the IPCC, however. For an overview of the criticisms, see *MEA Bulletin* (5 February): <http://www.iisd.ca/mea-l/meabulletin85.pdf> (page 2).

While these errors do raise concerns about flaws in the IPCC's review process and have provided considerable ammunition to climate skeptics, they do not appear to represent any serious challenge to accepted climate science.

The criticisms have recently provoked a backlash from the IPCC's defenders, with some experts alleging that "an orchestrated campaign is being waged against climate change science to undermine public acceptance of man-made global warming." For more, see the UK's *Independent*, 7 February: <http://www.independent.co.uk/environment/climate-change/thinktanks-take-oil-money-and-use-it-to-fund-climate-deniers-1891747.html>
The UN Environment Programme's Achim Steiner has also come to the IPCC's defense: <http://climate-l.org/2010/02/09/unep-executive-director-defends-ipcc-assessment-findings/#more-9988>

Whether accurate or not, the recent allegations do appear to be having an impact on public opinion in at least one major country (see the BBC's article, "Climate Skepticism on the

Rise," 7 February: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/8500443.stm>). Changes in public opinion may well have an impact on the course of negotiations.