

THE LONG ROAD OF CLIMATE NEGOTIATIONS: FROM KYOTO TO PARIS STOPPING OVER IN DOHA

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Is the world doing enough progress with regard to the problem of global climate change? And is there a solid plan ahead to improve on past achievements or address past failures? Most of the scientific evidence indicates that temperature records continue to be broken, that polar ice is melting faster than expected and sea levels are rising beyond many projections. Further, worryingly, the planet is not progressing effectively towards the goal of keeping global average temperature rise below 2 degrees Celsius by the end of this century. Science projects that if current global carbon emissions are not curbed, this may increase to between 4 to 6 degrees Celsius. Science also warns us that the physical impacts of global warming are here now. For all these reasons the urgency to act is increasing.

Just a few weeks ago extreme events such as typhoon Bopha, which hit the Philippines killing at least 500 people and Hurricane Sandy which hit the Caribbean and the US showed us what the world would face with greater frequency in a global warming scenario that is now likely. While it is hard to link these two events directly to human-induced warming, scientists generally agree that such extreme events will increase in number and intensity if the world continues on our carbon-intensive path. The scientific consensus is that if we are to limit global warming to 2 degrees Celsius global emissions must peak before 2020, the world would then need a 25% cut in emissions by 2030 from the current emission levels and by at least 50% by 2050.

So what are world leaders prepared to do about it? One way to know is to look at to what extent and in what direction political leaders are moving in formal multilateral climate change negotiations. A few weeks ago, from the 26 November to 8th December 2012, 195 nations met in Doha, Qatar, in what is known as the COP18 (18th annual conference of the parties under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change process). Expectations about this round of climate negotiations were low and at the end countries were successful in making some progress, but only incrementally. There was no breakthrough.

The Doha summit confronted the main dilemma that the UN sponsored Kyoto Protocol, the only international binding agreement, adopted in 1997 and which entered into force in 2005 involving 191 countries, was about to expire on 31 December 2012. Hence the objective, following last year's Durban meeting (COP17), was to continue paving the diplomatic way to a new post-Kyoto treaty.

Key Points

- *Expectations about the COP18 Doha round of climate negotiations were low and countries were successful in making some progress, but only incrementally. A second commitment period (from 1 January 2013 to 31 December 2020) for reducing emissions by amendment to the original Kyoto Protocol were agreed. Doha has left the door open for more progress ahead as the new treaty is supposed to be signed in 2015 and come into effect in 2020.*
- *Industrialised and heavily polluting countries such as Canada, Russia, Japan, and New Zealand who were members of Kyoto did not approve this second commitment, and the US and China, the world's two largest carbon emitters, have also largely opposed it. Doha called (unofficially) for the remaining Kyoto Protocol countries to increase their ambition in committing to reduce emissions in the range of 25-40% by 2014. This was a call though, not a firm decision.*
- *A debate ensued regarding the carbon market that exists in the EU, more specifically about how many non-used "emission credits" a country could transfer to the second commitment period. This is the so called "hot air" carbon credit issue. While some countries such as Poland wanted to keep the carbon credits, developing countries wanted such hot air credits to be abolished. The EU finally allowed Poland to keep its unused credits.*
- *Developed countries spectacularly failed to put any real money on the table or to agree on the roadmap to the 2020 \$100 billion a year target. The decision calls for public funds for adaptation without any specific figure calling in developed countries to make such a pledge "when their financial circumstances permit".*
- *Doha has brought an important innovation by agreeing to begin addressing the issue of "loss and damage", due to the pressure of developing countries. The parties agreed to establish by COP 19 international mechanism to address loss and damage from climate change.*

In the Kyoto Protocol 37 industrialized countries and the EU15 committed themselves to reduce their emission of GHG by 5.2% on average between 2008-2012 relative to their emissions in 1990. However since the US did not ratify the protocol, in practice this implied an average reduction of 4.2%. While this seems a meager figure, the political dimension of the agreement cannot be underestimated as it was the first ever multilateral legal instrument to fight against climate change.

One of the main achievements at Doha has been that the Kyoto protocol was somewhat rescued. A second commitment period of emissions reductions from 1 January 2013 to 31 December 2020 was agreed, by amendment to the original Kyoto Protocol. At COP 17 in Durban, South Africa, agreement was reached about the second commitment period for the Kyoto Protocol (KP2), but there was no time to finalize all the rules. At Doha the rules were finally agreed upon and we know now the countries with binding targets in the second commitment period: All members of the European Union, Australia, Norway, Switzerland, Iceland, Croatia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine, which together represent about 15% of total global emissions, will commit to reduce their emissions on average by 18% below their 1990 level between 2013-2020. Other key industrialised and heavily polluting countries such as Canada, Russia, Japan, and New Zealand who were members of Kyoto did not approve this second commitment, and the US and China, the world's two largest carbon emitters, have also largely opposed the second commitment period. But in order to accommodate countries such as the US, the negotiations have formally initiated discussions on the requirement of both developed and developing countries to cut their emissions.

Therefore Doha has left the door open for more progress ahead as the new treaty is supposed to be signed in 2015, at a conference in Paris, and come into effect in 2020 (i.e. after KP2). This is the reason why the COP18 is known as the Doha climate gateway. But

we expect the next three years of negotiations to be some of the hardest since a real danger exists that the 2015 Paris summit will not succeed due to major differences between countries such as the US and new industrialised countries such as China, India and Brazil. Since the 2009 Copenhagen meeting most of the underlying discussions on a post-Kyoto treaty have been dominated by the increasing economic rivalry between these two geopolitical blocks. Here at home, the EU emission commitment will possibly meet its target of a 20% reduction by 2020 compared to the 1990 baseline. The EU-15 is already about 14% below the 1990 base year level



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so it is to be seen how KP2 will affect its emissions target. In particular it is an open question as to whether the 20% reduction target will strengthen in 2014 amidst the deep economic crisis affecting the EU. More generally, Doha called (unofficially) for the remaining Kyoto Protocol countries to increase their ambition in committing to reduce emissions in the range of 25-40% by 2014. This is a call though, not a firm decision.

A hot debate also ensued regarding the carbon market that exists in the EU, more specifically about how many non-used "emission credits" a country could transfer to the second commitment period. This is the so called "hot air" carbon credit issue. While some countries such as Poland wanted to keep the carbon credits awarded to them in the 1990s, developing countries wanted such hot air credits to be abolished. However, many countries stated publicly in Doha that they do not plan to purchase any such units. This is not a minor issue since such emission credits in the hands of Russia, Ukraine, and Japan totaled 13 million tonnes of CO₂, that is, about three times what the whole of the EU emit to the atmosphere each year. At the end the EU allowed Poland to keep its unused credits indicating the delicate diplomatic balance required within the EU. It is not thus surprising that things get much more complicated when dealing not with just the 27 members of the European Union but with almost 200 countries.

There were three other big issues that played an important part of the negotiations in Doha and that merit attention. These are (a) the principle of equity, (b) the practice of climate finance and the new issue brought into the negotiation table of "loss and damage."



Doha Climate Change Conference (Photo by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, available under a Creative Commons Attribution license).

Equity refers to the idea that the countries that have polluted the most in the past should be proportionately responsible in helping those countries most vulnerable to be impacted by climate change, generally the more impoverished developing countries. In the jargon of the negotiation table, equity is referred to the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBDR-RC). This has been and will continue to be one of the cornerstones of the climate negotiations.

To developing countries, CBDR-RC is associated with justice as it is associated with the principle that not only must developed countries lead the mitigation of green-

house gases but must also provide finance and low carbon technology to reduce emissions in developing countries as well as finance for climate adaptation. The problem is that to some of the most industrialized countries, such as the US, the principle of CBDR-RC is not politically attractive domestically as they fear other emergent countries such as China do not confront legally binding emission reduction targets. This is a tricky issue that will need to be sorted if a successful agreement is to be arrived at in 2015 that holds global average temperature increase under 2°C. It is hard to see how such an agreement can fail to respect the principle of equity and at the same time be politically effective. This issue is now stalled as for some the equity principle has to be first negotiated out and later operationalized in the new agreement but others prefer the principle to be made operational from the start.

Beyond these principles, a key aspect of the negotiation is the one of climate finance. Already at the 2009 Copenhagen summit, developed countries pledged 100 thousand million US dollars to be transferred to developing countries annually as climate finance, starting from 2020. In Doha, developed countries spectacularly failed to put any real money on the table or to agree on the roadmap to the 2020 \$100 billion a year target. For example, in a weak way and in an uncertain economic environment for many developed countries due to their domestic economic crisis, the final decision at Doha calls for public funds for adaptation without any specific figure, and 'encourages' developed countries to continue providing funding at existing average levels until 2015 which is about \$10 thousand million per year. In fact, the final Doha agreement calls on developed countries to make such a pledge "when their financial circumstances permit". These are soft words for such an important element in the fight for climate mitigation and to support effective adaptation measures.

Amidst this mixed outcome of developments, Doha brought an important innovation by agreeing to begin addressing the issue of “loss and damage”, due to the pressure of developing countries and especially by the island states most vulnerable to sea level rise. It refers to helping vulnerable developing countries confront the future irrecoverable losses and damages from climate change impacts. The parties in the negotiation table agreed to establish by COP 19 so-called “institutional arrangements, such as an international mechanism” to address loss and damage from climate change. This issue is a key one, as the term loss and damage has legal connotations in many countries and although it remains to be seen how the term is crystalized in the next summit, it could imply questions on compensation for damages from extreme weather events.

It is crystal clear that after so many years sitting around the climate negotiation table, progress is slow. The steps that are being taken are just incremental and a gargantuan effort is required to mobilize the political will of the most powerful countries to make firm commitments and to deliver on them. While greater ambition seems to be elusive at the climate summits the world needs to find complementary ways to move forward in the fight against climate change. In this context, national and subnational policies need to step up to fill in the slow motion of the climate negotiations. This is the great challenge we all face amidst a rapidly changing climatic context. The pressure on good policy can only come from well informed citizens. For this, science is as necessary as political will and motivation. Both are essential in the long road to the post-Kyoto treaty.

*This Policy Briefing was written by Unai Pascual and Anil Markandya **

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