

Insights from Durban to Doha

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INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC or FCCC) is an international environmental treaty negotiated at the United Nation Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), informally known as the Earth Summit.¹ Each year since 1995, the parties to the convention have met at the Conferences of the Parties (COP) to assess approaches to climate change and related progress. Annual COP conferences rotate among the five UN regional groups; the African Group last year hosted COP 17 on 29 November 2011 in Durban, South Africa. At COP 17, The State of Qatar and the Republic of Korea from the Asian Group agreed to cooperate in order to host and encourage the success of the UN Climate Change Conference, COP 18/CMP 8 (the 18th Conference of Parties to the UNFCCC, plus the 8th session of the Conference of the Parties, serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol), which will take place in Qatar from November 26th through December 7th, 2012.² The countries decided on a joint effort in preparing for the conference to globally promote and implement the green growth agenda. The Republic of Korea stands behind the green economy concept as a strategy to foster sustainable development and poverty eradication. One of the world's main energy exporters, the State of Qatar expressed its eagerness to secure progress in the UN climate change negotiations and to support developing countries, including Small Island Developing States (SIDS), in adapting to the effects of climate change.² Hosting the UN climate change negotiations this year makes Qatar the first OPEC nation to do so.

UNFCCC

In 1992, the UNFCCC emerged as a framework for intergovernmental efforts to address climate change, as a starting point for addressing the problem of climate change. This Convention came into action on March 21st, 1994. The ultimate objective of the Convention is "to stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations at a level that will prevent dangerous human interference with the climate system".¹ The UNFCCC has near universal membership (195 ratified countries) and is the parent treaty of the 1997 Kyoto Protocol.³

Generally, parties to the convention commit to:

- gather and share information on greenhouse gas emissions, national policies and best practices;
- draw and adopt national strategies to address greenhouse gas emissions and to mitigate expected impacts, providing financial and technological support to developing countries;
- cooperate on mitigation of and adaptation to climate change.

KYOTO PROTOCOL

The Kyoto Protocol was initially adopted on December 11th, 1997 in Kyoto, Japan, and implemented on February 16th, 2005.³ It has been ratified by 193 of the UNFCCC Parties. Under the Protocol, 37 states (Annex I countries) consists highly industrialized countries and countries undergoing the process of transition to a market economy, have legally binding emission limitation and reduction involving four greenhouse gases (GHG), specifically carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, sulphur hexafluoride, and two groups of gases, hydrofluorocarbons and perfluorocarbons.² According to the Kyoto binding targets, the 37 industrialized countries and the European Community, as signatories, agreed to reduce GHG emissions by at least 5 percent, on average, compared to the 1990 level.⁴

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To encouraging signatories in their progress toward emission targets, the Kyoto Protocol offered three main market-based incentive mechanisms:

- emissions trading (ED), where countries can trade allocated quotas;
- joint implementation (JI), i.e., a developed country could receive “emissions reduction units” when it helps to finance emission reducing projects in another developed country;
- clean development mechanism (CDM), whereby developed countries could finance their emission reduction or removal projects in developing countries and receive credits for doing so, and then they can use their credit to balance the mandatory emissions limits.

Of importance is the fact that the Kyoto Protocol’s first commitment period ends in 2012, thus COP 18 is hoped to result in new agreements.

COP/CMP

Each year, since 1992, the parties to the UNFCCC have been meeting at annual COP conferences to assess progress in dealing with climate change, where the COP is functioning as the “supreme body” of the Convention. Successive decisions taken by the COP make up a detailed set of rules for practical and effective implementation of the Convention.⁵

The COP also serves as the meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol, which also adopts decisions and resolutions on the implementation of its provisions. Thus, the annual meeting, in this case COP 18, is referred to as the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP) as mentioned above.² However, Parties to the Convention that are not Parties to the Protocol are able to participate in the CMP as observers, albeit without the right to take decisions.⁵

FROM DURBAN TO DOHA

The main goal of COPs is to enter into a further binding global climate agreement without restraining economic growth and or distorting competition in world markets, and which can be applied to and would be carried out in the period after 2012. Cop 17 in Durban ended with a new legal agreement involving a breakthrough in that all countries, developed and developing, agreed to a pact to be signed in 2015 that would entale legally-binding—mandatory—emissions cuts, to begin 2020.⁶ The legal agreement also involved the participants taking key steps to negotiate a more inclusive treaty and establishment of a Green Climate Fund.

Binding targets

- Global temperature rise is to be kept under 2° Celsius in the 21st century,⁷ with three vital components to fight climate change, namely CO₂ reductions, reforestation and a transfer to green energy and green technologies
- GHG emissions need to peak before 2020,⁷ i.e., by 2020, CO₂ needs to be reduced by 20 to 30 percent of the 1990 levels. This translates as annual global emissions lingering around 44 Gt of Co₂ equivalents by 2020 in order to achieve a trajectory that halves those emissions by 2050, below 2005 levels as specified.⁸

Science and technology challenges

- The big question is whether the set targets above, for peaking of the global emissions before 2020, can be proven by science and will be achieved, in order to maintain the temperature increase below 28 Celsius.
- The estimated cost for cutting emissions will be four times more after 2020 than the cost today.⁸ This means that the current paths for emission reduction need to be urgently revised to prevent a global temperature rise of 3.5° Celsius or more sometime by the end of the century.
- At Durban, the European Union and several other countries agreed to continue the Kyoto Protocol beyond 2012 if other governments, including major emitters from developed and developing countries, agreed to negotiate a new legally-binding treaty with deeper emission reductions by 2015 to come into force afterwards.⁸ The new negotiation phase of the Kyoto

Protocol could mean specific provisions within this existing emission reduction treaty, ranging from emissions trading to the Clean Development Mechanism, would continue providing some benefit to the climate and developing economies over the near term.

Green Climate Fund, adaptation and technology

- Establishing and operationalization of a Green Climate Fund (GCF) sees the commitment to mobilize US\$100 billion to support developing countries by 2020.
- Readiness actions in developing countries will help in preparing for the investments that will eventually flow from the GCF.
- Agreement to establish an Adaptation Committee and a process that will lead to the establishment of a Climate Technology Centre and Network to likely be funded by the Global Environment Facility.

DEBATABLE ISSUES AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The argument behind using legally-binding agreements to push the climate agenda forward is based on the notion that voluntary action could not ensure the development of a low-carbon economy across the globe;⁶ and yet, big questions remain.

How will the Durban platform translate into actual emission reductions and by when?

Durban platform is high-risk strategy involving the following points of divergence:^{4,6,7}

- Whether more than 190 nations can cooperate in order to peak and bring down emissions to the necessary level by 2020 remains open.
- The gridlock between the developed countries and the developing countries about the impact of CO₂ reductions on economic growth, and its impacts on the development trajectories of these economies for all countries involved.
- The EU suggests that the budget of the GCF needs to be at least US\$100 billion each year for the foreseeable future, while other countries suggest that this amount needs to be considerably increased.
- Durban saw confirmation that the GCF will have a facility to fund private sector initiatives to promote business involvement and catalyze further public and private money.⁶ This should mean more public-private partnerships in developing nations working on green growth, which should create jobs, alleviate poverty and improve infrastructure as well as tackling climate change.
- Action is being taken by national governments, companies, cities and individual citizens. For example in 2010, over US\$210 billion was invested in renewable energy.⁸ But what is required to reach global goals is a strategy involving agreed targets and timelines for their achievement, and the time gap is growing ever narrower.
- The role of the multilateral agency in monitoring and enforcing the treaty will be an especially sensitive issue.
- However, there is also an opposing group arguing that the annual climate talks that have been running for nearly two decades have borne little fruit and that nations should focus instead on a series of voluntary, non-binding pledges and on encouraging industry to cut emissions.⁶

Dual approaches

It is vital to work on a dual approach (the Global binding agenda and the voluntary non-binding pledges) as it is imperative to adapting a climate-confronting scheme for the following reasons:

- Confronting climate change involve sustainable management for the natural resources; the three directly related resources; **air, energy and water**, while it will reduce the pressure on consuming natural resources, including material and land, and help protecting ecosystems. This means that adapting climate change policy will yield various co-benefits for sustainable development objectives.
- Cutting GHG emission offers real business opportunities, as for example; eco- industry system, for low-waste economy, thrive innovation of clean technology at various industry sectors such as

climate- friendly low carbon technologies, air pollution control, wastewater management and recycling industries . . . etc.

- The above implies that cutting GHG emissions offers grounds on which sustainable priorities can meet business priorities. Hence, emission reduction is best considered together with advancing technology innovation to confront climate change as core concerns in forwarding the climate agenda.

Developed countries and developing countries

Bringing the developing countries with the developed ones under the same legally-binding agreement is the core of the debate that necessitates long-term planning with many uncertainties:

- any market-based mechanism (like carbon trading) requires a global perspective reflective of changes to economic activity, which are uncertain;
- the long-term costs of GHG emission reductions will depend, in part, on future technological innovations—many of which are presently unknown—and on other factors that could either promote or constrain the use of certain technologies in the future.⁹

How far the developing country Parties will be able to stand behind their commitments under the Convention will strongly depend on the developed country Parties and their follow up on commitments under the Convention, specifically related to financial resources and transfer of technology. Therefore, resolutions need to address:

- promoting technology transfer and expertise exchange freely around the world, which will help accelerate the adoption of clean energy and sustainable technologies;
- any breakthrough of environmental technology should reach various players and users, and the knowledge should enter education. Regulations, standards, codes and control instruments also hold great importance related to the rate at which environmental technology can penetrate society and promote improvements;
- any new efforts to confront climate change will include: removing obstacles to, and providing financial support for the “development of technology” in developing countries, and other “positive incentives” for mitigation and adaptation by developing countries;
- offering developing countries easier access to technologies by “buying out” intellectual property rights.

As important as a focus on the necessary actions under the Convention is the emphasis on actions related to funding, insurance and the transfer of technology.¹⁰ These complementary actions address the specific needs and concerns of developing country Parties, which are currently facing, head-on, the adverse effects of climate change and/or the impact of the implementation of response measures. It will be also essential to address specific actions related to countries whose economies are highly dependent on income generated from the production, processing and export, and/or on consumption of fossil fuels and associated energy-intensive products.

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