

The Politics of Climate Change Negotiations in Africa and Globally

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Introduction:

Climate change has been defined as the most serious threat ever to face humanity this century yet the world's political and corporate leaders appear unable and/or unwilling to take immediate action to prevent seriously disruptive climate change. Evidence of human impact upon the earth's climate is now irrefutable. We have emitted enough greenhouse gases into the atmosphere to commit the climate change. If we carry on as we are, we can expect a rapidly worsening situation that – because of the long life of emissions in the atmosphere – will continue for centuries to come. Within a global trend of rising temperatures that could reach levels in the next century that our species has never previously experienced, our climate will become more and more unstable, marked by extreme and unseasonal weather. The extreme and unseasonal weather patterns have now become the order of the day in most parts of the world and especially so in Africa which will suffer the most damages from the adverse impacts of climate change.

For any one who has been following climate change negotiations, especially the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) negotiations, one observation clearly stands out and that is the fact that international progress to prevent climate change is being achieved at a grossly inadequate rate. And as long as negotiations continue to be based upon the polarised positions of power politics and reluctance to embrace radical change, global greenhouse gas emissions will continue to rise.

Short History of the Negotiations:

The 4th Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC took place in Buenos Aires, Argentina in Nov. 1988. It was the next step to protect the climate from human induced climate change, following and building on the agreement reached in Kyoto in Dec. 1997 – the Kyoto Protocol – which committed Governments in the Developed world for the first time to legally binding obligations to reduce six ghgs.

In the run up to UNFCCC – COP4, at least two polarised political realities emerged:

- 1) One was the fundamentally “Northern View”, which postulated that the next steps in protecting the climate required two things:
 - a) the first was a means of ensuring developing countries participation in reducing ghg emissions;
 - b) the second was the development or refinement of the mechanisms that would begin to slow incremental reduction of those gases without causing undue hardship to those developed countries making the cuts.
- 2) The other position can be characterised as the “Southern View”, which stipulates that the current state of negotiations continues to deny the developing world their right to benefit equally from the protection of what is a common global resource belonging to the entire global population: the atmosphere.

Fast-forward to the Present:

A lot of negotiation texts have since been produced. Now, we find ourselves at cross-roads as far as climate change negotiations go.

The 15th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC – COP 15) will take place in Copenhagen, Denmark in less than 100 days from now. But the draft texts which have been coming out from the inter-session meetings of the UNFCCC do not indicate the inclusion of African priorities. Food security and agriculture, Forestry and Land use changes, are some of the critical sectors that will be negatively impacted by climate change in Africa yet mention of them is scarce in the texts under discussion. However, what is even more worrying is that despite a deepening knowledge of the increasing damage to the climate system and therefore damages to livelihoods, from excessive build-up of atmospheric ghgs, action to reduce ghg emissions is not accelerating. Infact, the reverse is true – in both developed and developing countries, emissions are currently increasing. The political and corporate response to climate change has been grossly inadequate. To stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations at non-catastrophic levels, the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) stated in 1990 that ghg emissions from human sources would have to be reduced immediately by at least 60% below 1990 levels. At Kyoto, however, developed countries agreed to a cut of just 5.2%, to be achieved between 2008 and 2012. Worse, the US Congress refused to ratify the US Kyoto commitment.

As Africa continues to pay the price of climate change despite the fact that it contribute the least in global ghg emissions (less than 4%), it is imperative that African leaders unite, agree and present a common stance before the UN Summit on climate change (UNFCCC COP 15) in Copenhagen, Denmark later this year. In this regard, it is heartening that just last week (25 Aug. 2009), Environment and Agriculture Ministers from several African nations met at the AU headquarters in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa. This is a right move in the right direction, albeit late in the day.

However, like most international agreements, climate change negotiations have had its fair share of wheeler dealing, intrigues, conspiracy theories, etc. A critical look at the current climate debate easily reveals particular self-interest and robust rent seeking. Scientists, who must rival with many other pressure groups for scarce tax dollars, often realise that nothing is a better attention-grabber than the announcement of a potential danger which their research can fix, if it is only funded generously. It is important to recognise that the issue of climate change was politicised through scientific knowledge, especially the IPCC. The instruments of global environmental politics are mostly market-based because “the market” is considered by powerful actors as the superior means to deal with far-reaching problems like climate change.

But the above should and must not distract African governments and stakeholders from articulating and demanding action from its Western counterparts – Annex I Parties – on Africa's key priority issues at the forthcoming climate change negotiations. In this regard, it is commendable that African governments have come up with a position called *the Africa Climate Solution*. This position endorses, and

calls for, AFOLU (agriculture, forestry and sustainable land use management). Infact, it has been argued that for Africa a post-Kyoto regime agreed at COP 15 in Copenhagen, which does not include agriculture and food security by extension is NO deal at all. Besides, AFOLU, some other key African priorities that should/must be addressed by any post Kyoto climate architecture include (but are not limited to):

- 1) Operationalisation of the Adaptation Fund: At the Addis Ababa meeting, Africa leaders present agreed to seek \$67 billion per annum from 2020 to cushion the continent from the adverse impacts of climate change. This financing should be new, additional, predictable and grant based. Funding for climate change adaptation should NOT be considered as part of ODA. If anything, developed countries are in environmental debt to the world because they are responsible for 70% of historical carbon emissions into the atmosphere since 1750. Therefore, developed countries should provide significant resources (like the amount proposed by the African leaders in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia) so that developing regions like Africa can embark upon a growth model which does not repeat the serious impacts of the capitalist industrialization.
- 2) Solutions to the energy, food and climate change crises should be comprehensive and interdependent. We cannot solve a problem by creating new ones in fundamental areas for life. For example, widespread use of agricultural fuels has an adverse effect on food prices and the use of essential resources such as water, land and forests.
- 3) Capacity building: This is the most important issue that must be seriously addressed. It is a prerequisite for the continent to participate effectively and fully in the international struggle against climate change. Institutional strengthening and human resource development are largely needed in Africa, to help address challenges brought about by climate change impacts.
- 4) Technology transfer: Technological transfer of efficient and renewable energy technologies like wind, solar, geothermal, and hydropower are costly but will promote cleaner technological advancement and development that is environmentally friendly. Renewable energy will be key to achieving sustainable development in Africa and should be emphasised, in all international negotiations aiming to address climate change.

In conclusion, climate change negotiations will always be characterised by politics, especially given that various groups of countries in the negotiations have formed blocks to push for their common/shared interests. We have groups like GRULAC, AOSIS, G77 and China, EIG, LDC, Africa Group, etc. However, given Africa's minimal contribution to the problem of climate change coupled with its low level of economic development, it ought to be accorded special attention, status and support from the developed countries, to assist her to not only cope with expected adverse climate change impacts but also to increase her resilience. African negotiators must also step up their networking capacities within and among their countries as this will give them more leverage during the negotiations like in the forthcoming UNFCCC COP 15 in Copenhagen, Denmark, and beyond.