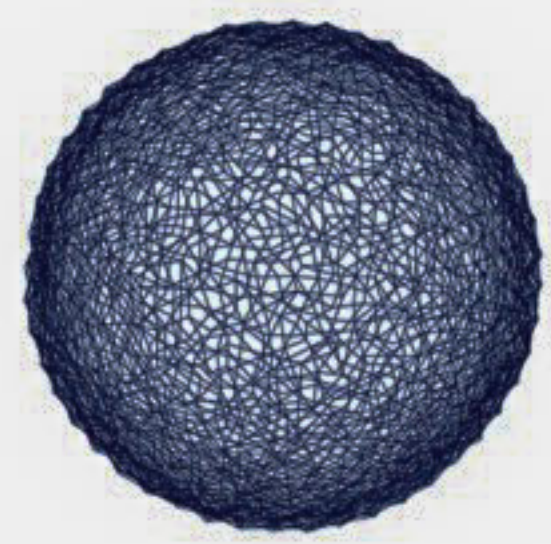


From Hopenhagen to Brokenhagen: A personal journey



COP15 COPENHAGEN
UN CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE 2009

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I feel very let down by all the world's political leaders who were there, for abdicating their responsibilities to solve a global problem requiring all countries to move forward together (instead they remained trapped in their national and domestic political constraints). However, there is still hope that the huge outpouring of public interest and scrutiny will continue its momentum and push the leaders to do the right thing the next time (which should also be a Summit level meeting).

as well as at the international level.

During the months before Copenhagen much was in fact achieved in getting these three groups of vulnerable countries (along with others not in these three groups) to develop common positions, one being the support for a temperature target of 1.5 degrees rather than 2 degrees. The other was to support a legally binding agreement. They also supported each other on the need to stress the need for adaptation support. At the same time there was a massive increase in levels of engagement by civil society spearheaded by many international and national NGOs as well as increasing levels of media attention to the climate change issue.

Thus, the level of awareness of climate change as both a development issue as well as an issue of global justice was raised considerably in many vulnerable countries from a relatively low level to quite a high level, focusing on the upcoming COP15 in Copenhagen. This positive engagement will remain despite the disappointing outcome from COP15.

legally binding agreement finished in Copenhagen (something which most countries felt was no longer achievable in the time available) which held up proceedings for a day or so. Another delay was caused by the African Group asserting that no progress would be made on the Long Term Cooperation Agreement (LCA) track unless the Kyoto Protocol (KP) track was dealt with first.

Although these procedural delays were characterised by many delegates (especially from the rich Annex 1 countries) as holding up "progress", they were in fact the only way that the poor and vulnerable countries could assert their voices in the process.

Thus, although some progress was indeed made on some sections of the negotiating text (such as on adaptation, technology transfer and reducing emission for deforestation and degradation or REDD) by the time the Ministers started arriving in the second week there was insufficient progress on the main negotiating texts.

During the second week, there was also

Agreement" and consult with leaders of key countries and constituencies to see if a deal could be agreed.

Thus, in the final two days of the COP there were two sets of parallel negotiations being conducted, one the official negotiations with all 192 countries included and the other behind close doors amongst a select group of leaders. The latter group of 25 leaders, many of them heads of state themselves personally involved, met on Thursday night and tried to cobble something together by Friday morning when President Obama arrived and gave his speech around midday. However, as the final version was still not agreed at that stage he had to postpone his flight home and also had to personally get stuck in to the negotiations and try to hammer out a deal.

So over the course of the last 24 hours or so there were at least five or six different versions of this so-called "Copenhagen Accord" being drafted and re-drafted (most versions of which were leaked within hours if not minutes!) until around midnight on Friday night (after one final round of face to face discussions between Obama and the Chinese, Indian, Brazilian and South African leaders) they finally had something which they thought would be acceptable to everyone. President Obama then took his much delayed flight back to Washington and told the US Press corps on board his plane that the Copenhagen Accord had been agreed. The only trouble was that it had yet to be presented to the COP Plenary meeting and adopted by all 192 countries there, so his announcement was premature to say the least!

Once the COP plenary reconvened under the Presidency of Prime Minister Rasmussen of Denmark (at around 3.00 am on Saturday morning), he tried to present the "Copenhagen Accord" and get it approved by the Plenary but first Tuvalu objected and then several other countries, including Venezuela, Nicaragua, Bolivia and Sudan all objected strongly to its adoption. The Danish PM was clearly out of his depth in terms of what to do as there was clearly no consensus in the room and it could not be adopted without consensus! He was then saved by the British Minister Ed Miliband (who had supposedly gone back to his hotel room to sleep and was urgently called back to salvage the situation) who asked for an adjournment.

All the details of what followed is still unclear but there were clearly strong lobbying efforts from the Secretary General of the UN, Mr Ban Ki Moon, and leaders of some countries, including from President Nasheed of the Maldives, to get their various constituencies to sign up to the deal (the argument being that a flawed deal was better than no deal!) as well as getting the Danish PM to relinquish the Chair to the COP Vice President. Thus, when the Plenary reconvened in the early hours of Saturday morning they then passed the "Copenhagen Accord" by "noting" rather than "adopting" it. What the difference is between these two words is still unclear but will probably become clearer over time.

What is quite clear is that the so called deal is a very unambitious and poor one from many points of view (a view reinforced by the fact that even its proponents accept its flaws). However, to look at the positive elements:

It does mention 2 degrees for the first time (although all references to targets



Cutting emission is imperative.

In addition to the Copenhagen Accord the COP also made decision to continue the mandate of the two UNFCCC tracks (namely the LCA and KP tracks) for another year to reach a conclusion at COP16 to be held in Mexico in December 2010.

Some immediate reflections on COP15 outcomes:

In many ways what happened in Copenhagen over the space of two action-packed weeks was a shaking of the traditional pieces of the global geo-political puzzle and their landing in a new and unfamiliar configuration.

It will take some considerable time for the real meaning of what happened in COP15 to become clear but here are some (still fuzzy) items to note:

The final hours of the Heads of State level negotiations saw China (leading India, Brazil and South Africa) forming a new block called BASIC within G77 (which may perhaps be the death knell of the G77 +China as we have known it so far).

The most vulnerable countries were left high and dry as the final agreement was hammered out personally by Obama with the leaders of China (and BASIC). Even the Europeans were marginalised in this last round.

The low level of ambition agreed for mitigation means that reaching 2 degrees (let alone 1.5 degrees will be increasingly difficult). Adding up what countries (both Annex 1 as well as the BASIC countries) have so far proposed will take us to 3 to 3.5 degrees.

The unity between AOSIS, LDCs and Africa that had been forged before COP15 broke apart when the Africa Group led by Prime Minister Zenawi of Ethiopia made a deal with President Sarkozy of France where he dropped the 1.5. degrees target and agreed to funding for Africa.

Once the Africa Group withdrew support for AOSIS the LDC group was also broken (as two-thirds of the LDCs are also in the Africa Group). Thus AOSIS were left

going forward. Look out for the next meeting hosted by President Tong of Kiribati next year.

In hind sight the more important outcome of Copenhagen was not what the leaders were able (or unable) to agree but the mass mobilisation of people from all countries in Copenhagen and around the world (on Saturday the 12th of December there were over 100,000 people demonstrating there) and also the major media scrutiny and coverage which will continue after Copenhagen.

After Copenhagen

The UNFCCC negotiations continue into another year until COP16 in Mexico in December 2010 with the regular Subsidiary Bodies meeting in June in Bonn. There may be other inter-sessional meetings as well.

The Countries that are part of the Copenhagen Accord will have to take that forward (not at all clear whether separately outside the UNFCCC process or inside it?).

The short term funds have been promised in principle but not how much from whom and through which channels? This will need to be worked out soon.

Funding for adaptation in the vulnerable countries will be a priority for the short term funds.

A personal end note

Over the course of the last two years I have invested a huge amount of my personal time in working towards a fair and ambitious deal in Copenhagen, hence I feel very let down by all the world's political leaders who were there, for abdicating their responsibilities to solve a global problem requiring all countries to move forward together (instead they remained trapped in their national and domestic political constraints). However, there is still hope that the huge outpouring of public interest and scrutiny will continue its momentum and push the leaders to do the right thing the next time (which



Protesters at the conference venue.

elling around the world not just attending the many intersessional meetings of the UNFCCC but also organising and attending meetings with negotiators, ambassadors, politicians and civil society from the vulnerable countries, specially the least developed countries (LDCs) to try to raise awareness and understanding of the UNFCCC process and what was at stake for them in these negotiations.

My objective, along with my colleagues in the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) where I work, as well as partners in governments and civil society in the LDCs, was to enable them to raise their voices more effectively in the international arena on an issue which is of vital concern for them.

This activity involved engagement at a number of different levels. Firstly with the climate change negotiators from these countries through regional capacity building workshops held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia for the eastern and southern African LDCs and in Dakar, Senegal for the west African francophone LDCs, to help them understand the different issues being negotiated.

Secondly with Ambassadors from these countries in key Western Capitals such as London, Brussels, New York, Washington, Stockholm and Copenhagen to impress on them the need to engage on climate change at the diplomatic level from their various missions.

Thirdly, with political leaders from the vulnerable countries, to encourage them to coordinate and work together as much as possible. This latter effort culminated in the Vulnerable Countries Forum held in Maldives, hosted by President Nasheed of the Maldives on 9th and 10th November with the President of Kiribati as well as Ministers from 10 other vulnerable countries from the LDCs, Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and Africa. The purpose was to get these three groups of vulnerable countries, which numbered nearly 100 countries, to coordinate and try to work together.

Fourthly, and finally, with civil society in many of the vulnerable countries to get them involved in advocacy both at home

At Copenhagen

I arrived in Copenhagen several days ahead of the official beginning of COP15, to carry out our regular annual pre-COP capacity building workshops for the negotiators from the LDCs, which went very well. Having done these for a number of years, it was good to see a number of more experienced negotiators from the LDC Group act as Resource Persons for the first time on different issues for their colleagues. An important feature of COP15 was the unusually large number of official delegates that came to Copenhagen for COP15 from each of the LDCs. Thus, the mood going into the COP was quite optimistic from all concerned.

However, things started to go wrong from the day before the official opening of COP15 when the G77+China Group (the umbrella group of over 130 developing countries which was chaired by Sudan) had their annual pre-COP meeting on the weekend before the COP started, when the Danish hosts revealed that they had been holding discussions at the level of their Prime Minister with a number of other Heads of State before the COP and were contemplating to introduce a new so-called "Danish text".

This upset many of the G77 negotiators who felt that all the hard work that they had been doing for the last two years and which was still not finished was being bypassed by the Danish Prime Minister and that a new "Danish Text" was being introduced when the negotiations at COP 15 had not even started. Once the Danish text was leaked to the press and its contents were seen, they were felt to be very one-sided and the Danes were forced to withdraw it (officially claiming that no such "Danish text" ever existed!) and had to allow the negotiations to take their course. However, lasting damage had been done to the Danish COP Presidency having lost the confidence of the G77 group as an honest broker (an essential attribute for any COP Presidency).

Once the negotiations started in earnest on Monday the 7th of December there were a few dramatic events, including a proposal from Tuvalu for having a

a great deal of public outcry due to the restrictions that were placed on the many thousands of NGOs who had registered to attend the COP. Of over 15,000 NGO observers who had registered, the UNFCCC Secretariat stopped allowing them to enter the COP premises from the Tuesday of the second week and then from Wednesday onwards they placed severe restrictions on numbers of NGOs who had already been registered and attended during the first week. This caused many thousands of NGOs to be stranded outside the venue in the freezing cold waiting to be registered and let in and then were sent back-causing scuffles with police and a great deal of ill feeling from them.

The level of media presence at COP15 was also unprecedented with over 3,500 media personnel, not only from the large global media but from almost every country including most of the LDCs (many of the latter sponsored by IIED and partners). Thus, COP15 was a national front page story in every country and not just a global event reported from the wires. This level of media interest will also continue far beyond COP15.

In the last few days as the Heads of State started arriving in Copenhagen and the negotiations did not make sufficient progress for them to have anything to sign, things began to go haywire. Normally, under such circumstance of an impasse in the official negotiations (which are not very unusual) the parties entrust the President of the COP to consult with a few key countries (as a so-called "Friends of the Chair") group and come up with some compromise text to break the deadlock.

However, as the Danish Prime Minister had lost the trust of the G77 group through his earlier attempt to prepare a Danish text before the COP, the G77 did not mandate him to take this initiative now. Thus, it was left to some of the Heads of State who had arrived earlier than the others (such as Prime Minister Gordon Brown of UK and President Nasheed of Maldives) to try to put something together as a so-called "Political



Cyclone devastation in Bangladesh.

were removed)

It allows developed and developing countries to put forward their mitigation plans and targets (in Annexes by 31 January)

It puts forward the promise of short term funding mainly for adaptation in vulnerable developing countries (of 30 Billion USD over three years from 2010 to 2013)

It puts forward the notion of longer term funding to the tune of 100 Billion USD a year from 2020 for mitigation as well as adaptation, etc

It mentions looking at 1.5. degrees in 2016

alone to fight for the 1.5 Degrees target and Legally Binding Agreement.

President Nasheed of Maldives emerged as a major player who gave excellent speeches to rally action and till the end was trying to get something out of Copenhagen (in the end he reluctantly supported the deal to keep the show on the road as in his view a breakdown would have been worse outcome).

From the perspective of the vulnerable countries, the new grouping of Vulnerable Countries initiated by President Nasheed that transcends the traditional LDC, SIDS and Africa Groupings is possibly one of the major achievements

should also be a Summit level meeting).

I will personally be shifting my own efforts away from the international negotiations to doing more mundane capacity building work on adapting to the real impacts of climate change in the most vulnerable countries through the new International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD) which we will be setting up soon in Bangladesh to provide short courses and masters degrees for people from the least developed countries.