

Tearfund Analysis of COP14



Summary

Given that COP14 was the mid-point of a two year negotiation period for a new global climate deal, it was never going to deliver the same level of energy and sense of achievement as Bali, where a mandate for negotiating a new deal was launched.

Disappointingly, however, progress in Poland (and indeed throughout 2008) has been achingly slow and painstaking. Climate change is hitting poor people now, and recent science indicates that things will get much worse, much more quickly than we thought, unless developed countries act urgently to slash emissions and to help poor communities adapt. But it feels as if the negotiations are taking place in a parallel world, in slow motion.

It's still possible to get a deal next year – but governments will need to redouble their efforts to work towards a 2009 climate deal. Developing countries have been active and cooperative in coming up with suggestions for financing mechanisms, technology, adaptation, and some have shared their plans to reduce their emissions. It is developed countries that have been dragging their heels: they must up the pace over 2009. There is a sense of increasing mistrust from developing countries as to the commitment of developed countries to the process. Developed countries must do all they can to redress this in the coming year by placing concrete proposals on the table and engaging seriously in negotiations.

The talks have also been overshadowed by talks at the EU Council to agree on a new package of climate and energy laws for Europe. These laws were approved by the EU Council on the final day of the talks, and passed by the European Parliament a few days later. They show an extremely low level of ambition in terms of both emissions cuts and finance for developing countries, and risk undermining the international negotiations, by setting a poor example to other developed countries and further eroding trust among developing countries.

Finally, the change of administration in the United States has meant that progress has been difficult to achieve – hopefully with a new Obama team in place for the next round of negotiations the pace will pick up and serious negotiations can start – there is no time to lose.

Progress on Adaptation

Climate change is already harming poor and vulnerable communities. Countries agreed at previous talks to address the most urgent adaptation needs in the poorest and most vulnerable countries. In addition a massive scale up of funds is needed to support poor and vulnerable countries and communities to adapt to climate change in the long-term.

Near-term Action on Adaptation

A major blockage to progress on long-term adaptation financing and mechanisms at these climate change talks is the lack of an EU position on post-2012 financing for adaptation. It is critical that the EU position is agreed in time for the next climate change talks at the end of March 2009. In this context there has been much focus on concrete steps which could be taken now to scale up and deliver adaptation action over the next three years before a post-2012 framework begins. These efforts include: making the Adaptation Fund set up under the Kyoto Protocol operational; full and effective implementation of National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPAs) for least developed countries; and a three year work programme for the implementation of adaptation.

Despite much discussion on adaptation in a number of different negotiation streams this COP has produced few concrete results. The full operationalisation of the Adaptation Fund was one area where many felt that agreement at this COP could be made. However discussions between countries were deadlocked for most of the two weeks with talks going on into the early hours of the final night. Agreement was finally reached between countries meaning that from the beginning of 2009 the Adaptation Fund can start to distribute much needed funding for adaptation in poor and vulnerable communities. Given that this should have been a relatively straightforward and uncontentious process, it is shocking that the issue was so hard fought, exposing deep differences between developed and developing countries.

In addition there was much resistance from the EU and other Annex 1 countries to increasing finance for adaptation by placing a levy on other carbon trading mechanisms under the Kyoto Protocol (in addition to the current 2% levy on the Clean Development Mechanism or CDM). A decision on this issue can only be made at a COP/MOP which normally take place once a year. This year a decision was blocked with poor countries going home empty handed, after bitter and divisive discussions between developed and developing countries in the early hours of the final night.

Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)

The case for the importance of drawing on the experience, tools and methodologies of the DRR community in discussions on adaptation to climate change was made strongly during this COP. The chair's summary from the AWG-LCA workshop on risk management on insurance states clearly that DRR provides many useful tools and experience. In this workshop and through other sessions there was much discussion of the place of insurance. Insurance is a useful safety net, achieved through risk sharing, but is not a risk reduction approach. The balance of investment needs to be in preventing the loss of lives and livelihoods and not on replacing assets or 'transferring' risks. Finally in relation to DRR, the importance of institutions in providing information, services and strategies has been highlighted in discussions. Discussions have highlighted the importance of implementing the priorities of the Hyogo Framework for Action in responding to the needs of poor and vulnerable communities already experiencing the impacts of climate change.

Progress on Emissions Cuts

Kyoto Protocol

Disappointingly the Kyoto Protocol track of discussions which covers emissions targets for all developed countries except the United States barely managed to cover the same ground as it did last year, and in some respects backtracked from Bali agreements. The final text reaffirms the importance of the ranges of emissions cuts of 25-40% for Annex I countries but does not go any further in terms of actually committing countries to making these cuts. Worryingly instead of specifying that emissions cuts by developed countries *must* be made by economy wide binding emissions targets (Quantified Emissions Limitation and Reduction Objectives or QELROs), the new text only says that QELROs are the *principal* means of making cuts. And instead of referring to capability and historic responsibility for emissions as determining Annex I responsibilities to make cuts, the text refers to terms such as 'efficiency', 'costs and benefits' being the basis on which Annex I contributions are determined. These changes potentially open the door to bottom up or sectoral approaches whereby countries look at what emissions they think can be cut from different sectors (eg steel or cement) and add them together. This is a dangerous and unscientific way to calculate targets.

Targets should be based on the latest science, together with capability and historic responsibility.

Countries will now make submissions on a number of issues ahead of the next round of talks in March in preparation for developing negotiating text.

UN Convention on Climate Change – Ad-hoc Working Group on Long Term Cooperative Action (AWG-LCA)

Countries discussed a shared vision for the post-2012 framework, including their thoughts on what a long-term global goal for 2050 should be. This is a contentious issue, as determining this goal has implications for developing countries who will also have to cut their emissions by this date; the amount they have to do will depend on how much developed countries do now and how high the target is set. Developing countries are concerned that developed countries will fail to curb their emissions and will pass the buck onto developing countries instead. Countries recognised that shared vision is wider than just emissions cuts and should cover all four strands of the Bali Action Plan (adaptation, mitigation, technology transfer and finance). Developing countries (and a few developed countries) have come forward with proposals around finance and technology, and some interesting ideas have been presented around how developing countries could start to register their own Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Actions (NAMAs).

However, developed countries have been slow to respond to any financing or technology proposals and this means that developing country trust is eroding. Many developing countries recognised the need to take mitigation actions to cut their emissions, but stressed that these were dependent on the appropriate finance and technology from developed countries, as laid out in the Bali Action Plan. The Ad-hoc Working Group for Long Term Cooperative Action gave the chair a mandate to produce negotiating text by June next year.

European Climate & Energy Laws

The EU announced the final version of its climate and energy package simultaneously with the conclusions of COP14. This was an opportunity for the EU to show leadership, but the legislation announced was inadequate to either curb dangerous climate change or to fulfil what the EU agreed to at Bali last year: to make deep emissions cuts and to provide finance for developing countries.

The laws set a 20% emissions reductions 2020 target (on 1990 levels) – rather than the 30% target previously announced which is more commensurate with the science. Although the target can be raised to 30% in the event of a global deal, it does not rise automatically. Furthermore large numbers of overseas carbon credits from the Clean Development Mechanism can be used as offsets – meaning that the EU could make as little as 4% cuts on current levels of emissions within the EU by 2020. This is more in line with temperature rises of four degrees, rather than the two degree goal which the EU insists it is sticking to. Large sections of the power industry and other heavily polluting industries do not have to buy permits to pollute under the EU Emissions Trading Scheme. And none of the money made from auctioning has been specifically put aside for climate change adaptation or mitigation in the developing world.

Conclusion

Progress at Poznan has undoubtedly been slow, and all countries, particularly developed countries must raise their game to ensure that a deal is achieved by Copenhagen.