

Solidarity understood correctly

The Kyoto Protocol does not do enough to protect humankind from climate change. Additional binding reduction targets for greenhouse gases are necessary and they must also apply to important developing and transition countries. So far, these countries have been treated as a uniform group. In future, different rules will have to be used according to varying capabilities and different exposures to risk. A team of 14 researchers from rich and poor countries puts forward proposals on how to proceed.

[By Bernd Brouns and Hermann E. Ott; published in D+C – Magazine for Development and Cooperation, Vol. 46, No. 5, pp. 207-209]

The Kyoto Protocol on climate protection came into force internationally in February. At its core are binding commitments for industrialised countries to restrict their greenhouse gas emissions. This is an important step – however, it is only the first one in coming to terms with a major challenge of the new century: climate protection. The reduction targets of five percent on average for industrialised nations established so far are insufficient. Moreover, there are no obligations yet for developing and transition countries, which emit almost half of the greenhouse gases worldwide.

At the climate summit in Buenos Aires in December last year, the European Union tried to kick-start negotiations on the further development of the Kyoto Protocol – with moderate success. While the negotiations in the run-up to Kyoto were already quite difficult, the new phase of international climate politics that is just beginning presents even greater obstacles. Apart from reintegrating the climate-desperado USA into the international process, future negotiations will have to involve a number of transition and developing countries.

However, these countries point to the rich nations' historic responsibility for on-going climate change. They are afraid their economic development might be slowed down. Meanwhile, many of the poorer developing countries are particularly vulnerable. Due to their geographical location, economic structure and weak financial and technical capacities, they are particularly exposed to the consequences of the greenhouse effect. Therefore, future negotiations must break the “North-South” divide as well as finding an adequate differentiation for the very heterogeneous countries of the “South”.

In light of this challenge, the Wuppertal Institute for Climate, Environment and Energy and the South African Energy Research Centre carried out a research project to identify possible key priorities of future agreements. The project was commissioned by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the German Society for Technical Cooperation (GTZ). Working in a team with 14 researchers from poor and rich countries, we have put together some suggestions that might promote a sustainable climate policy.

The central theme of our work was the principle of solidarity. This implies that weak countries should be supported when tackling the effects of climate change. As stated in Article 2 of the Framework Convention on Climate Change, the “dangerous” interference of humankind with the climate must be stopped. This means that global warming must be restricted to, at most, two centigrades above pre-industrial temperatures. Any warming above this level would threaten human existence in many regions. The cultural survival of local communities and the physical integrity of the weak and powerless would be acutely endangered.

Mitigation becomes a negotiation topic

Even if this two-degree goal would be reached, which the European Union has adopted, the impact of climate change that is already noticeable now would be aggravated further. The first conclusion of our team therefore is that future negotiations can no longer deal merely with combating the causes of the problem by reducing emissions. Negotiations have to go further and contribute to limiting damage. Measures to adapt to climate change, particularly in the case of very vulnerable countries, must play a central role.

In terms of finance, technology and personnel, many developing countries are in no position to adequately handle the negative consequences of climate change. They need transfer payments. Financing mechanisms that correspond to the ‘polluter pays’ principle are inevitable – and introducing them is a precondition to move ahead with preventive measures. Developing countries will only be prepared to accept reduction targets for emissions if the industrialised countries contribute (financially) to adapting to climate change. All summed up, however, the reduction and prevention of greenhouse gas emissions also serve adaptation programmes. The more effectively climate protection is implemented, after all, the lower will be the costs for adapting to the climate change – not to mention the prevention of irreversible effects of climate change, such as the extinction of animal and plant species and the melting of glaciers.

If climate change is to be limited to two degrees Celsius on average globally, humankind’s emissions must peak by 2020, drop to half of the level reached in the 1990s by the middle of this century and then continue to decrease. There is widespread agreement among politicians, scientists and civil society actors on the necessity of emission reductions. The difficulties begin with the question of which countries are to contribute. When does their obligation begin and what extent does it have?

The Kyoto Protocol retains the categories outlined in the Framework Convention on Climate Change. Accordingly, the advanced western nations and the former soviet block form one group (Annex I countries) and the rest of the world the second group (non-Annex I countries). This is not practical in the long term.

The Kyoto Protocol defines reduction obligations among the parties of the first group that are the result of political maneuvering and horsetrading. Given the increasing contribution of the “rest of the world” to global emission levels, future regulations must also engage several

transition and developing countries. To do so, it is necessary to develop better methods for differentiation between these countries – according to their capabilities and circumstances.

Criteria for differential treatment

In order to reflect the country-specific conditions in a fair manner, our proposal considers three criteria:

- the potential to reduce greenhouse gases,
- the capability to finance reduction measures and
- the responsibility for climate change.

In view of these criteria, the non-Annex I (developing) countries obviously differ greatly. They include, for example, all countries with the lowest emissions per capita. However, so are several countries with the highest emissions per capita worldwide – Qatar, for example. All least developed countries (LDC) fall into this category, but so do countries such as Singapore, with a per capita income well above the average of the industrialised countries. Obviously, it does not make sense to treat these countries as equals in climate talks.

If the “non-Annex I countries” are differentiated according to the three criteria mentioned above, four groups can be identified:

- “Newly industrialised countries” (NIC),
- “Rapidly industrialising developing countries” (RIDC),
- “Other developing countries” (ODC) and
- “Least developed countries” (LDC).

It should be said from the beginning that we are not interested in splitting the negotiating group of the “G 77 & China” politically. But solidarity among these countries requires that those, which are better off, make a contribution to global climate protection on a different scale than, for example, the LDCs. Only in this way can the group retain its important unity in negotiations with the traditional industrialised countries and, at the same time, tackle the climate problem.

Table: Country categories

Country group	Countries
“Newly industrialised countries” – NICs	Bahrain, Brunei, Cuba, Israel, Kazakhstan, Korea (South), Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkmenistan, United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan
“Rapidly industrialising developing countries” – RIDCs	Algeria, Antigua & Barbuda, Argentina, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Chile, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cyprus, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Fiji, Grenada, Guyana, Iran, Jordan, Lebanon, Malaysia, Malta, Mauritius, Mexico, Oman, Panama, Peru, Philippines, Saint Kitts & Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent & Grenadines, South Africa, Thailand, Tunisia, Uruguay.
“Other developing countries” - ODCs	Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bolivia, Cameroon, Congo, Cook Islands, Côte d'Ivoire, Dominica, Ecuador, Egypt, Gabon, Georgia, Ghana, Guatemala, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Jamaica, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Libya, Macedonia, FYR, Moldova, Mongolia, Morocco, Namibia, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Seychelles, Sri Lanka, Swaziland, Syria, Tajikistan, Venezuela, Vietnam, Zimbabwe.
“Least developed countries” - LDCs	Afghanistan, Angola, Bangladesh, Benin, Bhutan, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Kiribati, Laos, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Maldives, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Niger, Rwanda, Samoa, Sao Tome & Principe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, Somalia, Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, Tuvalu, Uganda, Vanuatu, Yemen, Zambia.

What would the climate protection obligations of the different country groups look like in concrete terms? We propose the following rules:

- The potential to reduce emissions should determine binding reduction targets. This potential arises from the emission intensity of a country (CO₂ emitted per unit of the gross domestic product) and from the emissions per capita. This line of action would guarantee a cost efficient climate regime, since emissions would be reduced wherever the potential for doing so was highest. This does not necessarily mean, however, that the countries concerned would be liable to fund all necessary measures themselves. Certainly, the industrial countries would have to contribute.
- Obligations to finance climate protection would have to derive from the respective capability of a country. This capacity could be measured against the average income and the *Human Development Index*. Countries with a higher capability – mainly industrialised countries – would have to support those with lower capability.
- To what extent obligations become binding should ultimately depend on a country's contribution to climate change. The accumulated emissions since 1990 could serve as a suitable indicator. At that time, the United Nations had already identified the greenhouse effect as a human-made problem and ignoring it was no longer possible.

These rules would mean that the advanced industrialised countries, and to a somewhat lesser degree also the former centrally planned economies, would have to take on absolute, binding

reduction targets going far beyond Kyoto. The target contained in the progress report of the German sustainability strategy (to reduce German emissions by forty per cent and Europe-wide emissions by thirty per cent by the year 2020) can serve as a base to define the levels of such obligations.

Moreover, these Annex-I-Countries would be obliged to make transfer payments to the four other groups in support of climate protection. According to our proposal, the “newly industrialised countries” (NIC) and the “rapidly industrialising developing countries” (RIDC) will also have to make an active, quantifiable contribution to reducing global emissions in the near future. The NICs could rely on rich nations co-financing some of their measures – and the RIDCs on broad funding of their climate protection by the advanced nations. Without such transfer payments, emission targets for NICs/RIDCs would not become binding. On the other hand, the remaining two groups (ODC, LDC) would have to gradually adopt policies and measures for a more climate-friendly direction of their development. Their main burden will be to put their full efforts into adapting to climate change.

The key to the indispensable integration of the developing countries into a system of binding emission targets lies in differentiation. For this purpose, the existing country categories will have to be broken up. Even if many of the politicians of the G 77 & China group still resist this idea, there were already clear indications in Buenos Aires that the unity of the group cannot be maintained without acknowledgement of its members’ heterogeneity. The countries most affected by climate change will, for example, no longer tolerate the OPEC countries blocking payments for adaptation measures with compensation demands for possibly declining oil exports.

Many G 77 countries gradually come to recognise the need to move on from the Kyoto Protocol. They are signalling willingness to negotiate. In the medium term, therefore, this group must seek “unity in diversity” for its own sake and show concern for the interests of its weaker members. Otherwise the group will lose the negotiating power required to gain necessary concessions from the advanced countries. It goes without saying that the latter have to lead the way in climate protection.

References

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