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Climate experts' forum: Was the first week a waste of time?

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FT Energy Source is posting a daily question for our panel of expert commentators. Below are responses from panel members Vivienne Cox of Climate Change Capital, Lord Browne of the Royal Academy of Engineering, Jeremy Leggett of Solarcentury, Julian Morris of The International Policy Network and Kyoto carbon markets architect Graciela Chichilnisky.

There was progress last week on technical matters such as forestry credits, technology transfer and, importantly, the EU's fast-start financing commitment – but now that the ministers have arrived, Copenhagen talks are getting down to the central issues of binding emissions agreements and long-term financing. Was last week largely a waste of time?

Vivienne Cox: Of course it has not been a waste of time. What has been done so far is extremely important – and so is the gathering of interests that turn up to these processes where networks are established and reinvigorated. The first week has also flushed out people's positions and now there is a better idea about what it possible.

However it is true that negotiators can get stuck and hold to established positions and that the arrival of heads of state and government can get things moving. It is easier for these people to focus on outcomes. It is they who can say : "Don't give me 100 reasons why this cannot be done, just get me the people in this room who can get it done." That said, we don't want Copenhagen to be just a media opportunity for them to look good for the domestic audiences at home.

And let us not forget, ahead of the arrival of the big boys (and girls) that this is an international institution that continues to function after they have left and that the details determine where investment flows.

Vivienne Cox is chairman of Climate Change Capital.

Lord Browne of Madingley: Long-time observers of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change process will be used to a sense of frustration. There have been nine high-level meetings since the Bali roadmap was agreed two years ago and none of those resulted in a spectacular outcome.

Instead, what we seem to get is a lot of bluster with very few tangible results. The first week of the Copenhagen meeting already seems to be going to script – with behaviour reminiscent of a medieval fair, but with deals still largely off the table.

But even if little has been agreed, the first week was not necessarily a waste of time. There has been significant movement on key issues: the European Union has made

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the first attempt at structuring a financial package for the poorest countries, and China has agreed that it should not be a recipient of such funding.

This is arguably more progress than the talks have delivered all year. There is still some way to go before world leaders can sign on the dotted line but the prelude may yet prove significant.

Lord Browne is president of the Royal Academy of Engineering, managing director at Riverstone LLC, and was chief executive of BP from 1995 to 2007.

Jeremy Leggett: Walking the corridors and talking to delegates this first week a sense of déjà vu has struck me. I have felt at times as though I was back in Kyoto a decade ago. Then, the first week was characterised by a strange brew of seriousness of intent and diplomatic posturing. Brinkmanship was rife, and yet hardly any delegations wanted the talks to fail, then as now. The negotiations were scheduled to end on the Friday evening, and the protocol was finally gavelled through at approaching 10 the following morning.

It took the arrival of ministers in the second week of the Kyoto summit to unlock the big-ticket agreements. The outcome was a protocol without sharp teeth, but one capable of sending a big enough signal to markets to mean very bad news to those who sought to defend the status quo at all costs. As I describe in the final pages of my book *The Carbon War*, the fossil fuel lobbyists were distraught at the outcome.

This time there are two differences, one negative and one positive. In Kyoto, the negotiators were closer to a final deal. In Copenhagen, unresolved issues span all major areas: mitigation, adaptation, finance and legal matters. On the other hand, it will not be ministers who descend for the endgame this time, it will be heads of state, and from more than half of the 198 countries present. They will not want to leave without a meaningful deal.

The first week in Copenhagen was not a great success, but nor was it a waste of time. True, there should have been more of a connect between leaders' rhetoric and diplomats' negotiating briefs. And much of the detailed negotiating could have been done in vast video-conferencing facilities with negotiators in their home cities (as it will have to be in the low carbon world). But some progress has been made, notably on forests and funding. More importantly, the key negotiators have looked each other in the eye, and sensed the mood among the thousand-plus journalists, and the tens of thousands on the streets. I write these words from a building with a long column of police vans outside, a helicopter overhead and the drums of protest drifting from elsewhere in the city.

Everyone knows what they will have to do this week. The first week was just the warm up.

Jeremy Leggett is an author, founder and executive chairman of Solarcentury, a solar energy company, and ambassador to the Global Observatory at Copenhagen.

Julian Morris: The premise of Copenhagen was always dubious. Some non-government organisations have billed it as the last chance to save the planet from anthropogenic global warming. Vested interests – such as those who have made money from the European emissions trading scheme – saw it as an essential vehicle for perpetuating their business models. Both groups want binding restrictions imposed on future carbon emissions. But the economic cost of such restrictions would likely be far larger than the benefits. Given that premise, it would be better if Copenhagen were to end with no agreement.

Of course, it could have been otherwise: the Framework Convention on Climate Change requires parties to seek cost effective ways to address climate change. In principle, actions could be taken to reduce barriers to adaptation, for example. Many of these would cost little and would have significant advantages. But those

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barriers to adaptation often benefit the elite in poor countries. In Ethiopia for example, restrictions on property ownership and trade reinforce existing power structures. Foreign aid has a similar effect, since elites are able to use it to insulate themselves from democratic accountability. Indeed, it is no surprise that the version of adaptation promoted by political leaders in Copenhagen focuses only on what can be done by central government through aid-funded projects.

Given those political realities, the absence of substantive agreement during the first week is probably a good thing. The question is whether the stand-off can hold out till the end, or whether political leaders will feel obliged to agree to do “something”, no matter how counterproductive.

[Julian Morris is an economist, author and director of The International Policy Network.](#)

Graciela Chichilnisky: The first week of the Copenhagen summit was somewhat chaotic and mostly about positioning – not very helpful. From my point of view it was difficult but very valuable.

The first week of the Conventions of the Parties always focuses on ‘technical issues’ in preparation for the political ministers’ meetings during the second week. At Copenhagen the first week ended yesterday – Monday. After a long and arduous week of negotiations I was able to introduce new wording into the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) about “negative carbon” technologies that could qualify for funding under the carbon market and CDM process that has allocated so far about \$25bn to developing nations. Negative carbon is necessary for the low emitting nations – Africa, Latin America and the small island states - to get significant funding from the Clean Development Mechanism for clean development, adaptation and mitigation. This was not possible until now.

The new wording may change all this. So far CDM funding has mostly gone to the large emitters, such as China and India – because they have more emissions to reduce. Africa, for example, emits only 3% of the global emissions and has little to reduce. With negative carbon technologies however Africa could reduce 20% of the carbon in the atmosphere – namely it can reduce much more than it emits. On this basis the low emitter nations can be significantly assisted by the CDM – and can become important contributors to resolving climate change risks.

There are several ‘negative carbon’ examples involving projects that reduce more carbon from the atmosphere than what they emit:

For example, REDD (reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation) is carbon negative, another example is a technology that “sucks carbon from air” and was recently advocated by Dr Pachauri of the International Panel on Climate Change as being necessary for averting climate change at this late stage of the game. One can build power plants that suck carbon from air, reducing atmospheric carbon while they produce electricity. With the wording we now introduced during the first week of the negotiations – I expect a solution for the climate negotiations that involves building power plants that suck carbon from air in Africa, Latin America and the small island states. This would involve a \$200bn-a-year fund – underwritten by the OECD nations with private funding – for the purpose of building power plants in low emitter nations for development, adaptation and mitigation. This can also create new jobs and expand exports in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development nations, all together a win-win solution for the world economy. A private-public fund of about \$200bn a year would suffice to get positive results all around – a possibility that negative carbon technologies have now made possible. I will be working on these solutions from now on, as part of the CDM process.

[Graciela Chichilnisky is the architect of the carbon market of the Kyoto Protocol](#)

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