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Climate experts' forum: the Kyoto question

December 15, 2009 5:54 pm by [Kate Mackenzie](#)

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FT Energy Source is posting a daily question for our [panel of expert commentators](#). Below are replies from [Robert Stavins](#) of Harvard University, [Vivienne Cox](#) of Climate Change Capital, Kyoto carbon markets architect [Graciela Chichilnisky](#), [Jeremy Leggett](#) of Solarcentury and [David Jones](#) of Euro RSCG group and Havas Worldwide.

Debate over whether to forge a new agreement or use the Kyoto protocol is dividing developed and developing countries at Copenhagen. Are developing countries justified in insisting that the Kyoto protocol be the basis for a new agreement?



Robert Stavins: The Kyoto Protocol, in particular its dichotomous distinction between the small set of Annex I countries with quantitative emission-reduction commitments and the majority of countries in the world with no responsibilities, is the “QWERTY keyboard” of international climate policy — the major stumbling block preventing progress in negotiations here in Copenhagen.

The world has changed dramatically since the 1997 Protocol divided the world in two. More than 50 non-Annex I countries (with no legally binding commitments) now have greater per capita income than the poorest of the Annex I countries (with commitments). So, even if this distinction was appropriate in 1997, it surely no longer is. But updating the list is impossible. Mexico and South Korea, for example, joined the OECD just six months after Kyoto, but they are unwilling to join the set of Annex I parties. Furthermore, updating the list would be insufficient. It is the very notion of a dichotomous distinction between countries with stringent targets and countries with no targets whatsoever which is at the heart of the problem. A more subtle, more sophisticated interpretation of “common but differentiated responsibilities” is needed. More about this below.

The industrialized (Annex I) countries have emitted most of the stock of man-made carbon dioxide in our atmosphere, so shouldn't they reduce emissions before developing countries are asked to contribute? While this may seem to make sense, here are four reasons why a new climate agreement must engage all major emitting countries – both industrialized and developing.

First, emissions from developing countries are significant and growing rapidly. China surpassed the United States as the world's largest CO2 emitter in 2006, and developing countries may account for more than half of global emissions within the next decade.

Second, developing countries provide the best opportunities for low-cost emissions reduction; their participation could dramatically reduce total costs.

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Third, the United States and several other industrialized countries may not commit to significant emissions reductions without developing country participation.

Fourth, if developing countries are excluded, up to one-third of carbon emissions reductions by participating countries may migrate to non-participating economies through international trade, reducing environmental gains and pushing developing nations onto more carbon-intensive growth paths (so-called “carbon leakage”).

How can developing countries participate in an international effort to reduce emissions without incurring costs that derail their economic development? Their emissions targets could start at business-as-usual levels, becoming more stringent over time as countries become wealthier. If such “growth targets” were combined with an international emission trading program, developing countries could fully participate without incurring prohibitive costs (or even any costs in the short term). This approach — described in a recent Discussion Paper by Harvard Professor Jeffrey Frankel and Valentina Bosetti of the University of Venice for the Harvard Project on International Climate Agreements — could provide a progressive route forward, breaking the logjam between developed and developing countries, if only the two sides would begin to talk to each other, rather than past each other.

Robert N. Stavins is Albert Pratt Professor of Business and Government at Harvard University.



Vivienne Cox: If you get back to the basics of what is going on here, the countries which emit the most carbon need to do most for this problem to be solved. The climate change convention needs to focus on taking tons out of the atmosphere – that is what will make the most difference to climate related poverty in developing nations and ultimately to climate changes which will affect us all. The distinctions between “developed” and “developing” nations are becoming increasingly blurred.

Amongst the G77 group there are countries with vastly different economies. Some make no contribution to the problem, others a great deal. Also, it is not the case that all the money and technology exist in the “developed” world; increasingly there is investment in the development and innovation of technology occurring in the so called developing nations. The Kyoto protocol has the advantage of being established and understood – but it may not be the only framework that will ensure a fair and efficient outcome.

Vivienne Cox is chairman of Climate Change Capital.



Graciela Chichilnisky: Yes, we need the structure of the Kyoto Protocol. Without the Kyoto Protocol we miss the key elements that have been negotiated in 1997 and took 8 years to ratify into international law in 2005. The Kyoto Protocol provides the basis for necessary cooperation between industrial and developed nations in pursuit of a safer climate. Without it the cooperation turns into an open debate and a mine field that does not favor reaching an agreement in Copenhagen.

In the Kyoto Protocol developed nations have binding limits on emissions – they are the largest emitters after all, while developing nations – through the carbon market and its Clean Development Mechanism – have important incentives for reducing emissions and adopting a new form of clean development, which they have been using to the world’s advantage.

The Kyoto Protocol is international law and its emission limits are legally binding – an outcome that most people seem to want to achieve in Copenhagen. Without those, the voluntary approach can easily be lost and lead to more contention and conflict.

With the introduction of wording on “negative carbon technologies” this last week into the structure of the Clean Development Mechanism, a matter on which I have

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been working all week, so far successfully, we can now assure that substantial funding from the CDM is forthcoming to Africa, Latin America and the Small Island States – to reduce carbon in the atmosphere, to adapt and mitigate the negative impact of climate change in the most vulnerable nations.

Graciela Chichilnisky is the architect of the carbon market of the Kyoto Protocol and the co-author of 'Saving Kyoto'.



Jeremy Leggett: Knowing a little of the history of the Climate Convention, and the negotiations going back 20 years to the World Climate Conference of 1990, one only has to place oneself mentally in the shoes of a developing-country diplomat for one second before responding to this question, no matter how strong the pull of pragmatism.

The developing countries are completely justified in insisting that developed countries keep to the legally-binding language that was so painfully negotiated over so many years. They have conceded so much already to the developed countries in the course of these negotiations, and to one developed country in particular.

One state – a rouge state for much of this time, as far as climate-change diplomacy is concerned – may have a sizeable a problem with some of its senators, and its ultraconservative climate-denying heartland. But that should not and cannot be an excuse for a mass retreat from ground hard won over two decades in the formulation of international law. Negotiators need to agree the best post-Kyoto deal they can possibly formulate, collectively, and then go back and try to ratify it.

The world will have time to try and shame the ultraconservatives into a sufficiency of acquiescence during the ratification process. Or show them that they are going to cause their economy to lose out big-time if they insist on isolationism. Or both.

I have formed the impression this last week that not many of the people in Copenhagen, or commenting on Copenhagen, know how close the Kyoto climate summit came to disaster, and how much ground the developing countries had to cede to win the deal. It wasn't until the very last hour of negotiations, between 9 and 10 o'clock on a Saturday morning after the negotiators' clocks had been stopped at midnight on the Friday, that it became clear that consensus treaty text was possible.

I described the drama blow-by-blow in the final pages of *The Carbon War*. For people who want a probable preview of the theatre that awaits on Friday, or to appreciate how the tortuous multilateral process can win through given a little collective will, I am posting the final pages of the book on [my website](#).

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



David Jones: While the demands from developing countries are understandable, I don't believe they are justified. Clearly the developing nations want to keep the developed nations to the Kyoto protocol where the developed nations would be legally bound to meet emission reduction targets while the developing nations would not. But Kyoto was 1997. Developing countries such as China, India and Brazil have changed dramatically in the last 12 years and are now much more developed, much richer and they are creating much greater emissions.

The principle of climate justice or "polluter pays" should apply. The richer nations that are creating the problem should compensate the poorer nations. And the level of a country's "development" should not be a factor. Several of the so called "developing" nations from the Kyoto protocol are now technically developed.

Michael Levi

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Finally, I believe if we want to get progress we need a new start-point. Not only is there the issue of developed vs developing nations but the US never ratified the Kyoto protocol.

I personally believe that the European Union, Australia and others are justified in calling for an agreement that is broader than the existing Protocol and that puts obligations on the United States and the emerging economies.

David Jones is global chief executive of Euro RSCG group and Havas Worldwide. He has worked with Kofi Annan's Campaign for Climate Justice, which aims to raise awareness of the impact of the changing environment on poor communities throughout the globe.

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Country Rank in Reduction of CO2 Emissions after Kyoto (1996 - 2006) (source, EIA, best on top)

Top 10

Afghanistan (1)
Congo (Kinshasa) (2)
Guam (3)
Eritrea (4)
Gabon (5)
Kyrgyzstan (6)
Zimbabwe (7)
Mauritania (8)
Macedonia (9)
Burundi (10)

Best of Europe

Denmark (12)
Sweden (19)

Middle of the Pack

Germany (45)
UK (46)
Switzerland (49)
'Ultraconservative' US (51)

European Laggards

Belgium (64)
France (65)
Finland (85)
Norway (88)
Italy (95)
Iceland (106)
Austria (112)
Greece (126)
Ireland (148)

Major Sinners

St. Kitts & Nevis (154)
US Virgin Islands (172)
Maldives (174)
Mauritius (175)
Seychelles (183)

Total countries and territories in survey: 205

It is all well to slam the US, but in fact, it improved by about as much as Germany or the UK following the signing of the Kyoto Protocol. The top performer, Afghanistan, was not a Kyoto signatory--and also not a place that most would want to live in. On the other hand, the inviting Maldives, one of the most vocal countries in expressing concern about climate change, managed to haul in 174th place, just about the bottom of the deck.

So, rhetoric is fine, but sometimes, the numbers also tell a story.

JPM, Zenium Limited | December 16 2:09am | [Permalink](#)

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The above columnists like Cayote chasing Roadrunner off a cliff face appear to be running on thin air. That'll be not only ignoring there's no science below their feet to support their pontificating but also the little matter of the majority of the planet, both citizens and Govts, don't give a hoot for the AGW junk science.

Namely the politicians and all the hangers-on at Copenhagen have NO PUBLIC MANDATE to make policy.

And despite 10 years of ever more shrill hysteria, Govt propaganda campaigns and media scare stories fabricated by that old ruse, Govt payroll crony scientists, people are increasingly switching off. That must be real depressing for the socialists and their insidious Tax & Control political agenda. Question is how many will be jailed for this blatant fraud and 10 years of lies (Antarctica, sea level rise, extreme weather etc etc all exposed by real science from real scientists).

AGW (and socialism) RIP

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