

Tricky Questions: Copenhagen climate summit

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**World
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Movement**

Aren't developing countries holding out against a deal?

Not at all, most developing countries are actually pushing for a stronger deal. In Copenhagen, over 100 developing countries strongly proposed a deal where rich countries would make serious cuts in emissions, and provide finance to help developing countries cut emissions and adapt to climate change.

Unfortunately, rich countries blocked this deal. In Bali two years ago, rich countries agreed to collectively cut their emissions by 25-40 per cent by 2020 on 1990 levels [which was a recommitment to the commitment they made by signing up to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)]. Yet none were willing to commit in Copenhagen to play their part in doing so.

These blocking tactics by rich countries halted negotiations throughout Copenhagen, and ultimately led to its failure. In the final evening of negotiations a 'deal' negotiated by just a few countries, outside of the UN process, was presented to the rest of the world; the Obama Accord. If agreed, this accord would have allowed rich countries to continue emitting for many decades to come.

The Obama Accord also said \$8 billion a year would be provided between 2010 and 2012 to help developing countries tackle climate change. However, this is not only a pitifully small amount compared to what is needed, but this money is nothing more than a reallocation of pre-existing aid commitments from other areas. Much of it is loans are to be spent through the World Bank, which would actually lock the developing world into deeper financial debt.

The US and UK told countries that if they did not sign this Accord, they would not get any of the money. This amounts to nothing more than

bribery. Yet despite this threat, some developing countries, including Tuvalu, Bolivia and Nicaragua, refused to let the Obama Accord become a UN document. The Accord has no official status within the UN, and it is yet to be seen how many countries across the world will actually sign-up to it.

Is it true that China ruined the chance of a good deal coming out of Copenhagen?

No. As outlined above, rich countries bear the responsibility for blocking progress in Copenhagen by refusing to cut their emissions. The US actually said its emissions would be as high in 2020 as in 1990. The EU said its own emissions would be just 10 per cent lower in 2020 than 1990. This is not in line either with the science or a deal that has justice at its heart.

Rich countries need to make large and quick cuts in emissions (at least 40 per cent on 1990 levels by 2020). This is a prerequisite of getting a deal that will be effective in tackling climate change, at the same time as being just for the world's poorest people. Without this, there was no chance of a good deal in Copenhagen.

Why wouldn't China even accept the rich country emissions targets be put in the Obama Accord?

The author Mark Lynas, who happened to be in the same room as the negotiations between a few countries, says China 'blocked' agreement in Copenhagen. He says that China prevented agreement on global targets for emissions by 2020 and 2050, as well as stopping rich countries committing to cut emissions by 80 per cent by 2050.

China didn't want to agree a global target for 2020 when rich countries had not agreed to do

their part in meeting it, as they feared it would mean China and other developing countries would have to do more than their fair share to make up the balance. Both global and rich country targets for 2050 would have implied a target for developing countries in 2050, but rich countries have yet to make the specific commitments to help developing countries access the finance and technology they will need to develop in a low carbon way to meet these targets, as the UNFCCC states they should. Without this, developing countries cannot be expected to take on targets for a problem they didn't cause.

If China had not blocked these targets, the Obama Accord would still have completely lacked rich country commitments around significant reduction in emissions in the next 10 years, the critical timeframe when cuts need to happen. Neither would it have provided the finance to help developing countries grow in a low carbon way and adapt to climate change. It would still have been a bad deal and climate change would have continued to devastate the lives of people around the world. In some ways having a weak deal would have made things worse by giving rich countries something to hide behind.

This is not to say that China is a major force for good on climate change. But the blaming of China by rich countries is hypocritical, unhelpful and seeks to deflect attention away from countries which are far more responsible for climate change.

Who's responsible for the climate change we've already seen?

When you look at the facts, it is clear that rich countries hold the historical responsibility for climate change. With around 20 per cent of the world's population, we are responsible for 70 per cent of man made greenhouse gas emissions so far. Developing countries, with 80 per cent of the world's population, are responsible for just 30 per cent of historical emissions.

Isn't China the biggest carbon emitter now?

China is the world's largest country in terms of population and has just overtaken the US as the world's highest emitter of carbon dioxide. However, this is because of the size of its population, rather than because it is an

overconsumer. China emits 4 tonnes of carbon dioxide per person, the same as the average for the whole world. In contrast, the UK and EU emit around 10 tonnes per person, and the US over 20 tonnes. We must consider population size along with emission level, otherwise a country could split itself into two and would no longer be responsible for the same level of action.

Furthermore, a lot of China's emissions are for making products consumed in rich countries. If emissions are calculated based on where consumption takes place, rather than on where things are produced, China's emissions are just 3 tonnes per person, the UK's are 13 tonnes, and the US's are 25 tonnes.

But rich country leaders seem to really want a deal. Weren't they doing everything they could?

The US and UK in particular wanted to be able to tell the media and their populations they had struck a 'deal'. However, rich country leaders did not want to commit to significant targets for reducing their emissions over the next decade, or find the money to help developing countries grow in a low carbon way and adapt to climate change. Essentially, what rich countries wanted was a bad deal, something that would get them off the hook with the growing movement against climate change in their countries, but that would prevent them from needing to take the decisive action that is needed. Of course, this is a very different thing from wanting to have an effective deal.

Aren't rich country emissions cuts irrelevant if we don't stop China's emissions from growing?

Given the fact that it is rich country emissions who have caused climate change so far, and that they will continue to make it worse until they radically reduce their emissions, stopping the growth in China's, and other developing countries', emissions is irrelevant if rich countries don't take the lead in cutting their emissions as quickly as possible.

For there to be effective solutions to climate change, the growth in the emissions of China and other developing countries will need to be curbed, halted, and ultimately fall. But this alone will not help tackle climate change if rich

countries are not radically cutting their emissions. Countries like China and India need rich countries:

- to demonstrate that it is possible to shift away from an addiction to fossil fuels
- to give them access to the resources and technology that will enable them to develop in a low carbon way

Hypocritically blaming China is not going to help find a solution. Serious commitments on reducing emissions and providing finance and technology would.

Why are we talking about equal rights to emit carbon dioxide when CO₂ is going to destroy us all? Shouldn't we just all be cutting emissions?

Climate change is and will affect everyone across the world, although it is the poorest who will suffer the most. In an ideal world we would all cut out emissions as much as possible. But this isn't an ideal world. Hundreds of millions of people still live in desperate poverty. Increasing access to energy is one thing needed to help tackle this poverty.

By signing up to the UNFCCC framework, rich countries agreed that they should be providing the financial and technological resources to meet energy needs in a carbon constrained world. Unfortunately this has not yet been provided.

It is critical to remember that for many developing countries, with populations already living on the edge of survival, the right to energy can help them access things like clean water and healthcare, and these are matters of critical importance. Rich countries have the responsibility to assist developing countries in doing this in a low carbon way.

Is the UN the right place for these talks to happen?

Yes. The UN is the only legitimate forum which brings together every country in the world. In 1992 all countries signed up to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. In this, rich countries committed to taking the lead in tackling climate change by:

- Cutting their own emissions
- Providing finance and technology to help developing countries cut emissions
- Provide resources to help countries vulnerable to climate change adapt

What is needed now is rich countries agreeing to implement the 1992 agreement. However, rich countries are trying to scrap this agreement to get rid of their obligations. Blaming the UN process for the failure of Copenhagen is one way in which they are seeking to do this.

Talks in Copenhagen did not fail to produce an effective and just outcome because they took place in the UN. They failed because rich countries refused to do what is needed. Furthermore, in Copenhagen the UN process was consistently sidelined by private discussions, bribery and bullying, further frustrating developing countries and undermining the UN process.

Rich countries like the US and UK now want negotiations to happen between smaller groups of countries in a less transparent way, as happens in trade negotiations. This would enable them to impose unjust and ineffective agreements. It is vital that all countries remain part of international negotiations on climate change.

I heard there was a small group of countries thrashing out a deal at the end of the negotiations. Why was a small group of countries meeting separately anyway?

The Danish government convened a meeting of several countries outside the UN process. The majority of them were rich, but also included major emerging economies such as China, India and South Africa, as well as a few other developing countries such Ethiopia.¹

Ultimately there is nothing that can be done to stop a few countries meeting in private. But the process replicated what has been seen for many years in the WTO; rich countries creating a meeting on their terms, negotiating with just a few developing countries, and then presenting

¹ It is not a coincidence that Ethiopia was invited; a few days earlier it had signed an agreement with France endorsing many EU policies and implicitly rejecting policies of the African Union. Other African countries were surprised and confused that Ethiopia chose to do so.

the resulting 'deal' as a fait accompli to the rest of the world.

The 'deal' reached in the small group was presented to the 192 countries which make up the UN. Several developing countries who had not been included in the small group refused to let the 'deal' be passed as a UN agreement as it failed completely to set in place the action needed, particularly from rich countries, to effectively tackle climate change.

What happens now?

The UN process is due to continue, with further meetings in Bonn during 2010, and in Mexico in November. It is likely that the US and other rich countries will continue to try to undermine the UN process by creating ad hoc meetings with selected guests at other points in the year.

Rich countries and major developing countries are meant to give their voluntary emission reduction targets for 2020 by 31 January 2010. These are likely to show that rich countries are failing to meet what they signed up to in Bali two years ago, whilst developing countries are actually collectively meeting the targets set then. The voluntary offers will hopefully form the basis of negotiations to be increased throughout 2010, rather than set in stone.

By the end of January 2010, we will have a better idea of which countries have signed-up to the Obama Accord. Check out the WDM website for the latest or contact us.

Some of the \$8 billion in finance for 2010 to 2012 will be made available this year. WDM will be campaigning for this to be grants not loans, spent through alternatives to the World Bank such as UN funds and local democratically accountable funds and counted as additional to aid budgets.

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