

What happened in Doha?

Analysis of the conduct and outcome of the COP 18 climate negotiations

8 December 2012

Just three days after Typhoon Pablo (Bopha) hit the Philippines and demonstrated the human cost of extreme weather in vulnerable countries, politicians at the Doha climate talks showed themselves to be out of touch with the reality of climate change, as they failed to increase the speed or scale of international efforts to cut carbon pollution.

The talks in Doha were always going to be a modest affair, but they failed to live up to even the historically low expectations. They did manage to agree a second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol, but with most of its major loopholes intact, making it of limited value in restricting emissions. On a 2015 deal and greater near-term ambition, governments agreed the bare minimum to be able to claim any progress at all. Some climate finance was put on the table by a few European countries, but nothing was done to scale up funding for vulnerable countries towards the previously agreed target of \$100 billion per year.

A large part of the reason for the failure was blocking tactics by the USA – in spite of President Obama's post-election climate promises – and also by Canada, New Zealand and Japan. At the heart of the problem is dirty energy: the stranglehold of fossil fuels on our economies must be broken if we are ever to see real progress.

The international process limps on, while the crisis accelerates.

Political performance of countries/groups

The USA

On arrival in Doha, the US delegation immediately launched into blocking progress on nearly every front. It consistently used procedural measures to try to stop discussion of key issues such as finance and loss & damage. While not a party to the Kyoto Protocol, the US sought to prevent progress in just about every other area.

Despite the devastation of Superstorm Sandy and polls showing majority support for climate policy, Obama's team exhibited no improvement from previous COPs. With his administration's subsidies of fossil fuel exports that could negate any domestic carbon pollution reduction, President Obama's legacy could turn out to be no better than his predecessor's.

China

We saw China taking active efforts, together with other developing countries, in pushing for a second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol with higher ambition and elimination of 'hot air', and for financial commitments to help developing countries to address climate change. This is good but not enough: time is running out for meeting the agreed 2°C temperature rise target. In the current atmosphere of collective lack of ambition, we need China to take a stronger leadership role to help construct the future post-2020 climate regime and to increase near term ambition. Key to China's mitigation of climate change will be restraint on the growth of coal use, and the expansion of renewable energy.

The European Union

This time Europe – usually seen as a leader on climate change comes away looking weak and divided, and unable to live up to its own rhetoric on ambition. Due to a collective failure of political courage, European governments chose to take the side of Poland, which demanded the right to keep 'hot air' credits awarded to them in the 1990s. This preserved a central flaw in the Kyoto Protocol. Europe also refused to go beyond a 20% emissions target, which would barely

decrease emissions from today's levels. The one faint glimmer of responsible behaviour on the part of the Europeans was that a few put climate finance pledges on the table.

Europe has a long way to go if it is to ever reclaim leadership on climate. A good start would be to raise its 2020 emissions cut target to 30% below 1990 levels – this must be done as soon as possible, and at latest by April 2014.

Anti-Kyoto countries

Canada and New Zealand have both pursued an approach of consistent blocking in these negotiations. Both have followed and supported US positions on many issues, including opposing common accounting rules.

Early in the COP, Canada said countries shouldn't expect any more money towards climate financing, backed away from promises of financing for Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Actions (NAMAs) and did not support providing funding for through the Green Climate Fund until "a new agreement applicable to all... be adopted by all parties".

New Zealand proposed that access to the Clean Development Mechanism should be open to countries that have not signed up to a Kyoto second commitment period – allowing them to profit from trading, without accepting a target for reducing emissions.

Japan has refused to sign up for the second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol and there is a real danger that it will even soften its pledge from 2009. The second largest donor has also refused to pledge money needed to prevent dangerous climate change.

Russia, which has based its economy on oil and gas and is one of the world's five largest polluters of the atmosphere, has refused to sign up for the second commitment period. With the world's largest stash of 'hot air', Russia's exclusion from the carbon market is good; however it will be difficult to prevent Russia from carrying over the unused emission rights from the first commitment period under a new treaty in 2015.

How will the LDCs and AOSIS feel about the outcome?

LDCs' main concern will be the lack of certainty on climate finance during the 2013-2015 period. The creation of an international mechanism for loss and damage is delayed for one year when in fact it should have been decided here – though agreeing on the mechanism at all is a highly significant move and one that many thought would never happen here. The link between climate finance and adaptation is weak.

AOSIS has been asking for an increase in ambition for both climate action and adaptation. Every COP, the outcome falls far short of what the small island states have been asking. Despite being frustrated or disappointed every year, they have persevered pushing for an ambitious outcome in all fronts of the negotiations.

In an unambitious COP, and faced with consistent blocking by the USA and others, these groupings of highly vulnerable countries felt this was the best they could achieve.

Outcomes on key issues

What happened in the Kyoto Protocol?

The Kyoto 2 targets – an aggregate of 18% below 1990 – are insufficient to meet the planetary crisis, as they are not within the range demanded by IPCC scientists. Governments agreed to 'revisit' these targets in 2014 with a view to increasing their ambition and agreed to the technical and legal means that would enable them to raise their targets. This will create pressure domestically for countries to increase their targets, notably for the EU to increase to at least 30%.

With Poland intransigent, the deal failed to get rid of the 'hot air' in the Kyoto system and enhance the environmental integrity of the Protocol. In spite of strong demands from civil society and from vulnerable country governments, the outcome on hot air was limited to a declaration by countries that they would not buy such credits, and would instead place them in a reserve.

Governments agreed that the Protocol will be implemented from 1 January 2013. Those that want to may choose ('opt in') to apply the amendments provisionally (i.e. giving them legal force prior to ratification and entry into force of the amendments). An earlier proposal to apply the amendments provisionally with an 'opt out' clause was deleted. This was a missed opportunity to signal the commitment in the strongest possible terms (i.e. legal) to the Protocol as well as to the continued need for a legally binding regime now and as part of the 2015 negotiations. The amendments will enter into force 90 days after 3/4 of the Parties to the Protocol have submitted their instruments of acceptance to the UN.

However for all its weaknesses, adoption of the a second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol is a signal of the continued importance of a multilateral, legally-binding, rules based regime, and this continuity will provide some influence on the evolution of the 2015 deal. For investors, the adoption maintains a risk that as climate change intensifies political pressure for a tightening of the regime, investments in dirty energy technologies like coal may end up stranded assets.

What happened on finance?

Although some countries (including Germany, France, UK, Denmark) pledged finance at Doha, amounting in total to around \$10 billion, there was no additional finance offered by the US. Moreover, countries failed to agree on a firm figure for finance for the period 2013-2015. The text only “encourages” parties not to allow levels of funding to drop from the \$30 billion pledged for 2010-2012, when in fact it needs to increase significantly (Greenpeace and developing countries were calling for \$60 billion for the 2013-2015 period). The increase is need to help countries adapt to the growing impacts of climate change, and to scale up towards the \$100 billion a year by promised by 2020 by Governments in the run up to the Copenhagen summit. There was however agreement on a work programme on long term finance that would look at how developed countries would scale up to deliver on their commitments, and new provisions to develop ‘monitoring, reporting, and verification’ systems for finance, which should allow for greater transparency in future on how countries are progressing against their finance pledges.

Throughout the talks the US obstructed progress on language that would have given more confidence and certainty to vulnerable countries about the scaling up of climate finance. The EU was also in a weak position, since although some European countries made pledges, the EU as a whole did not agree to put a figure on the table for their contribution.

What happened on forests?

Doha marks the end of the process started in Bali, whereby developed countries agreed to provide financing to tropical forest countries in exchange for action to reduce deforestation and forest degradation. In a stalemate, Brazil and other G77 countries objected to finalizing the details on the verification of REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation) actions in response to the failure of the USA and other developed countries to provide details on the necessary financing for REDD. In the end, the negotiators merely agreed to the one thing they can always agree on: to continue to negotiate more next year.

What happened in taking forward action on pre 2020 ambition?

Governments agreed to a work plan on closing the mitigation ambition gap which will take the form of roundtables, workshops and technical papers in 2013. But a plan to close the gap, and actually closing it, are two different things. This track must not be another talking shop but must be the source of meaningful action by all countries.

What happened to the negotiations on a new binding deal in 2015?

Governments agreed to a work plan to take forward discussions on the 2015 deal, including a timeline for developing draft negotiating text (elements of a text by 2014 and a full negotiating text by mid-2015) and the adoption of agreement by COP21 (2015). This was the bare minimum they could deliver and still claim to be moving forwards. It is now up to governments to negotiate the content, specifically concrete proposals that will deliver real, quantified cuts in emissions.

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