

*Critical Issues of climate change
and climate change governance*



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Soumya Dutta,
"Beyond Copenhagen Coalition".

Though the greenhouse gases were first 'officially' recognized as 'pollutants' and contributing to the warming of the Earth (resulting in the change of its reasonably stable climate regimes) only as late as 1972 – at the Stockholm environmental conf., the scientific recognition of this fact is much older. It looks somewhat surprising then, that the first global effort to come to some kind of an international agreement to curb the emission of green house gases (GHGs) were started only two decades later, in the Rio conference, which fructified into the Kyoto Protocol (KP) another five years later in 1997. The KP came into force even later – in February 2005, with the signing of the required no. of nations. This is in sharp contrast to the other global treaty to curb & eventually eliminate another class of dangerous pollutants – Ozone Depleting Substances (ODS), mainly Chloro Fluoro Carbons (CFCs) and the like, through the reasonably quick and effective implementation of the 'Montreal Protocol'.

The reason for this reluctance and long delay to even admit and later, address the GHG emission problem, is very much connected to the extraordinary dependence of our industrial civilization on fossil carbon fuels, for about four-fifths of its energy needs, and the extreme difficulty it finds itself in trying to evolve other alternative sources of energy that are affordable, available in large enough quantities and suits its intensive-conversion-consumption model of energy use. It is also reflective of the fact that the present relentless 'profit-growth-production-consumption-waste generation-occupation of Commons' model and the conceptualization of growth in terms of only the consumption levels, has become the overwhelmingly dominant development paradigm of our societies.

What the 'Kyoto Protocol' agreed – The KP is an internationally binding agreement that –

The rich industrialized countries (called Annex 1 countries) will cut down their GHG emissions by about 5-8% by the year 2012 (the end of the 1st commitment period) to below their 1990 levels of GHG emissions. This is the first of the four pillars of KP – called Mitigation of the problem, and is acceptance that these rich countries have contributed maximum to the problem. The other countries – whether poor or emerging economies - did not have any such reduction commitment till 2012. In reality, most of these rich & polluting countries have actually increased their emissions by anywhere between 15-22 % over their 1990 emission levels! The emissions by various major countries are shown below.

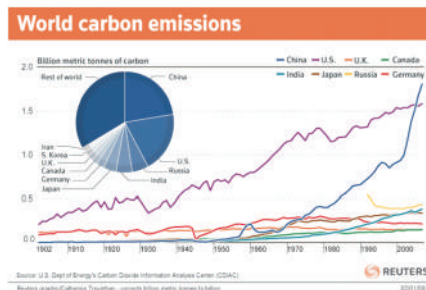


Fig. 1 – Cumulative (historical) US emissions (roughly the area under top violet line) are by far the largest. It is only in the recent past that China (rising dark blue line - with over 4 times the US population) matched its current emission.²⁾ That the rich countries accept that in exploiting a disproportionately larger share of the earth’s resources to build up their wealth & infrastructure, they have used both the resources and the earth’s atmospheric (and oceanic) carbon space – which is a Commons for all – and thus they have a ‘Historical Responsibility’ in creating the problem of GHG-driven global warming and the resultant climate change, along with the responsibility of compensating the poorer countries and societies for the ‘Adaptation’ to this erratically changing climate regimes . Adaptation is the 2nd pillar in KP, as it was formulated. Though all have responsibilities for mitigating the problems, the levels are different – ‘common but differentiated responsibility’. And the vulnerability of countries & societies are very different, as shown below (12 most vulnerable countries under five climate induced hazards).

Six Climate Threats, and the 12 Countries Most at Risk

Low Income			Middle Income	
Drought	Flood	Storm	Coastal 1m	Agriculture
Malawi	Bangladesh	Philippines	All low-lying Island states	Sudan
Ethiopia	China	Bangladesh	Vietnam	Senegal
Zimbabwe	India	Madagascar	Egypt	Zimbabwe
India	Cambodia	Vietnam	Tunisia	Mali
Mozambique	Mozambique	Moldova	Indonesia	Zambia
Niger	Laos	Mongolia	Mauritania	Morocco
Mauritania	Pakistan	Haiti	China	Niger
Eritrea	Sri Lanka	Samoa	Mexico	India
Sudan	Thailand	Tonga	Myanmar	Malawi
Chad	Vietnam	China	Bangladesh	Algeria
Kenya	Benin	Honduras	Senegal	Ethiopia
Iran	Rwanda	Fiji	Libya	Pakistan

Source: World Bank

Fig.2 – The 12 most vulnerable countries facing five disastrous climate change threats – and none of the rich Annex 1 countries figure in this list! It’s only the poorer countries who have not contributed to the problem! Thus, the principle of justice demands that the rich polluting countries pay for the adaptation financing required for these countries, apart from reducing their climate changing GHG emissions. Note that India is in the list of most vulnerable countries in three (3) of these disaster risks categories!

3. The third pillar of the KP is Financing, which follows from the first two, and this was supposed to come from the rich polluting countries to the poorer and vulnerable countries. Nothing much has happened in the 13 years from KP's formulation or even in the last 5 + years after KP came into force. The earlier estimates of \$200 billion (about Rs.930,000 crores at present exchange rate) per year as the amount needed to be supported to the poorer countries, has now been brought down to the absurdly small \$10 billion per year from 2010-2012, and proposals are there that \$100 billion per year need to be found from 2012 onwards, for climate financing. And even here, discussions about 'part loans' instead of grants, commercial interest driven private funding, in place of public funding etc, are clouding the scene.
4. The fourth pillar of KP is supposed to be Technology Transfer, with the idea that the countries of the world will need to move towards an affordable low carbon economy, that the poorer & technologically less developed ones will need technologies to cope with the unfolding climate crisis, and that the required technologies are being developed/ will be developed mostly by the richer & technologically more advanced countries. Even in this area, progress has got bogged down with the Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) regime – which is part of WTO agreements – coming in the way of free transfer of climate friendly technologies to those who might need these most. The 'private property' nature of patents and other IPRs are major road blocks, and the richer countries are taking shelter behind the IPR-WTO shields. In addition, many indigenous methods to cope with the situation are not recognized as valuable adaptation / mitigation technologies – often even by the developing country governments being in the grip MNC technology vendors.

It needs to be kept in mind, that though the KP talked about Mitigation in terms of actual reduction of GHG emissions (targets) by the rich countries, under US pressure, the carbon trading, offsetting and other market based mechanisms were introduced as "flexible mechanisms", which allowed all the rich countries not to cut down their own GHG emissions, by paying some money to some big corporate/ industries in developing countries (non Annex 1) for some supposedly "Clean development Mechanism" (CDM) projects, while the actual sufferers are the small & marginal farmers, fishing people, mountain dwellers, adivaasi/ tribal populations etc in our countries. Thus the globalization of corporate profits at the expense of climate crisis impacted poor communities continues in the name of market based solutions. Markets have their own rules, don't prefer the 'weaker', and will serve the highest bidders, where poorer and disadvantaged communities have very little opportunity to 'compete'.

Recent Developments in Climate Change Negotiations / Governance -- The world wide negotiations, meetings, even wheeler-dealer arrangements on the governance of Climate Change / Climate Change Policy, has recently (from mid/ late 2009) taken some 'curious turns'.

Till sometime before the hugely publicized – and as many felt, overhyped – COP 15 (Conference Of Parties No.15) held in Copenhagen in the second & third weeks of December 2009, lots of ‘stake-holders’ in these negotiations were at least partially hopeful of some kind of forward movement in global agreement making – if not a final agreement. This resulted from the apparent willingness of the European Union to cut down emissions – if not to the extent required by science, for mitigation – at least to some level for others to consider that a forward step. This was also strengthened by the Bali Declaration, and by some big emerging economies ‘voluntary declarations’ to cut down the energy intensity of their economies by 25% or higher soon etc. These were all marginal steps to a positive path for the international negotiations to build upon, and many hoped that COP15 will improve upon these.

That hope started declining sometime before the Copenhagen conference, as the host Danish Government and EU started backtracking on their earlier ‘promises’, taking advantage of the ever-treacherous US’s usual non-commitment. The emerging economies of BASIC (Brazil, South Africa, India & China) also played their ‘dirty cards’, betraying the trust of the unified G-77, particularly those of the LDC’s and Island nations who are facing the greatest threats. Finally, this collective of the betrayal won the day, and with active connivance of the Danish, came up with an atrocious “Copenhagen Accord”, that seeks to negate the few positive features of the “Kyoto Protocol”, like the acceptance of Historical Responsibility, of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities, of the very concepts of (even minimal) climate justice. Even some of the comparatively less regressive countries like Germany were sidelined, and thwarted in their attempts to enforce some binding cuts in emissions for the rich countries.

On the last extended day, these countries tried to push this so-called accord down the throats of all the assembled country-representatives, which was rightly resisted by many – particularly by the LDCs and small Island nations. Some countries rose under the bold leadership of Bolivia, and challenged this absolutely un-democratic method and unjust “accord”. As a result, this was only “noted” and not put forward as an agreement. What also emerged from this ugly dealing is the beginnings of a “People’s World Conference on Climate Change & Rights of Mother Earth”, proposed by Bolivia, and supported by a no. of other nations. This was proposed to take into primary concern –

1. The voices of the oppressed / marginalized communities, and that of the civil society, and
2. To bring into centre-stage of climate negotiations – the concept of the needs and rights of the earth itself, as she provides for all humanity and the entire living world, and as the earth’s life-support systems are now being threatened by the greed & exploitation of the world-wide capitalist industrial system.

What resulted from this is the hugely responded people’s world conference in

the Andean city of Cochabamba in Bolivia, in the 4th week of April 2010, where thousands of people's groups along with some 40 country representatives, worked tirelessly to come up with clear earth-friendly and survival oriented demands and formulations on many areas involved, including the latest science of climate change, including new modeling projections of the safe atmospheric limit of CO₂, and the max safe limit of temperature rise, not to push the earth-systems too far.

Till a few months ago, the recent advances in climate science and the voices demanding justice and equity, were mostly outside the considerations of the official "negotiating texts", but what changed for the better is that – at least as points for consideration & negotiation, some of the concrete demands and positions put together as the voices and concerns of world-wide people's movements, resistant struggles, peasants movements, indigenous people's groups etc – have been accepted in the official negotiating texts (though still within brackets) as issues of negotiation. This was achieved largely as a result of the "Plurinational Government" of Bolivia, along with some supporting Govts and very large number of people's movements, putting huge pressure on the negotiating teams & 'parties'. Some of the demands and concerns put forth by the People's World Conference on Climate Change & Mother Earth's Rights, that were accepted as negotiating points (as reported – verification awaited), at the August 1st week consultations at Bonn, Germany, are –

- 50 % reduction of greenhouse gasses emission by developed countries for second period of commitments from the Kyoto Protocol years 2013 to 2017.
- Stabilize the rise of temperature to 1 C and 300 parts per million of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.
- To guarantee an equitable distribution of atmospheric space, taking into account the climate debt of emissions by developed countries for developing countries.
- Full respect for the Human Rights and the inherent rights of indigenous peoples, women, children and migrants.
- Full recognition to the United Nations Declaration on of Indigenous Peoples Rights.
- Recognition and defense of the rights of Mother Earth to ensure harmony with nature.
- Guarantee the fulfillment of the commitments from the developed countries though the building of an International Court of Climate Justice.
- Rejection to the new mechanisms of carbon markets that transfer the responsibility of the reduction in emissions of greenhouse gases from developed countries to developing countries.
- Promotion of measures that change the consumption patterns of the developed countries.
- Adoption of necessary measures in all relevant forums to be excluded from the protection of the intellectual property rights to technologies and ecologically sustainable useful to mitigate climate change.
- Developed countries will allocate 6% of their national gross product to actions relatives to Climate Change.

- Integrated management of forest, to mitigation and adaptation, without market mechanics and ensuring the full participation of indigenous peoples and local communities.
- Prohibition the conversion of natural forest for plantations, since the monoculture plantations are not forest, instead should encourage the protection and conservation of natural forests.

In addition, the COP-10 of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) has also adopted a moratorium on dangerous geo-engineering experiments. These are stepping stones towards a earth-sustaining, just and equitable climate agreement, but several questions remain.

Why agriculture must be brought to the centre of climate change negotiations – If we care to look into both the actual matter in the negotiating texts, and the various demands & ‘voices’ that are surrounding the climate conferences and negotiations, we see a strange neglect of the issues related to agriculture and farming livelihoods. Compared to other important issues, like forests or energy or even transport – which have rightly received high attention, the provider of the most basic and important source of energy and also the largest number of livelihoods in developing countries – AGRICULTURE, has received abysmally low attention. In the background of the multiple crises – - of a looming world-wide food shortage, - the stagnation or even decline of soil productivity in large swathes of the intensively-farmed lands (modern industrial agriculture) in most of the world, -the alarming decline in availability of water for agriculture and increasing competition that this faces with large scale diversion of precious water to industry, power plants and large urban centers, - the growing thrust towards agro-fuel which is diverting both arable land & produced-food from the primary purpose of feeding human beings to feeding ever-hungry cars, the increasing unpredictability and erratic nature of the climate patterns that farmers depended upon for centuries, - and the impending crisis of peak-oil – We cannot afford to put the larger picture of food & agriculture in the relative obscurity that this is in now, but must bring them to the centre-stage of climate negotiations.

In this connection, we must highlight that, traditional / organic agricultural practices - including animal husbandry, as practiced by third-world farmers for generations, has immense potential to be a key adaptation as well as mitigation measure. This is particularly so in light of the huge total energy consumption and GHG emissions caused by ‘modern’ industrial mode of intensive agriculture and ‘factory farming’ of animals for meat production. By some reasonable estimates, these two together contributes anywhere between 32 – 40 % of the total GHG emission! Also, agriculture and animal rearing contributes to the largest number of livelihoods & jobs in the developing countries, and erratic climate patterns are impacting them the most, needing immediate but sustainable adaptation measures. Beyond Copenhagen Coalition will strive to put the issues of agriculture and small-holder farmers in their right place.

Our expectations from COP-16 and the follow-up -- At a time when the world

climate change crisis governance has entered a crucial make-or-break phase, along with the intensification of many climate induced disasters, it is unfortunate that the worlds governments, media, institutions and the public in general has lost focus on these issues. The “Beyond Copenhagen Coalition” (formed in mid 2009) is trying to keep this focus, to bring out the voices of the impacted communities, to bring agriculture in the centre of climate negotiations – as it affects the most number of people and also holds large promise for both mitigation and adaptation, and sensitize various stakeholders through continuing informed dialogues. We will continue to push these people’s agendas before, during and after the COP-16 in Cancun, Mexico. We will continue to widen the engagements with both national & international players and stakeholders, particularly in those areas of concern, which impacts the poor and marginalized communities in developing countries the most. And COP-16 will give us an opportunity to enlarge these engagements beyond national borders and forge alliances across countries and ethnicities.

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PAIRVI

G-30, First Floor, Lajpat Nagar-III, New Delhi-110024 (India)

Ph. +91 11 29841266 | Email: pairvidelhi1@gmail.com

Website: www.pairvi.org | Blog: beyondcph.blogspot.com