

Copenhagen Accord: Changing the framework of global climate change agreements for ineffective and iniquitous action

A critique by the Centre for Science and Environment,

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The Copenhagen Accord was pushed through in the last hours of the disastrous 15th Conference of Parties to the Climate Convention on Friday December 18, 2009 (see [Down To Earth January 1-15, 2010](#) and blog '[My Copenhagen Diary](#)' by Sunita Narain for detailed account of meeting). However, when the Accord was presented to the plenary, there was no consensus on the process and substance of the document. It was finally agreed to 'take note' of the Accord. However, as the proponents of the Copenhagen Accord are powerful countries, there is concerted action to get it accepted and supported by all. There is however, a lack of clarity on the legal status of the Accord and how it will be incorporated into the formal decision of the conference of parties. There is also lack of clarity if the Accord replaces the stuck two-track approaches of the Kyoto Protocol and the Long Term Cooperative Action or not.

The question to examine is what is the Copenhagen Accord and what should be India's position on its future?

A. Will the Copenhagen Accord help the world combat climate change? It has been agreed that to avoid catastrophic changes the world needs to reduce emissions drastically and urgently. Till date, the world has been negotiating on an interim target by Annex 1 countries – 40 per cent reduction by 2020. What does the Accord say and do?

Clauses 1, 2 and 4 of the Copenhagen Accord lay out its intentions for emission reduction as follows:

- We recognize the scientific view that the increase in global temperature should be below 2 degrees Celsius on the basis of equity and in the context of sustainable development.
- We agree that deep cuts in global emissions are required to hold the increase in global temperature below 2°C.
- We should cooperate in achieving the peaking of global and national emissions as soon as possible.
- Annex I parties commit to implement individually or jointly quantified economy wide emission targets for 2020 to be submitted for compilation by the secretariat. Annex 1 parties, that are parties to the Kyoto Protocol will strengthen the emission reduction initiated by the Kyoto Protocol. Delivery of reductions and financing by developing countries will be measured, reported and verified in accordance with guidelines of the COP.

The problems with the Accord on the issue of emission reduction are as follows:

1. The Copenhagen Accord uses weak and inconsequential language on the matter of cutting emissions from industrialized countries. In fact, it sets up a framework for cutting future emissions, which is bound to take the world to climate catastrophe.
2. The Accord recognizes the scientific view that the increase in global temperatures should be below 2°C but does not **commit** nations to the 2°C or set out a pathway to ensuring this to happen. This is when there is a growing realization that even 2°C may be too high and that the world needs to cap emission to contain temperature to 1.5°C. In fact, a leaked UNFCCC study showed that pledges offered by industrialized countries will put the planet on track to an average temperature increase of at least 3°C. Sadly, the effects of this temperature increase will largely be felt by the poor and the vulnerable in nations.
3. On the matter of peaking of emissions, the Copenhagen Accord will have disastrous consequences. It is well accepted that Annex 1 countries should have already peaked in terms of national emissions by 2000. In other words, these countries have to now reduce, with no space to grow further. The Copenhagen Accord leaves the space for Annex I nations to continue emitting by stating '*we should cooperate in achieving the peaking of global and national emissions as soon as possible*'. So, it does not set time-bound targets for emission reductions from industrialized countries. Instead it simply says that Annex I nations commit to implement individually or jointly the quantified industry wide emission targets for 2020 that they will themselves submit to the secretariat.
4. The Copenhagen Accord is meaningless because it depends on a voluntary and domestic target for emission reduction. Under the proposed framework, Annex 1 countries will be allowed to set their own domestic targets, whatever these may be. Going by past experience and looking at the trend of domestic targets, this may more likely than not amount to nothing. The US domestic bill will amount to reductions of 3% over 1990 levels by 2020, and if all international offsets are taken into account, the US can still increase its domestic emissions till 2030. This is when it is well accepted that the US must decrease emissions by at least 40 per cent by 2020. ***In other words, the Accord legitimizes the US and other big rich country polluters right to pollute, which will be devastating for us.***

B. Does the Copenhagen Accord provide a robust framework based on equitable burden sharing for global action to combat climate change?

The biggest flaw in the Copenhagen Accord is that it aims to change the framework for future negotiations on climate change and negate the provisions of the UNFCCC. Till now, the global climate agreement was premised on two

issues: one that industrialized countries, primarily responsible for creating and responsible singularly for the stock of gases in the atmosphere must take the first action to reduce. And two, that these countries must provide finance and technology for the developing world to make the transition to low-carbon economies and to avoid emissions. Therefore, sharing the global carbon budget was not a matter of ideology but of practice to build a framework for action and transition. However, the Copenhagen Accord dismantles this completely by doing the following:

1. **It promotes a framework for future agreements based on pledge and review.** In other words, industrialized countries will be allowed to voluntarily pledge their domestic targets, which will be aggregated at the global level. The target will be self-chosen and voluntary, even if it adds up to nothing.
2. **The Copenhagen Accord will completely overwrite the principles of historical emissions and equity in burden sharing.** The reason is simple: as the world will no longer set targets based on historical and current emissions, the issue of equity in burden sharing will be erased. Currently, equity is manifested in the agreements, through the setting of targets for emission reduction. It is for this reason that the Kyoto Protocol accepted that industrialized countries must first reduce emissions and set their targets, based on their contribution to both historical and current emissions. Once the Copenhagen Accord is accepted and the framework for agreements is changed, so that all countries set their targets or announce their actions for emission reduction, the concept of burden sharing has been lost completely. No longer will the actions required by the Annex 1 (industrialized countries) be based on the apportionment of the carbon space.
3. **The costly burden of the transition to low carbon economies has already shifted to developing countries like India.** The UNFCCC secretariat estimates that based on the stated pledges of different countries, developing countries will cut double the amount of emissions than what the Annex 1 countries will do by 2020. The current 'pledges' of Annex 1 countries require them as a group to cut only 2.1 GtCO₂e by 2020. The voluntary emission reductions taken on by China, India, South Africa and others add up to as much as 3.7 GtCO₂e – more than what all industrialised countries will do by 2020. In addition, Brazil and Indonesia (and others) will further reduce forest-based emissions by 1.5 Gt by 2020. In this way, the burden of transition has conveniently shifted to the developing world. This is when the industrialised world is currently responsible for over 60 per cent of cumulative emissions till 2007.
4. **Once the principle of equity is abandoned and past responsibility is erased, then industrialized nations have no obligation to pay for the transition in the developing world or provide technology at favourable terms.** The transition to low-carbon economies will be costly. It is also clear that developing countries must build the low-carbon economies today, not first invest in polluting technologies and then clean

up. But this transition to high-end renewable and other energy efficient technologies will cost developing countries funds they do not have. Therefore, this framework will do nothing to provide for that leapfrog. It will be devastating for the world for this reason alone.

5. **This change in the framework means we accept the need for us to take on domestic actions at par with the actions being taken by the developed world. In the future, the pressures on the weaker nations will grow to do more.** Australia in its endorsement to the Copenhagen Accord has announced a weak and inconsequential target of cutting emissions by 5 per cent over 2000 level, which is actually a huge increase over its 1990 base-year. But worse, it has said that it would only do more, if and once, countries like India and China take on verifiable targets. Similarly, the US, which is committed to building coal-based power stations domestically, has written to the World Bank to cancel all coal based power stations in the developing world. These double-standards will be legitimized by the Copenhagen Accord, because it would accept that the basis of action is no longer equity in burden sharing, but the convenience of large polluters to set domestic targets.

C. Does the Copenhagen Accord create a framework to provide developing countries with the resources to make the leap to cleaner technology, lower emissions, build capacity and adapt to the impacts of existing climate change? Is the finance promised by developed nations new, additional, predictable (from public funds) and unconditional?

The proponents of the Copenhagen Accord have been demanding that the Accord be put into action as soon as possible so that the much needed finance can be operationalized. India was under tremendous pressure to not block the Accord as other vulnerable and poor countries would not be able to avail of the 'generous' finance being put forward by the developed countries. Clauses 7, 8, 9 and 10 lay down the financial provisions

- A Copenhagen Green Climate Fund shall be established as an operating entity of the financial mechanism of the Convention
- A variety of approaches will be used to enhance the cost effectiveness of and to promote mitigation actions.
- The collective commitment of developed countries is to provide new and additional resources approaching USD 30 billion for adaptation and mitigation for the period 2010-2012.
- Developed countries commit to jointly mobilizing USD 100 billion a year by 2020 to address the needs of developed countries in the context of meaningful mitigation action and transparency on implementation.

- The funding will come from a wide variety of sources, public and private, bilateral and multilateral including alternative sources of finance,

There are no details to be found in the Accord about the Copenhagen Green Climate Fund -- who will contribute, how much and on what basis and who will get funds and on what basis. It is also not clear if this money will only go to nations who sign on to this vaguely worded and weak deal.

This provision overwrites the financial agreement of the UNFCCC, which is clear: polluters must pay. The agreement was that industrialized countries, based on their historical contributions, had to provide funds for the transition in the developing and emerging world. But the Accord, wants the agreement for funds de-linked and dismantled.

It also wants to 'subtly' divide the world between the emerging countries – who allegedly do not need the funds – and the rest of the developing world – vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

The open question is the 'money' itself: where will it come from and will it be additional to the development assistance provided today and will it be public or private sources? Developing countries have for long argued that the market is prone to failure and that any finance for adaptation and mitigation must be from public sources and should be new and additional to existing ODA budgets.

So, little to offer. Promise of money, but as yet more in the nature of a 'bribe', to induce the smaller countries to agree to join the coalition of the willing.

Read also: [India should not support the Copenhagen Accord, says CSE, Move over boys and girls, the men are here: the future of climate negotiations and why India wants the Accord](#)