

SPECIAL BULLETIN ON GLOBAL PROCESSES*

Bulletin No. 2; December 7, 2001

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SEVENTH MEETING OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES OF THE FRAMEWORK CONVENTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE

29 October – 10 November, 2001; Marrakech, Morocco

Background: *The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was adopted in 1992 to combat climate change by dealing with its causes and responding to its adverse effects. Its objective is to stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level and within a timeframe sufficient to allow ecosystems to adapt naturally, to ensure that food production is not threatened and to enable economic development to proceed in a sustainable manner. In 1998, the Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change was agreed upon by countries as a further step to meet this objective of the convention. Since then, countries have been negotiating the details of this protocol with the aim of having it enter into force by September 2002 when the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) is convened in Johannesburg.*

Report: *Governments, meeting in Marrakech 29 October – 10 November 2001, met to agree on a set of rules that would enable countries to ratify and subsequently implement the Kyoto Protocol. After three years of intensive negotiations, countries agreed to move forward by adopting a set of decisions on four key areas: (a) making available financial resources and technology to developing countries (including for adaptation to climate change); (b) the operation of the Kyoto Protocol mechanisms (Clean Development Mechanism, Joint Implementation, and Emissions Trading); (c) how land use and land use change and forestry activities should be treated; (d) the adoption of a compliance regime.*

These decisions are expected to pave the way for the Kyoto Protocol to take effect even with the United States, the biggest emitter of greenhouse gasses, opting to abandon the process. From this standpoint, the Marrakech meeting can be judged to be a success. While the concessions given to some countries have reduced its effectiveness, the Kyoto Protocol remains, for now, the only viable way of moving forward in dealing with climate change.

Many stakeholders from both North and South were present during the meeting. Environmentalists, industry, women, indigenous peoples, workers, youth, local governments, and religious organizations actively intervened and participated in the negotiations and, with varying degrees of success, had a discernible influence on the process.

* This special bulletin, a continuing series on global processes, was produced with the support of the Initiative on Globalization, Environment, and Communities of The Ford Foundation. This Initiative seeks to respond to the emerging set of challenges brought by globalization for the alleviation of poverty and injustice worldwide, especially as it affects communities. Copies of this and other bulletins in the series may be found at the following location on the WRI website: http://governance.wri.org/project_description2.cfm?ProjectID=148

This is a special bulletin on the seventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP) of the Framework Convention on Climate Change held last month in Marrakech. This special bulletin is intended to give a brief overview on the meeting and its results to funders and civil society organizations. The COP is the highest governing body of the UNFCCC. It meets annually to make political and legal decisions that are intended to provide momentum to worldwide activities that respond to climate change by dealing with its causes and responding to its adverse effects. In the last three years, meetings of the COP have focused on the Kyoto Protocol and how to make it come into effect. Although countries adopted this protocol in 1998, the details of how it was to be implemented were deferred to further negotiations. This process ended with the Marrakech meeting when countries agreed to a set of rules that should enable all parties, except the United States, to ratify the protocol.

As reported in the Earth Negotiations Bulletin (www.iisd.ca/linkages/climate/cop7/), over 4000 participants from 172 governments, 234 intergovernmental, non-governmental and other observer organizations, including 166 media outlets, attended the meeting.

PARTICIPATION BY STAKEHOLDERS

As in previous meetings of the COP, many stakeholders from both North and South were present and actively participated in the meeting. Environmentalists and industry were the most active. Women, indigenous peoples, workers, youth, local governments, and religious organizations also actively participated. These stakeholders, in varying degrees, had a discernible influence on the process.

The environmental organizations, for example, actively lobbied to ensure the environmental integrity of the Kyoto Protocol. Without such intervention, the final agreement would have been much worse from an environmental standpoint. Women successfully obtained a decision improving the participation of women in the convention processes. While indigenous peoples did not succeed in getting the COP to establish a special working group on their issues, for a group that has just started to get involved in the process, they were able to strongly articulate their concerns. It is clear that it is only a matter of time before the COP would have to pay more attention to their concerns.

A significant aspect of this meeting was that it was the first COP that was held in an Africa, the region that is expected to suffer the most from both climate change and the related environmental threat of desertification. As a result, many issues important to developing countries, especially the least developed ones, such as adverse impacts of climate change, adaptation and financial resources were given attention during the meeting.

THE CORE ISSUES

Four sets of issues had to be negotiated during the meeting. Following a political agreement adopted in Bonn in July 2001, governments had to agree on the details of (a) financial resources and technology; (b) the Kyoto Protocol mechanisms; (c) land use and land use change and forestry activities; and (d) a compliance regime.

Financial Resources and Technology Transfer

Providing the necessary resources so that developing countries can actively participate in global efforts to reduce or limit greenhouse gas emissions and begin adapting to the adverse effects of climate change was the most important issue for most developing countries. To address this issue, the Marrakech meeting established various funds for developing countries: (a) Special Climate Fund for mitigation and adaptation; (b) a Least developed country Fund for the poorest countries; and (c) An Adaptation Fund financed from the proceeds of the Kyoto Protocol mechanisms. Political pledges, specifying contributions to these funds, were made by European and other developed countries (except Japan and the United States). Decisions on capacity building and technology transfer were also adopted as part of the package.

The Kyoto Mechanisms

Agreeing on the rules of the Kyoto Protocol mechanisms was one of the most difficult tasks of the meeting. These mechanisms – the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), Joint Implementation (JI) and Emissions Trading – are all intended to provide developed countries flexibility in their efforts to reach their Kyoto emission limitation/reduction targets. Collectively, developed countries had agreed in Kyoto to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by approximately 5% but countries like the United States, Japan, Canada, Australia and Russia had said that they could not make these targets (by 2008-2012, the first commitment period of the protocol) unless these mechanisms were fully operational. The debate on the mechanisms focused on how to make sure their operation does not affect the environmental integrity of the protocol by allowing countries to effectively reduce their targets or to transfer their legal obligations to other parties.

In Marrakech, there was full agreement on the rules for these mechanisms. Of interest is the adoption of the rules on CDM. On one hand, CDM could be an innovative way of promoting sustainable development in the Global South, including in local communities, through projects in energy efficiency and renewable energy (large scale and small scale), sustainable transportation, and ecologically based agriculture. On the other hand, CDM projects, if implemented without transparency and public participation, could become a major source of conflict in many developing countries.

Land use and Land Use Change and Forestry

A third contentious issue in the Marrakech negotiations was the debate on how land use and land use change and forestry (LULUCF) was to be treated under the Kyoto Protocol. LULUCF activities result in greenhouse gas emissions but they also enhance and promote the conservation of carbon sinks. Lack of precision in the existing methodologies have made it difficult to ascertain the extent to which countries can report such changes in carbon stocks and thus making it difficult to report with accuracy the extent LULUCF is a source of emissions. Even more difficult to determine is measuring and verifying the extent that LULUCF activities enhance and protect carbon sinks.

In Marrakech, political agreement was reached on including, albeit with some limitations, LULUCF activities. Developed countries could get credit for human induced LULUCF activities (since 1990) in their own countries while LULUCF activities in developing countries could be included in the CDM but limited only to reforestation and afforestation. Many stakeholders have raised concerns about these decisions. Some say that this effectively reduces the Kyoto target by 1-2%. Others are concerned that an incentive for timber plantations in developing countries, with all its environmental and social consequences, has been created.

Compliance Regime under the Kyoto Protocol

The most difficult issue that negotiators had to deal with in the meeting was agreeing on a compliance regime for the Kyoto Protocol. The European countries and developing countries wanted to have legally binding consequences when developed countries fail to meet their Kyoto targets. Japan, Russia, Canada and Australia argued strongly for a more flexible system. In the end, as a result of hard bargaining by the latter countries, the compliance regime adopted contained many weaknesses that would have to be addressed in the future.

CONCLUSION

Climate change is probably the most serious environmental problem that the world, and particularly developing countries, faces. While the threat is long term, the expected impacts – on ecosystems, livelihoods, and food security – are enormous. By paving the way for the Kyoto Protocol to take effect, the Marrakech meeting can be judged to be a success. While the concessions given to some countries have reduced its effectiveness, the Kyoto Protocol remains, for now, the only viable way of moving forward. Abandoning this effort, a position advocated by the United States, would mean further delay in responding to climate change.

While the Marrakech agreement has its flaws, it presents opportunities for developing countries, and for local and impoverished communities, to promote important concerns. For the first time in the climate process, adaptation to climate change has become a central issue. Compensation for affected communities, for example, is now being debated in the negotiations.

The new funds and the Kyoto mechanisms (especially the CDM), if implemented properly, could become vehicles for sustainable development. If implemented with transparency and with public participation, such areas as community based energy and forestry approaches could find new sources of funding through these funds and mechanisms. On the other hand, projects supported by these funds and mechanisms could also have negative environmental and social consequences.

In conclusion, as the UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol moves into a more detailed and operational mode, they will soon have very direct impacts on local and impoverished communities, including women, workers, farmers and indigenous peoples. There is an urgent need to make sure that these stakeholders understand and can respond to these impacts and participate actively in their further design and implementation..