

Cancun: muddling or policy reversal

Aviel Verbruggen¹

The Copenhagen Accord made a seizure in the unwieldy UNFCCC crawling. However, the Accord's *urgent combat* against climate change and *deep cuts in emissions* ask for a real policy reversal, ending the zero sum games on pledged caps, creating clarity on immediate marching directions and eliciting worldwide action by today's operational institutions at all levels.

Surprisingly all components of an effective mitigation policy architecture are available. First the global 2°C ceiling needs translation in by country future paths of CO₂ emissions per person, being the product of three drivers: wealth, energy and carbon intensities, observed annually for most countries in the world. Parties commit to yearly improvements on the drivers. Transfers from rich to poor countries depend on ability to pay and spend, and on countries' mitigation progress. The hands-on approach dissolves barriers like outdated emissions baselines, illusory global instruments, blocked graduation of Parties, unclear transfer mechanisms, neglect of basic principles like universality, sovereignty, transparency, realism, diversity, and equity. The architecture stimulates climate policy emulation among Parties.

Slow progress in international climate policy is due partly to the huge stakes involved, partly to the stupefying complication of the Conference of Parties (COP) processes. On stakes and related distributional aspects it are representatives of constituencies that negotiate. But processes should be designed and run to facilitate negotiations. It seems today COP processes do the opposite. For example, bottlenecks emerge at emissions targets, newly created instruments with their institutions, and distributional mechanisms.

First, pledged emissions caps by (Annex I) countries correspond with distant, moving, and fuzzy targetsⁱ. They dilute the state of urgency, allow deferment in action on the ground, and cover up defecting policies. Cap negotiations among Parties are played as zero sum games, seeding distrust and causing stalematesⁱⁱ.

Second, new global instruments have been imagined like global emissions trading or the universal carbon taxⁱⁱⁱ. These scythes were assumed to efficiently shave emissions around the globe, forgetting however what giant institute would be necessary to forge and handle the scythe. Several new institutions have been created without expedient audits of today's operational institutions with trained and experienced staff, knowledge and know-how, data and memory, etc. Even with giants available, uniform scything is little effective, inefficient and unfair because emissions are resulting from trillions of decisions made by billions of people^{iv}, representing the high diversity and complexity of human communities on earth. Instruments creating the necessary additional climate pricing pressures must take into account the pressures already in place and the different areas the forces are working on, considering also unequal carrying capacity of people.

Third, distributional issues stay central in the appropriation of commons. Preserving the climate commons implies that all countries must own low-carbon energy economies by 2050. Transfers of financial means, technologies, and institutional

¹ University of Antwerp, Prinsstraat 13, BE-2000 Antwerp; www.avielverbruggen.be

capabilities from rich to poor nations are necessary, and should be adequate, predictable, sustainable, and performance steered. Classification of donors and recipients, and graduation of countries in this ranking must be obvious. The Clean Development Mechanism and promises by ad-hoc funds are not meeting the distributional challenges posed by climate change.

The process and outcomes of the 2009 COP15 in Copenhagen are evaluated differently by the variety of participants and observers. Measured by process efficacy and efficiency COP15 is a failure: the set objectives (and implicit higher hopes fostered by most attendants in and around the meeting rooms) are not realized, with disproportional resources spent on the event (some call “non-event”^v). Some scholars have been critical for the Kyoto approach since longer^{vi} and may find their analysis confirmed by the facts. Proponents of the Kyoto-Bali-Copenhagen (KBC) route were very disappointed by the COP15 outcome but seem to lack alternatives: preparatory meetings (Bonn, August 2010; Tianjin, October 2010) for Cancun prolong the usual approach.

However, the Copenhagen Accord made a seizure, of depth and length to be assessed. This article contributes to this assessment with five items: 1) review of the Accord; 2) salient conditions that the Accord’s urgent combat and deep cuts impose on policy creatures; 3) Kyoto pledged caps or targets are less useful than mostly believed, and the better alternative is immediate stepwise progress on four today known and observed intensity indicators; 4) decomposition of the indicators to see what’s in for change; 5) a brief word on transfers and related issues like graduation of Parties on the donor-beneficiary scale and performance adjusted transfers.

The feasibility of the proposed policy reversal results from respecting actual diversity, from using available and proven institutions, from steady progress on transparent and available indicators, from light, but comprehensive and consistent, coordination and supervision at the UN (COP) level. The hands-on approach dissolves many barriers created by the unwieldy processes since Kyoto.

ⁱ Ward, M. Emissions – Pledges and ‘Projected Anyway’ in 2010. Paper 5 in a series of papers on Analytic support for Target-based Negotiations. *Climate Strategies* (2010)

ⁱⁱ This atmosphere of suspicion was publicly denounced by Y. De Boer, in his position of Executive Secretary of the UNFCCC (e.g. European Parliament hearing, April 14, 2010).

ⁱⁱⁱ The U.S.A. delegation headed by Al Gore at the Kyoto COP (1997) imposed global emissions trading on the other Parties. Now the European Commission is its main caretaker (ec.europa.eu/climateaction). The universal carbon tax is more promoted by economists, e.g. Cooper, R. Toward a real treaty on global warming. *Foreign Affairs* 77, 66-79 (1998); Nordhaus, W. D. To Tax or Not to Tax: Alternative Approaches to Slowing Global Warming. *Review of Environmental Economics and Policy* 1, 26-44 (2007)

^{iv} Nordhaus (see note 3) emphasizes this in articles and lectures.

^v Victor, D.G. in The road from Copenhagen: the experts’ views. *Nature reports climate change* 4, 15-17 (2010)

^{vi} Nordhaus, W. & Boyer, J. Requiem for Kyoto: An economic analysis of the Kyoto Protocol. *The Energy Journal* 2, 93-130 (1999); Prins, G. & Rayner, S. Time to ditch Kyoto. *Nature* 449, 973-975 (2007). Also climate scientists like James, E. Hansen have expressed fierce criticism on the COP processes.