

CLIMATE CHANGE: Agenda for Durban on the table



Photo: Charles Akena/IRIN

Many poor countries will face extreme water stress by the turn of the century

JOHANNESBURG, 18 April 2011 (IRIN) - Poor countries and small islands states have used their combined muscle to keep debate at the UN climate change talks in 2011 focused on steps to ensure global temperatures do not increase more than two degrees by the turn of the century.

Discussing the agenda for the formal round of UN talks, to be held later in 2011 in Durban, South Africa, consumed four of the six days of the [first intersessional meeting](#) from 3 to 8 April in Bangkok, but were well worth the effort, said NGOs and climate change experts.

“Talking about the agenda is highly important and needs time, as it defines not only what you want to discuss but also under which headings/framing,” said Jan Kowalzig, senior climate change policy advisor at Oxfam. For example, if a country believed that targets to reduce harmful greenhouse gas emissions were “too weak, you need an agenda item under which you can talk about this, otherwise you cannot talk about it at all”.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) noted in its latest assessment that a two-degree Celsius increase in global temperatures by the turn of the century would have a catastrophic effect: escalating water stress in arid and semi-arid countries, more floods in low-lying coastal areas, coastal erosion in small island states, and the demise of up to 30 percent of animal and plant species.

The final agenda for Durban leaves room for poor countries to make a case for extending the Kyoto Protocol - the treaty on reducing greenhouse gas emissions under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) - the first phase of which ends in 2012.

“The current mitigation commitments of the developed countries may lead to five degrees of warming, whereas scientists say that two degrees of warming, or even 1.5 degrees, is the threshold beyond which irreversible climate damage may occur, with the worst impacts on the poorest countries,” said Ilana Solomon, policy analyst at ActionAid USA.

If developing countries appeared to be slowing down the process by insisting on an extension to the Kyoto Protocol, people had to understand that “in many ways their [developing countries’] very survival is at stake”, she said.

The UK Met Office warned in 2009 that a four degree increase in global temperature was quite possible by the end of this century, or even earlier.

Talk about money

The [agreed agenda](#) allows broad-ranging debates on issues such as sourcing finance, encouraging transfer of technology to help countries adapt to climate change, and reduce their emissions.

Saleemul Huq, a senior fellow of the International Institute for Environment and Development, a UK-based policy think-tank, said he expected talks on these issues to continue until the formal talks in Durban. "I don't see an agreement on emission cut commitments [happening in Durban]. I think the emphasis will be on operationalization of national adaptation plans and the means to finance them."

Parallel to the talks on the agenda, the topic was how to raise long-term finance of US\$100 billion a year for adaptation and mitigation by 2020, promised by the developed countries, said Oxfam's Kowalzig. The funds are to be handled by a new Green Climate Fund, suggested at the climate change conference in Cancun, Mexico, in 2010.

ActionAid's Solomon noted that the Africa Group and the Democratic Republic of Congo had formally proposed an agenda item on how to generate financing.

After the Bangkok meeting, the UNFCCC announced [the members of a new](#) Transitional Committee, who will design the new climate fund. The first meeting of the committee will be held on 28 and 29 April in Mexico City, Mexico.

ActionAid and other NGOs urged the new committee to ensure the participation of civil society and communities in designing the fund, that half the money raised would be set aside for adaptation, and that disbursement and management would not be handed over to a multilateral bank institution.

Technology transfer

Transferring technology, such as the know-how to produce renewable energy and replace fossil fuel-based energy, or hi-tech tools to help countries adapt to climate change, is a critical track of negotiations under the UNFCCC. Setting up a Climate Technology Centre (CTC) and Network was discussed at a peripheral workshop at the conference.

The Earth Negotiations Bulletin, [an official report on the talks](#), said the US had suggested that the CTC be the "first stop" for information on technology, tools and practices to mitigate or adapt to climate change; help countries identify and assess options, needs and policy barriers; and provide access to a global network of regional and sectoral experts who could help build capacity, with some of services being chargeable.

Tanjir Hossain, ActionAid's Climate programme officer in Bangladesh, described the workshop as constructive and said there was a strong demand by developing countries to have a "country-driven" approach, in which national needs would be given priority rather than just handing over the technology. There were also questions about how this would be financed.

"Developed countries suggested that funds should be channelled through the existing adaptation and mitigation windows. However, the developing countries are demanding a different window for technology, through which funding could be disbursed for both adaptation and mitigation."

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Photo: IISD

UNFCCC Executive Secretary Christiana Figueres at the Bangkok talks

Adaptation

A synthesis report on the formation and function of an [adaptation committee](#), proposed in the Cancun Agreements, was tabled in Bangkok. The committee will provide support, scientific advice and guidance to countries in their efforts to adapt to climate change.

Hossain said developing countries had indicated that formation of the adaptation committee would be their priority issue in Bangkok, but the agenda had overshadowed other issues, including adaptation.

“Now that we have an agenda,” ActionAid’s Solomon and Oxfam’s Kowalzig agreed, “Bonn must begin to get into the substance of the issues.” The next round of informal talks takes place in Bonn in June.

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Theme (s): [Environment](#), [Food Security](#), [Governance](#), [Natural Disasters](#),

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