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## **AFRICA'S STANCE ON COP 16: A UNITED FRONT AND A DOSE OF PESSIMISM**

BY BRIAN ADEBA

### **SUMMARY**

- African countries will be presenting a united front at the COP 16 negotiations in Cancun, Mexico. Key negotiating points will focus on making progress in a few main areas, including technology transfer, capacity building for adaptation, and securing financing—especially through developed country pledges to constitute the Green Fund of the Copenhagen Accord.
- Africa's leaders are pessimistic about achieving a binding agreement and are instead considering these negotiations to be a stepping stone toward a broader agreement in 2011.

As the 16<sup>th</sup> session of the Conference of Parties (COP 16) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) kicks off in Cancun, Mexico, African delegates will be attending the discussions with a common goal: to reach a global climate change agreement that spells out adequate and predictable financial resources, capacity building and green technology development and transfer to address adaptation and mitigation needs in Africa. Despite the harmonized goal, there is a general sense of pessimism about the outcome of COP 16 for Africa, and indeed the rest of the world. In particular, Africa's key leaders on the climate change file are not convinced that rich and industrialized countries will agree to a fair climate change agreement at the Cancun conference, which runs from November 29 to December 10, 2010.

This pessimism is fed by the positions, statements, and actions of industrialized countries on climate change. On climate finance—a key point of interest for African countries—there is a considerable area of disagreement on a governance regime between the world's biggest greenhouse gas producers. Additionally, there are disagreements

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surrounding how best to raise long-term financing in a predictable and timely manner.<sup>1</sup>

African leaders perceive that industrialized countries currently lack the political will for a global climate change agreement. In particular, African leaders note that the position of several industrialized countries on meeting the targets of the Kyoto Protocol remains unchanged.

There are low expectations for the Cancun conference, with some climate change experts stressing that COP 16 is being viewed as a “transition” conference by some of the key countries in the climate change debate. This point was perhaps driven home recently by Christiana Figueres, executive secretary of the UNFCCC, who is intent on reducing expectations of the climate negotiations, when she said “Cancun is not intended to establish the ultimate framework for a global climate agreement.”<sup>2</sup>

## WHY CLIMATE CHANGE IS AN ISSUE OF CONCERN FOR AFRICA

Africa is expected to bear the brunt of the effects of climate change. The continent’s high poverty levels and minimal infrastructure make it particularly susceptible to extreme weather events and ecosystem changes. Adaptation and mitigation strategies are resource intensive and are—in many cases—out of reach for African nations. The ripple effects of climate change will drastically affect food security, health, migration, energy, and conflict resolution on the continent.<sup>3</sup> Africa’s inability to deal with the expected physical, human and socio-economic outcomes of climate change makes it one of the world’s most vulnerable continents.<sup>4</sup>

On food security, crop yields are reducing across the continent as a result

1 Shakalatek, Liane. *Climate Talks in Tianjin: Will China Assume a High or Low Profile?*, October 2010. Climate Equity. <http://climateequity.org/2010/10/01/chinese-are-excited-about-climate-negotiations-in-tianjin/#more-271>

2 See “Address by Christiana Figueres, Executive Secretary, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.” The speech was delivered at the Pre-COP Ministerial meeting at Mexico City on November 4, 2010. [http://unfccc.int/files/press/statements/application/pdf/pre\\_cop16\\_address\\_cf.pdf](http://unfccc.int/files/press/statements/application/pdf/pre_cop16_address_cf.pdf)

3 Dybenko, Erica. 2009. *Africa’s Climate Change Reality: The Africa Initiative Congress on Climate Change*. Congress Report, November 1-9, 2010. Waterloo, Centre for International Governance Innovation.

4 Lisk, Franklyn. 2009. Overview: The Current Climate Change Situation in Africa. In *CIGI Special Report: Climate Change in Africa; Adaptation, Mitigation and Governance Challenges*, ed. Hany Besada and Nelson Sewankambo. Waterloo, Centre for International Governance Innovation.

of unpredictable weather patterns manifested in phenomena such as heavy rains, destructive storms, dry spells and fluctuating temperatures. Destructive weather patterns such as prolonged droughts in the Horn of Africa, are also contributing to loss of livestock, with devastating consequences for pastoralist communities.

Rising temperatures and natural disasters brought about by climate change are contributing to the spread of infectious diseases. For instance, fluctuating temperatures and increasing rains in the Kenyan and Ethiopian highlands are contributing to the spread of malaria, a leading cause of death in Africa. Climate change induced eco-system degradation is also spurring the spread of malnutrition, child mortality, diarrheal diseases and cholera.

As unpredictable weather patterns increase, Africans are forced to migrate to urban areas, coasts, valleys and other areas deemed more protected against the effects of climate change.

Furthermore, climate change may exacerbate conflicts across the continent as communities struggle for scarce resources such as water and grazing pastures. Experts also believe climate change may aggravate disputes over borders and territory, setting hurdles for conflict resolution. Potential conflict flashpoints have been identified in the Horn of Africa, Darfur, the Sahel region, the Democratic Republic of Congo and northern Kenya.<sup>5</sup>

As Africa struggles to enact policies and strategies for combating climate change and its devastating effects, the need for a new international framework that helps Africans and others adapt is of crucial importance. Although the Kyoto Protocol has been endorsed by African governments, experts argue that its scope is limited to reducing future carbon emissions rather than tackling Africa's vulnerability and incapacity to combat the effects of climate change on its people and economy.<sup>6</sup> This limited scope, coupled with developed countries' reluctance to fully implement the Kyoto Protocol raises a new sense of urgency for Africa—hence the continent's unified approach at COP 15 and at the COP 16 meeting in Cancun.

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5 Ibid

6 Ibid

## OVERVIEW OF COP 16 AND AFRICA'S PARTICIPATION

COP 16 is the latest attempt at achieving consensus on a global climate change agreement. It comes in the wake of COP 15, held in December 2009 in Copenhagen, Denmark, where the Copenhagen Accord, a non-binding deal was inked. At COP 15, African countries represented by Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, presented a strong and unified front but achieved little on five key negotiating points: adaptation, mitigation, finance, technology transfer, and capacity building.

In preparation for COP 16, African countries resolved to establish a streamlined single negotiating structure at the ministerial and experts level to spearhead negotiations at Cancun. To that effect, the African Union Summit held in January 2010 authorized the Committee of African Heads of State and Government on Climate Change (CAHOSCC) to convene a post-COP 15 conference to strategize and develop a roadmap for COP 16.<sup>7</sup>

Starting from March to November 2010, a series of meetings to explore a common negotiating position were subsequently held in Kenya, Mali, Uganda and Malawi. Pivotal landmarks were achieved at the Uganda and Malawi meetings held in July and October respectively. At the former, where an African Union Summit was held in July, recommendations from CAHOSCC on a streamlined single negotiation structure were adopted.<sup>8</sup>

At the latter, African ministers of agriculture resolved to enhance a coherent, harmonized and aligned framework on a variety of key negotiating points on agriculture and climate change.

## ARMED AND READY FOR CANCUN

By the time a CAHOSCC consultation meeting was held on November 15, 2010 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to review final preparations for Cancun, African countries had reached an advanced stage on a common negotiating

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7 "A Brief on AUC Coordination and Engagement in Climate Change Negotiation Process"; a speech by H.E Mrs. Tumusime Rhoda Peace, Commissioner for Rural Economy and Agriculture of the African Union Commission at the CAHOSSOCC Representatives Meeting on May 11, 2010 at Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

8 See "Remarks by H.E. Dr. Jean Ping, Chairperson, African Union Commission at the Meeting of the Committee of African Heads of State and Government on Climate Change (CAHOSCC)" delivered on November 15, 2010 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

position ahead of COP 16. A press release on the day of the meeting described this position as a “sharpened African common position.” The consultation was also expected to give ministers and negotiators the clout with which to champion the continent’s concerns and interests at Cancun.<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, African countries reiterated their commitment to the Kyoto Protocol and called for its renewal “as time is ticking fast and Africa has the least capacity to adapt and combat the impacts of climate change.”

## **PESSIMISM ON COP 16 PREVAILS**

African delegates have formulated a united approach for COP 16 around key points crucial to the continent. As at COP 15, the key points centre on a global climate change accord that offers adequate and predictable financial resources, capacity building and green technology development and transfer to tackle adaptation and mitigation needs in Africa.

But as Africa enters this round of climate change negotiations, there is mounting pessimism at the leaders’ level at the prospect of reaching consensus on a fair, binding climate change agreement.

In October 2010, on the sidelines of the Seventh Africa Development Forum’s high-level dialogue on governance and leadership response to climate change held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopian Prime Minister Zenawi, who continues to play a lead role as Africa’s climate change spokesman, was blunt. He predicted that Cancun will be a “total flop.” He also postulated that neither COP 16 nor next year’s COP 17 in South Africa will result in tangible set targets for greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>10</sup>

In November 2010, Zenawi criticized wealthy nations for their lack of political will to reach a binding agreement, warning that Africa could no longer afford to bear the burden of disasters induced by climate change, which developed countries contributed little to ameliorate.<sup>11</sup>

9 See “Climate Change: Africa is Preparing for COP 16,” African Union press release No. 160/2010

10 Ogodo, Ochieng. *African Climate Leader Says Cancun Talks ‘Will flop,’* October 15, 2010. SciDevNet. <http://www.scidev.net/en/news/african-climate-leader-says-cancun-talks-will-flop--1.html>

11 D’Almeida, Kanya. *Hope and Pessimism Coverage in Cancun,* November 25, 2010. IPS. <http://www.ips.org/africa/2010/11/hope-and-pessimism-converge-in-cancun/>

Jean Ping, chair of the African Union Commission, has also expressed skepticism about a deal at Cancun. Addressing a CAHOSCC meeting on November 15 in Addis Ababa, Ping expressed exasperation at the slow and frustrating pace of climate change negotiations. He predicted that “Cancun may not achieve what has been initially intended,” noting that the position of developed countries on key targets of the Kyoto Protocol remains largely unchanged.<sup>12</sup>

Although host Mexico has promised to promote dialogue and restore trust in the negotiations, observers argue that Cancun will be a venue for low expectations.<sup>13</sup>

## COHERENCE AND A TOUGH STANCE

Two issues are clear about African countries' participation at the COP 16 negotiations in Cancun: 1) a coherent African united front on key issues of interest will be presented 2) African negotiators will be attending the conference with a sense of pessimism on the possibility of reaching a climate change deal.

Africa is the continent with the most at stake at the climate negotiations. Given that Africans have contributed the least to climate change, their standpoint is that they should not be forced to soften their position. Just like in Copenhagen, it is possible that African countries will insist on a commitment to the Kyoto Protocol before a new treaty is reached. Such a stance could result in a temporary suspension of negotiations for Africa delegates—especially if they walk out of the meeting as they did in Copenhagen in December 2009.

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<sup>12</sup> See “Remarks by H.E. Dr. Jean Ping, Chairperson, African Union Commission at the Meeting of the Committee of African Heads of State and Government on Climate Change (CAHOSCC)” delivered on November 15, 2010 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

<sup>13</sup> *Cancun: Will COP16 Live Up to Low Expectations?* November 26, 2010. International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development. <http://ictsd.org/i/trade-and-sustainable-development-agenda/97141/>

## **ABOUT THE AFRICA PORTAL**

The Africa Portal is an online knowledge resource for policy-related issues on Africa. An undertaking by the Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI), Makerere University (MAK), and the South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA), the Africa Portal offers open access to a suite of features including an online library collection; a resource for opinion and analysis; an experts directory; an international events calendar; and a mobile technology component—all aimed to equip users with research and information on Africa's current policy issues.

A key feature to the Africa Portal is the online library collection holding over 2,500 books, journals, and digital documents related to African policy issues. The entire online repository is open access and available for free full-text download. A portion of the digital documents housed in the library have been digitized for the first time as an undertaking of the Africa Portal project. Facilitating new digitization projects is a core feature of the Africa Portal, which aims to improve access and visibility for African research.

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The Africa Portal is part of the Africa Initiative project.

## **AFRICA INITIATIVE**

The Africa Initiative (AI) is a multi-year, donor-supported program, with three components: a research program, an exchange program, and an online portal. A joint undertaking by CIGI in cooperation with Makerere University (MAK), the Africa Initiative aims to contribute to the deepening of Africa's capacity and knowledge in five thematic areas—conflict resolution, energy, food security, health, and migration, with special attention to the cross-cutting issue of climate change. By incorporating field-based research, strategic partnerships, and online collaboration, the Africa Initiative is undertaking a truly interdisciplinary and multi-institutional approach to Africa's governance challenges. Work on the core areas of the initiative focus on supporting innovative research and researchers, and developing policy recommendations as they relate to the program's core thematic areas.

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