Chasing an elusive agreement: what smaller countries (i.e. G77+China) need to do to influence climate change negotiations?

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Summary

As the world is converging at Warsaw, Poland, for the 19th session of climate change negotiations, questions still exit as to whether these negotiations will ever yield tangible benefits for smaller states and developing economies. Past sessions of climate change negotiations has pointed to the fact that while smaller states suffer the consequences of climate change, these states hold little influence in directing the outcomes of climate change negotiations. This requires a new approach where smaller countries can clump together and use the influence of dominant countries like China to influence the outcome of the climate change negotiations.

Introduction

Within the climate change discourse it is well known that small states and developing countries are more vulnerable to the effects of climate change[1]. These countries unfortunately, contribute less of greenhouse gases than the developed nations[2]. Hence they are the ones that suffer the most due to climate change.

While developed countries have financial resources and technological capabilities to cope with climate change, smaller countries lack financial resources and technological capabilities needed to prevent adverse effects of change such as droughts, floods, hurricanes and others[3]. Because of this gap it is obvious that smaller countries are more vulnerable to climate change and are less resilient to its effects.

Since 1992 many countries have expressed their willingness to take steps towards reducing greenhouse gases and its associated impacts on climate[4]. This entailed the expression of the desire, by various countries to reduce average global temperature increases. In line with this, a Conference of Parties (COP) was launched in Berlin in 1995[5]. This sought to provide basis for negotiations on global responses to climate change.

Ever since these negotiations that take place under the framework of COP, their elusive nature has become more and more obvious. They have been unable to provide directions on how the World should approach challenges imposed by climate change and the associated impacts. During COP3, in Japan, Kyoto protocol was adopted as the first step towards addressing climate change. This laid a foundation for an agreement that developed countries should reduce their greenhouse gas emissions.[6] Again during COP16, (in 2010), countries expressed their desire to reduce greenhouses

gases so as to ameliorate the impacts of climate change, which were starting to affect countries. This led to a consensus that temperature increases should to be kept below 2 degrees Celsius[7]. Since the adoption of this target, developed countries started to show signs of pushing for their interests at the expense of smaller of developing countries.

As no consensus could be reached on targets for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, the European Union proposed the so-called "second commitment period for the Kyoto protocol", which should span from 2013 to 2017. This proposal was discussed at length during COP17 (in Durban), and has since been adopted at COP 18 (In Qatar). While this deserves applause, fewer than expected countries that signed and committed to the agreement is a cause for concern. Especially as it points to the fact that smaller countries (that are collectively referred to as G77+china) face threats of climate change and as such need to seek better ways of influencing on climate change negotiations.[8]

Evolution of G77 countries and their contribution to international negotiations

While the mandate for G77 plus China was initially to accentuate the trade and development related issues, today G77 has evolved to be a successful lobby group within the United Nations' structures. This strengthened the joint declaration made at the UNCTAD, which affirmed their unity under a common interest and defined their Group as "an instrument for enlarging the area of co-operative endeavour in the international field and for securing mutually beneficial relationships with the rest of the world."

Through successive consultations such as the Algiers Charter (1967) which sought to harmonize the position of the developing world and the Caracas agreement (Venezuela; 1989) which articulated the need for improved international cooperation for development, the G77 plus China has managed to firmly accentuate the pro-poor and pro-development agenda within the discourse of the multilateral institutions such as the UN.

The group was established in June 1964 by seventy-seven developing countries, in Geneva, during the first UN conference on trade and development (UNCTAD), the initial purpose of the group was to further the economic interests of developing countries and promote equality. The structure provided a platform for countries of the global south to promote their collective economic aspirations and enhance their joint negotiating capacity on major multilateral platforms. It also fostered south-south cooperation for economic development. Although members of the G77 have increased to 131 countries, they retained the original name due to its historic significance[9].

Recapping the Kyoto Protocol

The Kyoto Protocol was adopted in Kyoto, Japan, on 11 December 1997 and entered into force on 16 February 2005. The detailed rules for the

implementation of the Protocol were adopted at COP 7 in Marrakesh (2001). These are referred to as the Marrakesh Accords. The Protocol is an international agreement. The major feature of a Protocol is that it sets binding targets.[10] Recognizing that developed countries are responsible for the current high levels of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, the Protocol places a heavier burden on developed nations to reduce emissions. This requires polluting countries to meet their targets, primarily through national measures. The Protocol offers them an additional means of meeting their targets by way of three market-based mechanisms i.e. emissions trading known as "the carbon market" , clean development mechanism and joint implementation.

In accordance with the protocol, parties to the UNFCCC (United Nation Convention for Climate Change) are classified as follows:-

a) Annex I are industrialize countries and economies in transition.
b) Annex II (sub-group to Annex I countries) are developed countries which pay for costs of developing countries.
c) The Non Annex I are developing countries.

Countries in Annex I are committed to reduce emission level of greenhouse gasses to targets that they are set below their 1990 level by 2008 - 2012. This will be done by allocating reduced annual allowances to the major operators with their borders. These operators can only exceed their allocation if they buy emission allowances or offset their excesses through mechanism that is agreed by all parties to UNFCCC.

Even though some opponent of the convection argued both developed and developing countries need to reduce their emission independently. The UNFCCC has no immediate restriction to non Annex I countries due to less gas emission caused by developing countries. Therefore, they are not required to reduce emission levels unless developed countries supply enough funding and technology. Subsequently, the developing countries may volunteer to become Annex I countries when they are sufficiently developed[11].

In 2005, Canada hosted the first meeting of the parties to the Kyoto protocol since 1997 in Kyoto, Japan. The event marked the entry of the Kyoto protocol and the largest intergovernmental conferences on climate change. In the plan of action they decided to extend the life of the Kyoto protocol beyond its 2012 end date and negotiate deeper cuts in greenhouse gas emissions. Since the Kyoto Protocol is generally seen as an important first step towards a truly global emission reduction regime that will stabilize GHG emissions, EU proposed a second commitment period for the Kyoto protocols to span 2013 to 2017.

What has been the influence of G77 on climate change negotiations?

Despite the constraints of uncoordinated policies, lack of capacity in trade negotiations and finance, countries of the G77 have maintained their composure as a group with the assistance from emerging power countries such as China, India and Brazil. Most of these countries are intertwined in bilateral agreements that advanced their strength and position in negotiating bilaterally with developed countries on issues related to climate and energy. In general, the G-77 is seen to benefit from the greater visibility and negotiating weight of its larger and wealthier members, the BASIC countries. The BASIC countries have taken up the G-77's demands of greater procedural equality and transparency and brought weight to the G-77's preference for extensive public climate finance from the North. This eventually lead to G-77 countries argument that their future development depends on climate action by the BASIC countries, which Brazil and South Africa are more ready to do than China and India.

Although this may seem like the best approach, there are arguments that the emerging power status of China and the other BASIC countries is a hindrance to negotiating concessions from the North. Ultimately, the G-77's perspective is unlikely to shape the final outcome and will become less recognized as a leader in climate negotiations, whilst the BASIC countries and especially China gain visibility.

Vulnerability of developing countries and small states to climate change

Climate change is more about serious disruptions of the entire world's weather and climate patterns, including impacts on rainfall, extreme weather events and sea level rise, rather than just moderate temperature increases.[12] It is one global variable that has a direct and profound impact on every aspect of human existence.[13] Where the entire world is vulnerable to clime change, all countries has same abilities to cope with the effects of climate change. Developing nations, especially, the least developed ones have less capacity to deal with the effects of climate change. They are more vulnerable to environmental threats and global change just as they are more vulnerable to other stresses.[14] Vulnerability represents the interface between exposure to the physical threats to human well-being and the capacity of people and communities to cope with those threats.[15]

Africa, in particular is already experiencing the effects of climate change, which is linked to a number of climate stresses and is highly vulnerable to a number of impacts of climate change.[16] The climate of the African continent, where 33 of the 49) LDCs (least developed countries) are located, is controlled by complex maritime and terrestrial interactions that produce a variety of weather changes across a range of regions, from the humid tropics to the hyper-arid Sahara.

The African climate has a major influence on day-to-day economic developments, particularly in the agricultural and water-resources sectors.[17] Economic impacts of climate change are likely to be much higher in Africa than in other world regions. They could be significant in the short-term, with estimates that the costs could be equivalent to 1.5 - 3% of GDP each year by 2030 in Africa.[18]

Climate change will severely compromise agricultural production and access to food, in many African countries. It will expose the continent to increased water stress and shortage and reduce potential energy availability.[19] Africa, as the continent least responsible for global climate change, is typically acknowledged as the place where climate-related conflicts are likely to erupt. This likelihood is a consequence of the continent's existing vulnerability to climate stressors, its economic reliance on climate dependent sectors, and its history of conflict, poverty and weak governance.[20]

Threats to security are more likely to arise to regions where climate change impacts are more acute, where the affected populations are highly vulnerable, and where the ability of local and national to peacefully cope with the resultant are hindered by weak government and lack of capacity.[21]

The resultant effects of this are the compounding of the impacts of current climate variability in Africa and will have negative effects on the continent's ability to cope with climate change.[22] Climate change has critical health implications. Changes in rainfall will affect the presence and absence of vector- and water-borne pathogens.[23] According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) 1, by 2020 between 75 million and 250 million people in Africa are projected to be exposed to increased water stress due to climate change.[24] With regard to development is concerned, climate change will have a strong impact on Africa's ability to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).[25] Some locations, such as high latitudes, floodplains, river banks, small islands and coastal areas, may pose more risk than others.

With respect to water supply, it is very likely that the costs of climate change will outweigh the benefits globally. One reason is droughts are anticipated. [26]

In general, the consequences of climate change in African continent will be exacerbating the political conflict and economic instability.[27] These include the reversal of development gains; the displacement of populations; the disruption of social networks; the destruction of infrastructure; and the weakening of governance and institutional mechanisms for dealing with climate change.[28]

Some selected evidences

Floods in South Africa and Mozambique

Measurable changes in climate can be expected to have significant effects on various sectors of South African society and the economy. These potential impacts have been explored in the South African Country Studies for a time horizon of 50 years, using a series of general circulation model (GCM) simulations.[29] The potential effects of changed climate within 50 years and possible adaptation strategies were identified for the following sectors: human health; maize production; plant biodiversity; water resources; rangelands; and animal taxa.[30] Health impacts can be expected from increases in temperature and changes in rainfall patterns. These include an increase in the occurrence of strokes, skin rashes, dehydration and the incidence of non-melanoma skin cancers.

South Africa is prone to natural and man-made disasters such as floods, wind storms, hail storms, bush and informal settlement fires, droughts, landslides, rapid population movement and health disasters including cholera, rift valley fever and human pandemic.[31] Many parts of South Africa and Mozambique are particularly prone to climate change.[32] The recent South Africa and Mozambique's re-acquaintance with devastating flooding in Limpopo and Xai-Xai, respectively was a reminder of the harsh impact of climate change. This climatic variability caused havoc in the lives of mainly poor people, where their lives and livelihoods were destroyed. Many communities have watched their livestock, irrigation, household equipment, and family members perish because of extreme floods and thousand have been relocated to safer areas. The United Nations have reported that Xai-Xai is sinking with a death toll of up to 70 people, while 70 000 people have been reported displaced. [33] Mozambique being the poorest country in the world, ranking 184th out of 187 countries on the United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Index, is unable to deal with the realities of the disaster. [34]

On the other hand there are reports that 15000 crocodiles have escaped from a farm as the Limpopo River flooded upstream from Mozambique. This has created a difficult situation for the locals that live in the area as they have to deal with the effects of the flooding as well as the harrowing thoughts of crocodiles on the loose. Furthermore, infrastructures such as roads, irrigation systems, and schools have been destroyed and the health centres are unable to cope with the influx of people who need assistance.

During 2009/2010 there were devastating floods in Gazankulu, some areas in Eastern Cape (Mthatha, Ntabankulu, and Mhlontlo), Kwa-Zulu Natal (KwaNyuswa Madden, Bulwer, and Ngwavuma), Northern Cape (Upington and Douglas), and North West (Taung and Mafikeng). More than a million people were affected in these areas.[35] South Africa's rainfall is already highly

variable in spatial distribution and unpredictable, both within and between years.[36] Changes in rainfall will affect the presence and absence of vector- and water-borne pathogens (IPCC 2001).[37] Water stress means insufficient amounts of water causing dehydration (including reduced soil moisture for crops, pastures), seasonal mismatch between supply and demand, poor water quality, or water which is available but at too high labour or economic costs.[38] It is estimated that over 78% of South Africans are poor and that the majority (70%) of the poor live in rural areas (ISRDS, 2000). More than 85% of the countryside is settled by commercial farmers and population pressure in former homelands has resulted in a depletion of the natural resource base.[39]

Earthquake in Haiti

On Tuesday, 12 January 2010, a 7.3 magnitude struck the central region of Haiti, causing severe and widespread destruction. The earthquake and its after effects took the lives of well over 250 00 and displaced millions of Haitians.[40] The Quest province with the city of Port-au-Prince and the Northern Province with the city of Cap-Haitians are characterized by a drastically accelerating urbanization since the second half of the twentieth century, which, in turn, exposed even more people to storm hazards.[41] Governmental policies, however, are lacking in Haiti to increase the country's resilience against hurricanes and earthquakes.[42]

Drought in Somalia and Kenya

With almost 20 years of armed conflict and droughts and floods, there is a constant, but increasingly acute, humanitarian crisis in Somalia. The climate in Somalia is arid to semi-arid.[43] Livestock and rain-fed agriculture, the main livelihoods and components of the economy, directly depend on the weather and environment.[44] Drought has caused famine in parts of Somalia and killed tens of thousands of people in recent months. The situation could get even worse unless proper action is taken urgently. In the Bakool and Lower Shabelle areas, acute malnutrition tops 50 percent and death rates exceed six per 10,000 people per day.[45]

One view is that conflict occurs when pastoralists compete for scarce resources during drought. The conflict that took place in Kenya's Isiolo District in 2005 is a case in point.[46] Conflict erupted between pastoralists when drought led to the migration of approximately 10,000 herders with over 200,000 cattle to the riverbed traditionally used for watering animals during the dry season[47] the customary regulation of the use of the riverbed broke down under the immense pressure, which resulted in violent conflict.[48]

How much influence China have exerted on the outcomes of climate change negotiations?

China has, arguable, shown that it is ready to do serious business in tackling climate change. In 2010 it became clear that China's targets to

reduce carbon intensity by 40- 45% voluntarily (without support from rich countries) will be brought under domestic law, just as China became the world's biggest investor in wind power and other renewable energy investments.[49]

China stood up for the interests of poorer members of G77 at COP 15 – challenging the US in Tianjin over its double-counting of part of its 'fast start finance' with its commitment at the G8 in L'Aquila to provide new resources to tackle food security. On the MRV and ICA issues, it is China that has moved ahead of G77 partners in response to developed country demands.[50] Just after the Barcelona negotiations there was a two-day China-Africa Summit in Egypt on which China pledged $10 billion in concessional loans to African nations over the next three years. That is double of what they promised at the China-Africa Summit in 2006 in Beijing. To counter the critique that China was only after natural resources Beijing stated it would cancel the public debts of some of the poorest countries. China can be characterized as a key factor in solving the global climate change problem first and foremost because of the size of its GHG emissions.[51] China was holding fast in its alignment with the G77 and there was little indication of cracks in the G77 alliance before COP 15. In fact, China has exerted significant diplomatic effort to bridge gaps with key allies, particularly India and other major developing emitters.[52]

In the period from February 1991 to May 1992, China fully participated in the work of Group 77 in negotiations while simultaneously maintaining its independent status.[53] Group 77/China as a negotiating force took common positions on some proposals and arrived at a consensus on other issues. China was not an important player for EC during this period.[54]

At the third Conference of the Parties (COP-3) in Kyoto, the G77 and China contributed to push for higher targets by supporting the EU‘s emission reduction position. In general, the developing countries proved to be quite influential in Kyoto.[55] The G77 and China also succeeded in deleting an article on voluntary commitments for developing countries[56]. [57] In the international negotiations, China in alliance with G77 has consistently refused to take on and even discuss emission commitments, arguing that it has implemented extensive abatement measures despite its position as a developing country.[58]

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, for vulnerable states like smaller countries, it will be important to promote a systems approach that will address climate change issues through cross sectorial lobbying and engagement. The current state of economies of most developed countries means that environment and climate related issues are no longer a priority. This suggest that the push for agreements on climate change negotiations is at the moment left with smaller countries that are directly affected by the effects of climate change

and China as a second largest economy of the world needs to guide the way, otherwise climate change negotiations will always remain elusive.

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