



By Robert N. Stavins

From Berlin to Durban to Doha

In 1992, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change launched a process to confront the risks posed by global warming. It has led to a dichotomy between countries with serious emission-reduction responsibilities and others with no responsibilities whatsoever. In an article published in *Science*, my Harvard colleague Joseph Aldy and I describe how this has prevented progress. We also argue that recent talks suggest the prospect for a better way forward.

Article 3 of the UNFCCC established a key principle: “The parties should protect the climate system . . . on the basis of equity and in accordance with their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities.” In 1995, in the very first decision of the first Conference of the Parties of the UNFCCC (known as COPs), the global community agreed to the Berlin Mandate, which interpreted “common but differentiated responsibilities” in which “developed country parties” (also known as Annex I countries) alone are to take on emission-reduction responsibilities. The Berlin Mandate, codified with numerical national targets and timetables for Annex I countries in the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, produced a dramatic gap between rhetoric and reality.

By the time of the Berlin Mandate, non-Annex I countries’ annual greenhouse gas emissions surpassed those of Annex I countries, and by 2005, when

the Kyoto Protocol entered into force, per capita fossil fuel carbon dioxide emissions of nearly 50 non-Annex I countries exceeded those of the Annex I country with the lowest per capita measure. Further, the six largest greenhouse gas emitters are not constrained by the Kyoto Protocol, because of lack of commitments (China, Indonesia, Brazil, and India), the nonbinding nature of its emission commitment (Russia), or failure to ratify the agreement (United States).

The dichotomous structure effectively quadruples the global cost of emission abatement necessary to stabilize atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases relative to a cost-minimizing scenario that includes emission abatement by all nations. The Kyoto Protocol provides no means for developing countries to take on emission targets and engage in international emission trading. Thus, the Kyoto Protocol severely limited opportunities for developed countries to leverage finance of low-cost emission abatement in developing countries through international emission trading under emission targets.

But prospects for change emerged in 2009. Leaders of the 17 largest developed and developing countries, at the Major Economies Forum on Energy and Climate, agreed that they would need to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. Leaders of these economies and many more nations negotiated the Copenhagen Accord later in 2009, followed a year later by the Cancun Agreements (December 2010), which together blurred the distinction between Annex I and non-Annex I.

An even greater departure from the Annex I/non-Annex I dichotomy took place at the negotiations in Durban, South Africa, in December 2011, where the international community agreed to a negotiating process focused on long-term participation of all parties in the effort to mitigate greenhouse

gas emissions. The Durban Platform for Enhanced Action (DPEA) calls for a comprehensive legal regime by 2020 that essentially eliminates the Annex I versus non-Annex I distinction.

Of course, no one should overestimate the importance of a nonbinding agreement to reach a future agreement. But this is a significant departure from the past. It is of vast potential importance, but only “potential,” because just as the Kyoto Protocol’s targets and timetables fulfilled the Berlin Mandate’s promise, future COPs must deliver on the DPEA with a new post-Kyoto agreement by 2015.

The outcome of the Durban negotiations has increased the likelihood that a sound foundation for meaningful long-term action can be developed. With the DPEA, there is a mandate for change. The key questions now include how can an international agreement facilitate meaningful emission mitigation in developed and developing countries while meeting the UNFCCC’s principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities?”

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How can an agreement best leverage public and private finance for investment in climate-friendly technologies and climate adaptation? How can market mechanisms broaden

participation and deepen emission mitigation? How can an agreement improve transparency, improve trust, and thereby increase both participation and compliance among nations?

International negotiations continue in Doha, Qatar, in December 2012, at COP-18. The time has come for innovative proposals for future international climate-policy architecture, not for incremental adjustments to the old pathway.

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