

**guardian.co.uk**

Countdown to  
Copenhagen



## **It's too late to seal a global climate deal. But we need action, not Kyoto II**

Climate is too complex an issue to get in one gulp. If Copenhagen can pave the way for practical steps, an agreement can wait



**Jeffrey Sachs**

guardian.co.uk, Tuesday 29 September 2009 23.20 BST

---

The Copenhagen climate-change negotiations are 10 weeks off, and time has run out to reach a detailed international agreement. Yet failure to reach a comprehensive agreement need not be a cataclysm, if the US, Europe, China, India and a few others take some important practical steps while a new protocol continues to be negotiated.

The UN summit on climate change last week, followed by the Pittsburgh G20, made clear the broad global consensus on the seriousness of the climate crisis, and the need to act. UN secretary-general Ban Ki-moon skilfully brought the parties together to acknowledge their shared responsibilities. There was enough practical talk to give shape to a meaningful partial accord in Copenhagen, with substantive content to move the world forward.

The climate issue is too complicated to swallow in one gulp, as was tried in Kyoto in 1997. This invites a toothless agreement that could be more posturing than progress. We should think about the component parts of real progress, and then insist on practical policies by all major players, even as the legal framework is hammered out for later signature. There is still time for a three-part package: a political framework, a financing package, and a series of practical steps announced by all major regions to tilt the trajectory on emissions.

The political framework would lay out the basics: that all countries have "common but differentiated responsibilities"; the world needs to cut emissions sharply to stay under a 2C rise; that rich countries will have to pay poor ones to bear the expense of clean technologies; and the rich must help the poor to adapt, especially since the majority of poor populations reside in tropical regions vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

To these points should be added a basic developmental point. The climate issue should in no way stop developing countries from raising living standards, and fast enough to narrow the gap with the richest countries. Emissions targets and financing should be set to protect the right of the poor to economic development, with development based on cleaner, sustainable technologies for power, transport, buildings and industry. The rich world will benefit as the poor world goes green, and will have to pay much of the cost to bring that about.

The final component of the political agreement involves sharing clean technology between rich and poor countries. There are three ways to do this. First, rich countries should include the poorer countries in publicly financed research and development efforts, such as carbon capture and sequestration, or electric vehicles. Second, they should allow the least developed countries to freely license proprietary technologies for local use, as they do with Aids drugs and other essential medicines. Third, they should establish a fund to pay down the royalties on privately owned intellectual property so

that developing countries other than the least developed can use IP at subsidised rates, but without eliminating the incentives for private-sector innovation under the patent law.

This brings us to financing. The rich world should make clear that their financial commitments for economic development – made in the UN summit in 2002 in Monterrey, Mexico, and at the G8 summit in 2005 in Gleneagles, Scotland – will still be met, and that the extra costs of climate-change mitigation, adaptation and technology transfer will be additional to the promised development aid. The poor world will absolutely balk on climate change if they believe climate financing is just a shell game with already committed development aid. Gordon Brown recently suggested a sum of \$100bn per year for climate financing by 2020. The real needs are likely to be much greater and come much earlier. No doubt this figure was an opening gambit.

These agreements are within reach, at least as a general framework without specific numbers attached. Unlike the world trade negotiations, in which "nothing is agreed until everything is agreed", climate negotiations should aim for an interim agreement on general principles, financing and technology transfer even before the final deal is signed and sealed. But something more must be added. In addition to all the talk, governments should announce a meaningful set of practical programmes to reduce emissions on a large scale. These should include: testing carbon capture and sequestration at coal-fired plants in the US, Europe, China, India and Australia; tightening global supervision to support a rapid expansion of safe nuclear power; increasing global projects in renewable power, such as India's large-scale solar initiatives; establishing a global network of scientific and engineering institutions to help each government to understand the costs, benefits and trade-offs of clean-tech options; increasing the donor financing of clean energy in low-income Africa; raising energy efficiency through rapid adoption of specific improved technologies; and a global effort on the new generation of electric-powered vehicles.

Let's arrive in Copenhagen prepared not only to sign a political statement but to launch a range of real actions that can begin to tackle the global threat of catastrophe. Taking the problem in steps and committing to practical actions in each area would set a path towards bold emissions reductions, and would help to inspire the world to do more. The world is confused. A practical approach of the US, China, Europe and others on specific technologies and avoided deforestation can help to break the log-jam.

## **Ads by Google**

### **The 2009 BMW 7 Series**

Find Out What You've Been Missing - Learn More at Albany BMW

[www.albanynybmw.com](http://www.albanynybmw.com)

### **Environmental Markets**

Association Focused on Market-Based Solutions... 50% Off Membership

[www.environmentalmarkets.org](http://www.environmentalmarkets.org)

**Environmental Issues are**

a National Security concern. Learn more.

[SecureAmericanFuture.org](http://SecureAmericanFuture.org)

**Comments**

In order to see comments, please turn JavaScript on in your browser.

guardian.co.uk © Guardian News and Media Limited 2009