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GUIDE TO

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BY CHRISSY
SCHWINN

COPENHAGEN ACCORD: Can Two Tables Change the World?

The world has been taking a long, deep breath since the Copenhagen climate talks concluded on December 19th. The politics, logistics and legalities were so confusing in the last moments that much of the past month has been filled with efforts to understand what happened, and what people think of what happened.

What we know was that the Copenhagen accord was “taken note” of within the official negotiations. The accord was a political agreement brokered by some countries and acknowledged by almost all of the countries. It outlines some areas of agreement, including keeping global warming to 2 degrees Celsius, recognizing the importance of stopping deforestation and mobilizing billions in funding to tackle climate change. But it falls well short of securing a new legally-binding global agreement.

But it [the accord] has the potential to be an important step forward by — for the first time — registering developing country actions to reduce emissions in a measurable and transparent way.

There are few, if any, who think the accord is a great deal for the climate or for the most vulnerable people who are affected most by climate change. But it has the potential to be an important step forward by — for the first time — registering developing country actions to reduce emissions in a measurable and transparent way.

Why is this important? The Kyoto Protocol — the world’s current best effort to reduce emissions — only covers about 30% of current global emissions because both the United States and China and other major developing emitters are not part of it. Tackling 30% of global emissions leaves 70% left to grow unfettered, which means there is no chance of curbing global emissions and climate change under the current climate regime.

To get China and the United States on board (who jointly make up close to half of global emissions), they both need to jump. Neither is willing to move without the other taking action. And that is where the two simple tables in the Copenhagen accord have the potential to be a game-changing step in global efforts to slow climate change.

Now, the next opportunity to jump is approaching. The Copenhagen accord set January 31st as the date for developed and developing countries to submit their voluntary targets and actions in two simple appendices. One is for developed countries. One for developing countries. Each appendix has two columns: name of country, emissions reductions or “action” to be taken. Well, developed countries also have to list the base year that they will measure against (e.g., 20% reductions over 2005 levels).

In the United States, getting actions on paper in a formal document is hoped to allay fears that U.S. efforts to reduce emissions won’t put us at a disadvantage to our economic

competitors (read, China). This is huge in a country where economic progress is the very fabric of our society.

Countries that sign on to the Copenhagen accord with their targets and actions will show their readiness to continue moving forward to address this complex global threat. At least the simplicity of these two tables shouldn’t create any new barriers to further action on climate change. ■

At the United Nations Climate Change Conference more than a dozen countries pledged to initiate innovative new programs to help protect and conserve their natural resources.

- The Federated States of Micronesia will conduct a nationwide assessment to address and prepare for the impacts of climate change, using “time proven traditional methods of conservation” as well as new innovative tools and technology.

- Speaking on behalf of the six countries of the Coral Triangle Initiative, Indonesia announced the “CT6 Communique” that commits the countries to addressing the impacts of climate change and using conservation to build the resilience of coastal communities and coral reefs that are the source of food for millions in the region.

- The United States highlighted a suite of efforts to support adaptation of oceans and coasts, including the restoration of large wetland ecosystems to provide resilience to climate change and bring economic benefit to local communities.

- Costa Rica emphasized its leadership in bringing the concept of ecosystem-based approaches to adaptation into the climate negotiations and its continuing efforts to create sustainable policies and funding to strengthen its natural resources for the benefit of local communities.

- Ecuador committed to develop and implement its National Adaptation Program to Climate Change including building resilience in highland communities and ecosystems.

- California released its California Climate Adaptation Strategy that integrates nature-based adaptation strategies into a comprehensive approach to addressing climate change impacts.

- Colombia, Ecuador, Italy, Yemen, Germany and several regional governments made commitments to integrate and develop solutions that use the power of nature to help people adapt to the impacts of climate change.

- Google will deploy its latest satellite monitoring tool to help communities and officials analyze the impact of climate change on ecosystems and the services they provide to people, like forests that help secure and ensure clean water supplies.

The Nature Conservancy, World Vision and the IUCN joined these countries making a strong commitment to helping people and nature adapt to climate change. ■

Chrissy Schwinn is associate director of Marketing, California Field Office of The Nature Conservancy.

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