

## Son of Copenhagen

*The new round of negotiations led to only incremental progress.*

“WHY”, asked a Chinese negotiator, “is this working-group facing so much difficulty in showing a minimal semblance of being alive?” It was a fair question at the end of two weeks of climate discussions in Bonn. The talks led to some progress in some areas, but bogged down in almost all others. There is a moment in such negotiations when you come up against a nagging problem: many countries that are committed to act on climate change will seek to avoid really doing so for at least as long as other parties are under no such commitment—if not longer.

The meeting, which took place in Bonn from May 31st to June 11th, was the first big negotiating session held under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) since the rushed, inconclusive and, to most, disappointing end of the Copenhagen conference last December. It produced some of the little that was expected. Many countries made a genuine attempt to set a new and equable tone for discussion and debate. The Copenhagen Accord, agreed to by a few dozen heads of government, for instance, has an uncertain status. The negotiators agreed to have aspects of the accord, such as a high-level advisory group on finance, dealt with under the UNFCCC.

But such progress was at best incremental. The chairman of the negotiations on long-term co-operative action (LCA, which means the things that go beyond the Kyoto protocol: see table) tried to nudge the discussions forward by proposing a draft document at the beginning of the meeting. It was meant to form the basis of a negotiating text from which detailed rules can eventually be drawn for how to decide on such things as providing finance to developing countries, transferring technology and saving forests.

<b>Fog, clouds and climate</b>	
<b>Jargon</b>	<b>Translation</b>
CBDR (common but differentiated responsibilities)	Core principle which allows everyone to expect something of everyone else, but doesn't say what
Commitment	Something between an aspiration and a smokescreen
Environmental Integrity	Trying actually to slow global warming. Not as valued as commitments
KP (Kyoto protocol)	Uniquely, requires action from some states, thus wholly stalled
LCA (long-term co-operative action)*	The other bit of the talks, can go well when commitments (qv) stay vague
LULUCF (land use, land use change and forestry)	Turns photosynthesis into accounting loopholes. Useful for getting out of KP commitments

Source: *The Economist* \*The institutional manifestation of the Bali Action Plan (don't ask)

Predictably, many countries found fault with the chairman's draft. Discontent came both from countries, such as Bolivia, that are opposed to the accord and all its works as well as from some of those, such as America, that are broadly in favour. So, after a fortnight of sometimes constructive discussion, on the eve of the last day a new version was put to the conference. It, too, was all but universally criticised. The chairman will try again at the next session in Bonn, to be held in August. But chances are slim that negotiators will come up with a document that can serve as the basis for an agreement at the higher-level discussions taking place in Cancun, in Mexico, this December.

Other questions are even less tractable. Whose money, and how much, might flow through the new conduits for finance, which have yet to be established? What sort of commitments, if any, will the various less developed countries make in return for some of that money? The LCA's sister negotiations, the Kyoto protocol (KP) track, show how much more vexed things get

when commitments actually look as if they might cost money. Two technical problems bedevil the KP track. One is “land use, land-use change and forestry”, known to its friends as LULUCF. It could become a loophole for wriggling out of emission cuts—if, among other things, the baselines for forests are set too low, or if the rules allow the growth of a forest to be counted as a credit while its later felling does not constitute a debit.

The other problem is “hot air”, meaning the emission credits that have accrued to countries, such as Russia, that have seen their emissions fall below the Kyoto baseline year of 1990 simply because of economic contraction. Like a lax attitude to LULUCF, hot-air credits could allow developed countries that have pledged “emissions cuts” under the Copenhagen accord to meet those commitments without actually cutting emissions by much. According to analysis by the Dutch environmental-assessment agency, pledges which under one set of hot air and LULUCF rules would require a 12% cut on 1990 levels, would demand only a 4% reduction under a different set of rules. These are the sort of things that matter at negotiations—and on which they founder.

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