

Economic & Political Weekly, Magazine, 19 Jul 2008

## The G-8 and India's National Action Plan on Climate Change

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The Hokkaido communique on climate change of the Group of Eight countries does not lay down targets for emissions reductions in the developed countries. Yet the G-8 asks developing countries to take more meaningful mitigation actions. How does India's new national action plan propose to deal with climate change and how is it different from the approach being suggested by the G-8?

The summit last week of the G-8 at Hokkaido, Japan, deliberated on, among other items, climate change. The focus of the deliberations was not on how to make the transition to a low carbon economy, but on what developing countries should do to share the burden even at the cost of their own economic growth.

The summit is important because for the first time we have two communiqué, negotiated at the heads of state level, laying out the positions of the developed and developing countries. There is no longer one vision on how to deal with climate change. The developing countries now have the capacity to reject any framework that seeks to shift the burden onto them and have laid out their own vision for sustainable development.

The communiqué issued by the G-8 on July 8 stated:

...seeks to share with all Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) the vision of, and together with them to consider and adopt in the UNFCCC negotiations, the goal of achieving at least 50 per cent reduction of global emissions by 2050, recognising that this global challenge can only be met by a global response...in ways that will enable us to meet our sustainable economic development and energy security objectives...all major economies will need to commit to meaningful mitigation actions to be bound in the international agreement to be negotiated by the end of 2009.

It is important to note that the reference is to a "goal", which is defined as an aim or desired result. A target would be an objective or result towards which efforts are directed. In the framework convention on climate change, negotiated in 1992, all developed countries had agreed to the "aim" of reducing their emissions by the end of the century to 1990 levels. In the Kyoto Protocol emissions reductions were agreed, but only up to 2012. The communiqué just agreed upon does not specify the year from which the further reduction would be measured. Despite the lack of any demonstrable progress in reducing emissions so far, or commitment to reduce developed country emissions in the

future, the communiqué would like developing countries to commit to “meaningful mitigation actions to be bound in the international agreement to be negotiated by the end of 2009”. Such a step would effectively shift the burden of dealing with climate change on to developing countries, adversely affecting their growth, and therefore has not been accepted by them.

The declaration on energy security and climate change issued on July 9, in which developing countries participated, brought out a very different vision of the developing countries. It specified that the shared vision for long-term cooperative action had the long term goal of emission reduction as one component and major efforts towards sustainable consumption and production as another component. It places equal importance on mitigation, adaptation, concessional finance and technology transfer. It also specifies a two-track approach with developed countries achieving “absolute emission reductions” and developing countries a “deviation from business as usual emissions”. The inconvenient truth is that these conclusions are based on the provisions of the convention. The chair’s summary recognises that “what the major developed economies do will differ from what major developing economies do”.

### **New Framework**

In this context, India’s national action plan on climate change is significant not only because it provides a clear direction for changes at the national level in policy, planning and public-private partnerships but also because it lays out a global vision for modifying longer term trends to achieve sustainable development. It provides fresh thinking in an increasingly sterile global debate.

The principles the plan enunciates and the approach laid out will lead to three shifts in the way climate change has so far been considered. First, it stresses qualitative shifts in growth pathways rather than quantitative reductions of emissions. Developed countries have not even been able to agree on the base year to measure reductions, the percentage reductions to be brought about and the quantities of carbon that can be eliminated without affecting economic growth because each country looks at the problem through the prism

of its national industry. The plan’s focus on demand-side management shifts the debate to economy-wide areas where cost effective measures can be instituted. It seeks to redefine cost-effectiveness of measures in terms of opportunity costs rather than the bottom line of the industrial sector of an economy.

Second, the stress of the plan is on modifying activities that generate emissions of carbon or are affected by climate change, through new knowledge. The key role of technology establishes a bottom-up approach and a basis for international cooperation very different to the current stress of developed countries on a global agreement for determining when world-wide emissions should peak. By introducing the notion of avoided emissions, or deviations from business as usual, the plan will also measure the contribution to mitigation of climate change as a responsible nation.

Third, adaptation to the adverse effects of climate change is considered the policy priority under the plan. We know from the report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) that the adverse effects on monsoon patterns will affect food security. Developed countries, where one in three persons owns cars, on the other hand, are more concerned with energy (oil) security, and we know from

the IPCC that the adverse impacts of climate change are going to be negligible for them. Therefore, even though ensuring food security is a key objective of the climate change convention, developed countries relegate adaptation to more scientific research to assess effects. The balance of rights and obligations under the convention requires them to provide assistance on a grant or concessional basis for the damage being caused in developing countries.

With the growing importance of the service sector in economic growth worldwide, and the resultant effect on emissions of carbon dioxide, a sustainable energy future is possible only by modifying per capita trends in energy use. Improvements in end-use energy efficiency have benefits both for economic growth and for the environment – reducing demand for electricity and emissions.

The key insight of India’s national action plan is that it is the daily decisions by individual consumers that drive economy-wide emissions of carbon dioxide. China also stated at the summit that climate change “should be comprehensively resolved within the framework of sustainable development”. A vision of environmentally sustainable growth is something the developed countries do not want to talk about as yet.



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