

Equity and Climate Action:

Greenpeace Position

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BRIEFING

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Greenpeace position on equity and climate action

Recent scientific findings coupled with better understanding of the risks associated with global temperature increase provide a stark warning to the world: our climate system is far more sensitive than we previously believed and serious risks related to species extinction, extreme weather events, overall impacts and their distribution as well as large-scale discontinuities (such as melting ice sheets) are now estimated to occur with much smaller temperature increases.

There is an urgent need for bold action on a global scale to bring greenhouse gas emissions down as close to zero as possible by mid-century in order to avoid catastrophic climate change – and all countries will need to participate in this effort.

Governments at the Copenhagen Climate Summit in December 2009 must reach agreement on a deal that sets robust and ambitious targets for emissions reductions and provides financial and other support to enable developing countries to take a low carbon development pathway and to adapt to the unavoidable impacts of climate change.

While industrialised countries must take the lead by adopting ambitious and deep economy-wide reductions in emissions, developing countries will also be expected to participate as the existing carbon and energy-intensive development pathway is simply unsustainable in climate terms. Opting for carbon-free and climate-friendly development offers enormous sustainable development opportunities for both developing and industrialised countries.

One of the most crucial issues in future agreements will be the question of who does what and by when. The answer to this question will need to be built on the following fairness and equity principles; principles that should guide all current and future international negotiations on actions to limit global warming.

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Creating jobs and increasing energy security
A maintenance engineer inspects a wind turbine at the Nan wind farm in Nan'ao, Guangdong Province, home to the best wind resources in China and several industrial-scale wind farms. Investments in renewable energy offer enormous opportunities for creating new jobs, increasing energy security and fighting climate change.



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1) Climate action must be both fair and equitable

The world faces many challenges: dangerous climate change and its many severe impacts on human life and the environment; continuing biodiversity loss at an unprecedented rate; and the increasing inequality between rich and poor, to name but a few. In recent years governments have adopted some (weak) agreements to tackle these issues, but these initiatives are far from sufficient.

For example, the Kyoto Protocol's ambition to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from industrialised countries by 5% by 2012 was politically challenging to negotiate but is a very small first step in the context of the achievements - and future agreements - that will be required and negotiated in the coming decade. The Millennium Development Goals aim at halving poverty by 2015, which even if achieved would still leave more than a billion people surviving on less than two US dollars a day.

It is clear that climate change will exacerbate both poverty and inequality. The poorest - the majority of whom are women - will be hit first and hardest by climate change even though they have contributed least to the problem. Preventing dangerous climate change is essential if we hope to eradicate poverty. In this context, all climate action - be it at the international, national or local levels - needs to be equitable. It must take into account the responsibilities and capacities of nations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and should not increase the vulnerability of poor people and marginalised communities.

Climate action can contribute to achieving genuinely sustainable development by improving access to energy services, increasing support for sustainable agriculture, expanding forest protection and creating access to jobs in a low-carbon global economy. Of course, climate action cannot solve all the problems of poverty and inequality. But, making climate action fair and integrating 'climate-proofing' - making sure that investment in developing countries doesn't unnecessarily add to climate change or create vulnerable infrastructure or institutions - into development and related policies such as trade will be essential.

2) Climate action offers development opportunities

It has become increasingly clear that dangerous climate change will make development extremely costly, if not impossible, for many communities around the world. In contrast, taking decisive, equitable action to tackle the climate issue will create new development opportunities and help to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

Greenpeace rejects the ideological argument that economic development and climate action are incompatible, and that conventional 'fossil-fuelled' development must come first. Any sustainable future for our planet will have to be carbon free. Facilitating the transition of poor countries to a carbon-free development path will avoid raising emissions levels for years to come and avert the associated costs of 'decarbonising' society in the future. Furthermore, there is little evidence that global macro-economic growth alone will ever eliminate poverty.

3) Consumption patterns must be more sustainable

Current economic growth in the developed world and future development in poor countries is based on oil and other fossil fuels. It has fostered lifestyles and consumption patterns – or aspirations to such lifestyles - that are unsustainable under any energy system, since they assume unlimited availability of natural resources and cheap labour.

The globalisation of both consumption and production of goods and the international trade they encompass have created huge additional pressures on the environment and on the climate in particular. Globally, consumers need to make their consumption patterns more sustainable - but people in rich countries also need to take responsibility for the greenhouse gas emissions in countries abroad that are linked to their own consumption patterns. A quarter or more of emissions of certain developing countries is linked to products exported to industrialised countries.

4) Industrialised nations must take the lead

The international community has acknowledged that we need to address both climate change and equity by agreeing that nations must act 'on the basis of equity and in accordance with their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities'.

Industrialised countries are expected to take the lead in combating climate change. In the first phase of the Kyoto Protocol this translates as economy-wide caps on greenhouse gas emissions for industrialised countries only. Due to their historic responsibilities for emitting greenhouse gases that persist in the atmosphere today, as well as their high per capita emissions and their significant capacity to act, industrialised countries as a group need to reduce their emissions by at least 40% below 1990 levels by 2020, with at least three quarters of this needing to be met by domestic action.

Climate Change starves the poor, threatens food security

Farmers with corn damaged by severe drought, Surallah, Cotabato, Philippines in 2005. When an extreme drought struck, farmers reported that the harvest was less than one third the normal yield. The country's worst drought in 50 years affected around 700,000 people. Rising temperatures will increase the risks of droughts and other extreme weather events in developing countries and will primarily hit the poor.



5) All countries need to participate in climate action

Since the first assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 1990, it has been clear that even if industrialised countries reduce their greenhouse gas emissions to zero, it will not be enough to stabilise atmospheric CO₂ concentrations. Hence action by all countries is needed to prevent dangerous climate change. Developing countries will need to take on measures, based on their differing capacities and circumstances, to limit current and certainly future greenhouse gas emissions.

This can range from developing sectoral targets to setting economy-wide caps. Countries with the clear capacity to act should take on economy-wide commitments during the second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol. Others should follow later, when their capacity to reduce emissions - which industrialised countries must actively support with technology transfer and financing – has been developed.

At the 2007 Climate Summit in Bali, developing countries agreed to develop 'measurable, reportable and verifiable' actions after 2012 that will enable them to limit or reduce their emissions. A large number of developing countries can reduce emissions in specific sectors by setting a renewable energy or energy efficiency target or by developing programmes to halt deforestation. The commitments made in Bali by industrialised countries to support these efforts with technology transfer and financing must be translated into visible action.

6) Internal equity

Even in poor, developing countries there are groups of people who contribute to greenhouse gas emissions at grossly unsustainable levels. The political elites in these countries often use average emissions figures to justify continuing on a business-as-usual path – effectively hiding behind the poor. Governments need to take strong measures to ensure that rich people in developing countries reduce their own emissions in the same way as rich people in industrialised countries must reduce theirs. There is no acceptable argument for rich people in developing countries not to participate in necessary lifestyle changes.

At the same time, the poor and marginalised in industrialised countries also suffer from lack of access to energy services while being the first victims of climate change in their countries. Equitable climate action - at the national, regional and local levels - needs to take into account the increasing inequality within nations.

National governments must develop policies to ensure that climate action does not increase inequality but instead reduces the gap, for instance by providing access to decentralised and clean energy that does not concentrate pollution in marginalised communities. Governments should also ensure that local communities participate in decision-making processes on reducing emissions and adapting to climate change, and assist them in funding and implementing climate adaptation measures.

7) Sharing the mitigation effort

The question 'Who should do what and by when?' must be answered on the basis of specific criteria that take into account countries' responsibility (current and historical emissions), capability, relative wealth and income and the potential to reduce emissions and support others to do the same. A fair and equitable way of sharing the mitigation effort and assigning responsibility for funding, based on these criteria, is needed.

While comparisons based on current per capita CO₂ emissions give a good indication of the huge discrepancy in emissions between rich and poor countries and clearly show the overwhelming primary responsibility of rich countries, equal per capita emissions rights do not provide for an equitable or even effective framework to shape the future climate change regime under the UNFCCC. Equal per capita emissions rights do not take into account historical emissions or the capacity to act. Equitable climate action should not focus on a right to emit - and hence to pollute - either, but instead provide access to energy services and promote sustainable development.

Greenpeace supports the principles behind the Greenhouse Development Rights (GDR) framework¹ and considers it to be the rules-based proposal that matches our principles most closely. The GDR framework puts forward three criteria: historic emissions (starting from 1990); current per capita emissions; and per capita income (but only for those inhabitants with an income above €7,500 a year PPP).

Use of the GDR as an operational framework for negotiations would require further development as well as a major shift in the way effort sharing is dealt with in both the Kyoto Protocol and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. Therefore, Greenpeace is not calling for its immediate implementation, nor do we support the GDR authors' call to delay the start of the second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol.

In the interim, Greenpeace believes the concept proposed by the South-North Dialogue², while not addressing the issue of internal equity, offers a better opportunity to integrate our principles into an effort-sharing proposal for the second commitment period.

8) Rich countries' responsibilities go beyond their own emissions

Equitable climate action must take into account historical responsibility and the capacity to act. Under these principles, industrialised countries will have to take on long-term commitments that go beyond their own emissions. They must reduce their own emissions to zero, and in addition must also finance mitigation and adaptation in poorer countries.

This means providing adequate and predictable new financial resources for climate action in developing countries. Assessments from sources such as the UNFCCC³, Sir Nicholas Stern⁴ and Oxfam⁵ estimate the total costs for mitigation, technology cooperation, adaptation and halting deforestation at around USD 140 billion per annum. This is far less than the annual global defence expenditure (USD 1,339 billion⁶) and only a fraction of total global GDP (USD 54 trillion⁷). It is comparable to current ODA (USD 104 billion⁸), (which is itself less than half the ODA promised by industrialised countries in 1970 (0.7% of GDP).

Clearly, more money is needed for responding to climate change and these resources must be in addition to the long-promised ODA. At minimum, current financial assistance for developing countries needs to triple.

- 1 Baer P. et.al. 2008: The Greenhouse Development Rights Framework. The right to development in a climate constrained world. Heinrich Böll Foundation, Christian Aid, Ecoequity and the Stockholm Environment Institute. (www.ecoequity.org/GDRs)
- 2 GTZ. 2004: South-North Dialogue on Equity in the Greenhouse. A proposal for an adequate and equitable Global Climate Agreement. Federal Ministry for Economic Development and Cooperation of Germany. www.wupperinst.org/uploads/tx_wipprojekt/1085_proposal.pdf
- 3 UNFCCC 2007: Report on the analysis of existing and potential investments and financial flows relevant to the development of an effective and appropriate international response to climate change. August 2007. http://unfccc.int/files/cooperation_and_support/financial_mechanism/financial_mechanism_gef/application/pdf/dialogue_working_paper_8.pdf
- 4 Stern N. 2006: Stern review: The economics of climate change. HM Treasury. www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/sternreview_index.htm
- 5 Oxfam 2007: Financing adaptation: what's needed in developing countries and who should pay. www.oxfam.org/en/policy/briefingpapers/bp104_climate_change_0705
- 6 SIPRI 2008: SIPRI Yearbook 2008. Oxford University Press. <http://yearbook2008.sipri.org>
- 7 World Bank 2008: Gross Domestic Product 2007. <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/DATASTATISTICS/Resources/GDP.pdf>
- 8 OECD 2008: Debt relief is down: other ODA rises slightly. OECD. April 2008. www.oecd.org/document/8/0,3343,en_2649_201185_40381960_1_1_1_1,00.html

Protecting the forests and forest peoples' livelihoods

Loading a barge with ecotimber in Lake Murray, Papua New Guinea. Any effort to reduce emissions from deforestation must respect indigenous peoples' and local communities rights and support their livelihoods.



9) Markets and funds

A global carbon market will play an essential role in providing the necessary funds for mitigation and adaptation programmes in developing countries. However, market mechanisms alone will not be sufficient to bring about the rapid global reductions needed, nor can they achieve the equity objectives as stated above.

As well as delivering more genuine carbon reductions, market mechanisms must be structured to ensure that they contribute to sustainable development. It is also necessary to ensure that mitigation and adaptation support reaches the poor by developing specific funding mechanisms under the framework of the UNFCCC that can deal with transfer of financial support to mitigation, adaptation and reduced deforestation.

The massive funding needed should largely be raised through auctioning or selling of emission permits, at national and international levels. The governance of these mechanisms must be democratic, inclusive and transparent, and allow participation and input from those directly involved. It must also ensure that all funding is spent in the most timely and effective way possible and adheres to the highest environmental and social standards agreed by the international community in previous decades.

GREENPEACE

Greenpeace is an independent global campaigning organisation that acts to change attitudes and behaviour, to protect and conserve the environment and to promote peace.

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