ANALYSIS IN PROGRESS:
Your primer to the spectre of “partial deals”

Equitywatch is busy preparing a primer about the spectre “partial deals”: who’s calling for what; how one proposal, a problematic Danish-Australian collaboration, came to be; and where we go from here.

Today, we present an overview of where Parties stand; tomorrow, the full article. Stay tuned.

I don’t think we can get a legally binding agreement by Copenhagen… I think we can get that within a year after Copenhagen.
-- Yvo de Boer, November 5, 2009

What happens if—as many are now openly speculating—a comprehensive, equitable, binding deal can’t be negotiated by the end of CoP 15 in Copenhagen?

One option is that world leaders sign on to a partial agreement, something that’s called a deal, even if it leaves many, many details to be negotiated.

In fact, this may be the only option that answers a widespread political imperative—averting the perception that Copenhagen failed—within a reality that developed and developing countries are still miles apart on many issues, including the central question of targets.

1. Not all partial deals are created equal

The US, and the so-called Copenhagen Commitment Circle (CCC): Denmark, Australia, Mexico, Russia and others see an opportunity to abandon the Kyoto architecture under a new, “politically binding” agreement where countries would agree to domestic actions—summing up to a portfolio of pledges—and some kind of review mechanism.

All the multilateral, internationally negotiated aspects of the deal would be signed in Copenhagen, bringing “relief” from tense negotiations, media scrutiny and global political pressure. (Ed. Though not from rising temperatures.) After CoP-15, leaders would simply return to their own countries and write domestic laws.

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1 The quote was widely reported; for example, see: Alex Morales 2009, Climate-Accord Deadline May Slip a Year as Nations ‘Play Games’, in the Bloomberg News online edition, November 6. (bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601085&sid=aTFXPFqcsftc)
Although it would be sold as a deal, the CCC portfolio approach would do away with (a) internationally binding targets and (b) any notion of historical responsibility.

It stands in distinct contrast to a not-quite-there-but-almost deal in which countries would renew a commitment to setting binding, science-based targets through negotiations, and to sharing out emissions cuts based on equity principles. (Ed. Almost like a Bali Road Map 2.0.) After CoP-15 they would agree keep negotiating—internationally—until the details are settled, multilaterally.

The graphic below illustrates where different countries stand on the two key questions of legally-binding, multilateral targets, and historical responsibility. The US, Denmark, Australia and the CCC are ready to abandon both. The EU still publicly insists on multilateralism, but historical responsibility is out the window. For now, the developing world is holding fast to fairness. But the pressure to yield is on.