

What's up for discussion at CoP-8?

1. Adequacy of commitments (Second review of the adequacy of Article 4.2(a) and (b))

Article 4.2 (a) of the UNFCCC

Each of these (developed country) parties shall adopt national policies and take corresponding measures on the mitigation of climate change, by limiting its anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases and protecting and enhancing its greenhouse gas sinks and reservoirs...

Article 4.2 (b) of the UNFCCC

In order to promote progress to this end, each of these Parties shall communicate, within six months of entry into force of the Convention for it and periodically thereafter, and with accordance with Article 12, detailed information on its policies and measures referred to in subparagraph (a) above.... This information will be reviewed by the Conference of Parties, and its first session and periodically thereafter, in accordance with Article 7.

Article 4.2 (d) of the UNFCCC

The Conference of Parties shall, at its first session, review the adequacy of subparagraphs (1) and (b) above....Based on this review, the Conference of Parties shall take appropriate action, which may include the adoption of amendments to the commitments in subparagraphs (a) and (b) above.... A second review of subparagraphs (a) and (b) shall take place not later than 31 December 1998, and thereafter at regular intervals determined by the Conference of Parties....

The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), in Article 4.2 (d), calls for a review of the adequacy of developed country commitments in dealing with the problem of climate change. This provision was included in the Convention to address the concerns of some countries that Article 4.2(a) and (b) was not sufficient. This review was to take place in 1998, but has been continually postponed. According to the rules, any agenda item, which is not agreed upon at one CoP session, is automatically placed on the provisional agenda for the next. Thus the second review of the adequacy of Article 4.2(a) and (b) is included as an item on the provisional agenda for CoP- 8.

The basic controversy is whether inadequacy implies failure of the industrialised countries (Annex I parties) to fulfill their commitments or should be interpreted as opening up a discussion on commitments for non-Annex I Parties (mainly developing countries).

2. Clean Development Mechanism

The Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) is a mechanism under the Kyoto Protocol that allows an industrialised country to invest in a clean energy projects to be set up in place of a less efficient (more polluting) project in a developing country. In return, the industrialised country gets credit for the reduced emissions, which it can use to meet its Kyoto target.

In the last round of talks on climate change (November, 2001) an Executive Board (EB) was set up to decide the rules for CDM projects. The EB has met five times since then. The sixth meeting of the EB will be held on October 23-24, 2002 at the Sheraton Hotel in New Delhi. At this meeting, the Board will accredit "Operational Entities" to validate proposed CDM projects, check that the project reduces emissions additional to what could have been achieved by the developing country itself and monitor the operation of the project. It will also discuss how to simplify procedures to encourage small-scale projects.

CDM will also come up for discussion at CoP-8, where definitions and rules for projects to qualify as CDM projects are to be developed. Rules for including afforestation and reforestation activities in the CDM for the first commitment period have to be finalised for adoption at CoP-9.

CDM and sinks

Sinks are land, forests and oceans which absorb carbon dioxide and act as reservoirs. At CoP-7 in Marrakech, it was decided that industrialised countries could use credits from such sink projects towards meeting up to 1 per cent of their reduction targets.

However, the use of sinks projects under CDM remains controversial. Greenhouse gases may be re-released if a sink is damaged (for example if a forest burns down). This leads to uncertainties regarding the permanence of the project. It is also difficult to certify the "additionality" of a forestry project – i.e. would it have occurred anyway, irrespective of CDM. Similarly, a forest project could displace the local population of the area and increase emissions in the area to which they shift their activities -- a problem defined as a 'leakage'.

Strong rules for permanence, additionality, leakage, assessing the impact on the local population and measures to reduce uncertainty need to be applied otherwise CDM would just end up being a cheap way for industrialised countries to meet their targets without making any changes domestically.

3. Adaptation

Briefing Note

There are some climatic changes that are already inevitable -- even if the Kyoto Protocol is fully implemented, in fact, even if the world stops using fossil fuel tomorrow. Developing countries will bear the brunt of these impacts (*see CSE Fact Sheets on climate change impacts for details*). Therefore, these countries would like a discussion on how the industrialised countries will help them adapt better to these changes.

At CoP-6 in Bonn in 2001, three funds were set up: the Special Climate Fund (finance measures for adaptation, technology transfers and economic diversification), the Adaptation Fund (apart from taking two per cent off the proceeds from CDM projects, industrialised countries are merely invited to contribute towards this fund) and the Least Developed Countries Fund. The Global Environment Facility (GEF) is responsible for operating all these funds. The Adaptation Fund literally amounts to taxing the poor to help the poor – taking away a share of their profits from CDM to help them cope with a problem that is largely the creation of industrialised countries – thus allowing these rich countries to shrug off their responsibility for the problem.

Meanwhile, developing countries have received very little technology or finance from the rich countries to help them adapt better to changes such as sea level rise or increased temperatures. Many of them, including India, therefore want the focus to shift from only talking about climate change mitigation, to effectively addressing adaptation as well.

4. Canada's proposal to get credits for cleaner energy exports

Recognising that Canadian ratification is crucial for the Kyoto Protocol to come into effect, Canada has come up with a proposal that has been labeled ludicrous by many. Canada claims that it should get credit because it exports “cleaner” gaseous fuels and hydroelectricity to the US, and that stops the US from using more coal and thus causing more carbon dioxide emissions. If this proposal is allowed by CoP-8, it will be a present to Canada of an additional emission allowance of 70 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent per year (70 MtCO₂e/year). This would allow Canada's emissions to rise by another 11.4 per cent relative to its 1990 baseline, resulting in a net increase of 14.6 per cent above 1990, instead of the required 6 per cent reduction. Accepting Canada's proposal would also set a precedent for countries to demand credits for all kinds of exports like more fuel-efficient cars.