

# ECO



ECO has been published by Non-Governmental Environmental Organisations at major international conferences since the Stockholm Environment Conference in 1972. This issue is published cooperatively by Climate Action Network (CAN) groups attending COP12 and COP/MOP2 in Nairobi in November 2006. ECO email: [ecopaper@hotmail.com](mailto:ecopaper@hotmail.com) – ECO website: <http://www.climatenetwork.org/eco> – Editorial/Production: Nithiyananthan Nesadurai/ Sander Wijsman

## Ethics – The Missing Dimension

ECO finds it astounding that despite all the good intentions expressed at the climate change negotiations for more than a decade, the political, economic and scientific arguments have remained dominant in the proceedings so far, marginalising *ethics*.

This is unfortunate, as the incorporation of ethics into the discussions could lead to a shift from the divisive political posturing of *who* is right, which is consuming so much time and energy, to a focus on *what* is right and needs to be done.

An ethically based global consensus on climate change may reverse disparities between rich and poor, and reduce potential international tension that will arise from climate-caused food and water scarcities and perceived inequitable use of the global atmospheric commons – past, present and future – as a carbon sink.

In essence, ethics is a field of philosophical enquiry that examines concepts and their application about what is right and wrong, obligatory and non-obligatory, and when responsibility should be attached to human actions that cause harm.

A review of the ethics of the climate change process from a scientific perspective emerged at COP10 in Buenos Aires. At that meeting, a group of individuals and organisations adopted the Buenos Aires Declaration on the Human Dimensions of Climate Change. It concluded that reflection on the ethical dimensions of climate change was urgent because:

- Many profound ethical questions are obscured by scientific and economic

arguments about various climate change proposals;

- Unless the ethical dimensions are considered, individual nations may choose responses that are ethically unsupportable or unjust;
- An equitable approach to climate change policy is necessary to overcome barriers currently blocking progress in international negotiations.

A follow-up White Paper on the Ethical Dimensions of Climate Change\* was released at a side event here last Wednesday. Eight specific ethical issues were evaluated from the perspectives of factual content, ethical analysis and procedural fairness.

Extracts of the findings on each of these issues are as follows:

**Responsibility for Damages** – Cost to the economy is not an ethically acceptable excuse for an individual nation to fail to take actions.

**Atmospheric Targets** – Annex 1 countries are ethically obligated to consider the interests of non-represented future generations and non-humans.

**Allocating Global Emissions among Nations** – The polluter pays principle is consistent with principles of distributive justice. (There is an ethical imperative that each developing nation makes every effort to support sustainable development practices.)

**Scientific Uncertainty in Policy Making** – The argument that a nation need not reduce its greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions because of scientific uncertainty about the

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## Closer Than You Think?

In any relationship, it is important to listen carefully – without being defensive – to what your partner is saying. In the listening, and in the response, we acknowledge and respond to the other's concerns. It is no different in these climate negotiations. We are co-dependent, developed and developing countries: there is no saving the climate without each other.

If we focused less on the words, and focused more on the outcomes we are seeking – preventing dangerous climate change – what might we hear in what each partner is saying?

Let us look at some real life examples of where different interpretations of, or associations with, key words keep us from moving forward:

1. When developed countries push for a process on Article 9, they are *not* asking developing countries for Quantified Emissions Limitation Reduction Obligations (QELROs).
2. When developing countries oppose a process to review Article 9, it does *not* mean that they are not ready to consider specific items such as what might be needed to expand the Clean Development Mechanism and Adaptation funding, and technology transfer.
3. When developed countries talk about developing country participation, they are *not* talking about developing countries taking on absolute mandatory caps.
4. When developing countries say no new commitments, it does *not* mean they are not open to discussing to doing more, or the kinds of criteria that could be applied to graduation.

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## Equitable Distribution in the CDM

The skewed distribution of Clean Development Mechanism projects in eligible countries has been well documented. However, only three per cent of the 450 registered projects are situated in Africa. The poor distribution relates both to CDM-specific issues, as well as those correlated with macro-economics, energy infrastructure and levels of development.

Barriers to increased distribution of CDM projects in some African countries and other Least Developed Countries (LDCs) include low levels of energy use and low baselines, uncertainty about the future of CDM post-2012, low-cost high-yield projects crowding out renewable energy and energy efficiency projects, transaction and technical costs, lack of institutional infrastructure and expertise, and a reluctance of local financial services sectors to engage with the process.

Additional issues include the “perceived risk” of investment related to levels of governance, strong civil society opposition to CDM, and a lack of political will. Improving the geographical distribution of CDM projects thus requires the removal of an entire series of barriers and introduction of various measures.

There are a number of proposed solutions to address the identified issues. Within the negotiation process, these include: prompt provision of clear guidance on programmatic CDM, development of standardised baselines, addressing low level of development, and increased impetus on a post 2012 framework to create certainty around the carbon market.

Specifically, Annex I countries need to facilitate increased capacity building in the private and public sector, designated national authorities (DNAs) and the financial services sector in LDCs. In addition, projects also require dedicated upfront financing coupled with insurance products, as opposed to the dominant “pay on delivery” transaction model.

Additionally, current efforts by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) to promote and remove barriers to energy efficiency and renewable energy should be stepped up.

Moreover, host countries, need improved governance and DNAs need to better fulfil their sustainable development mandate. While CDM promotion through clear policy frameworks and development of project portfolios are key, these activities should occur outside of the DNA to avoid conflicts of interest. It is not clear that DNAs will always halt projects that affect local communities. As such, validators must be given a clear mandate to identify ineligible projects that have not undertaken proper stakeholder consultations or where

stakeholder comments clearly have not been taken into account and addressed.

An enhanced system for stakeholder consultation in CDM projects is also required. The stringency of this process should be comparable to that applied to additionality and emissions reductions methodologies.

Finally, while these and other measures can be undertaken to promote CDM in LDCs, it is clear they will never reach the scale of CDM activity in rapidly industrialising countries such as China or India. Nor will CDM solve all their sustainable development problems. Therefore, other means alongside the CDM will need to be developed to promote sustainable development in these countries. One starting point could be to focus GEF financing on countries where the CDM does not perform.

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If we listened carefully and focused on outcomes, what might we hear today?

“We agree carbon markets are an innovative way to achieve climate goals and we, as developed countries, are ready to maintain the framework for those markets to continue.”

“As developing countries, we recognise that Article 9 is an important tool for assessing how we can make the Kyoto Protocol better.”

In negotiating terms, this means developed countries have to make it clear they will continue with a QELROS approach – not intensity or sectoral targets or a menu approach – for the second commitment period, making it is absolutely clear to all partners they commit to building on the Kyoto Protocol architecture.

This also means that developing countries have to indicate openness to a credible process under Article 9 that provides for analysis of elements not covered by the Ad Hoc Working Group or Dialogue. Together these elements would provide the basis for a negotiating mandate that could be agreed at COP/MOP3.

### THANKS

The Climate Action Network thanks WWF International, Greenpeace International, FOE International, David Suzuki Foundation, RAC France, Helio International, Équiterre, Natural Resources Defense Council, NET, Practical Action, CAN-Europe, USCAN, Union of Concerned Scientists, Environmental Defense, Acid Rain Secretariat 2006, World Resources Institute, National Wildlife Federation, Environmental Protection Society Malaysia, The Nature Conservancy, CASA, WWF UK, Tearfund, Pelangi, United Nations Office Nairobi for contributing to the publication of ECO.

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consequences of timing and magnitude does not withstand minimum ethical scrutiny.

**Cost to National Economies** – If a nation refuses to take action to reduce GHG emissions on the basis of domestic cost alone, its position is ethically unsupportable.

**Independent Responsibility to Act** – Annex I countries should undertake policies and measures to limit their emissions regardless of actions taken by non-Annex I country Parties.

**Potential New Technologies** – It is ethically problematic to appeal to the possibility that less costly technologies might be available in the future as a basis for refusing to reduce emissions now.

**Procedural Fairness** – No nation may consider the implications of climate change policy to itself alone in developing national climate change policy.

ECO aspires that the ethical positions expressed in the White Paper act as a wake-up call to Parties, especially Annex I Parties that by and large have been using various tricks and tactics to shirk responsibilities to which they are already committed.

A lack of urgency could be considered the common thread woven through all COPs so far. This COP has been no different despite the explosive Stern Report released a week prior to this meeting highlighting the serious economic impacts of climate change. The indifferent reaction here might be considered unethical given the global community is on the verge of committing catastrophic climate change.

What would an ethical premise imply for a post-2012 regime that would actually deal with the climate problem? That the wealthy, comfortable, consuming population of the world must:

- Reduce their GHG emissions rapidly to prevent disastrous climate change;
- Provide the resources to enable sustainable development in poor communities along a low carbon pathway;
- Provide compensation for climate damages that are unavoidable, and – where possible – provide resources that will allow poor communities to adapt.

Some glimmers of hope have already emerged due to the action of authorities against tremendous odds: the world’s largest coal port of Newcastle, Australia capping coal exports from its port; New Delhi shifting all public transport vehicles from diesel and petrol to compressed natural gas; and California legislating to curb GHG emissions. More ethical leadership such as this is required.

\* Refer to [www.rockethics.psu.edu/climate](http://www.rockethics.psu.edu/climate) for details.