

Crucial Decisions on Climate Change in 2009

01-24 15:06 Caijing Magazine comments(0)

On top of post-Kyoto emissions targets, a UN conference to be held at the end of the year will decide, or fail to decide, how the global community responds to climate change.

By Xu Ke, staff reporter of Caijing

From Caijing Online

Copenhagen will host the fifteenth annual United Nations Climate Change Conference at the end of 2009. Known as the Cop15, the talks will be a pivotal event, deciding the success or failure of a globally coordinated strategy to deal with climate change. At the top of its agenda is setting emission targets for developed countries after 2012, when commitments made for the Kyoto Protocol expire.

China Wakes up to a Crisis

Last year seemed like a tipping point for China's climate. In February, a severe winter storm buried large swaths of southern China in snow. More than 100 lives were lost, and the economic toll stretched into the billions. Then in the fall, China's coastal cities were buffeted by typhoons at record frequency. The South again bore the brunt, recording the hardest rainfall China's had since 1951. On Hainan Island, the rains even triggered a cholera epidemic, showing that climatic change affects more than just the environment.

With the writing on the wall, China's central government and its local branches have upped the attention given to the environment and climate issues.

In accord with UN requirements, China issued a national plan in 2007 explaining its goals and strategies for coping with climate change. In October 2008, it published its first white paper on the issue. This white paper explained in details how climate change was impacting China, and outlined several policies to mitigate its effects.

China also hosted a series of conferences about the environment between April and November. These included the International Forum

on Climate Change and Technological Innovation, the East Asia Seminar on Climate Change Adaptation Capacity Building, and a UN Conference on Climate Change focusing on technological development and transfer.

On local level, the provinces of Hainan, Gansu, Ningxia, Tianjin, Jiangsu and Anhui all set up special taskforces to promote energy conservation and emissions reduction.

By the end of 2008, China started preparing the second National Assessment Report on Climate Change in order to give policymakers better scientific evidence with which to grasp climate change. The report will be published in 2010.

Weighing Two Worlds

Whatever headway was made at last year's conference, it was overshadowed by the patent division between developing and developed countries, a gap that seemed larger and larger as the two-week talks progressed. With the world seemingly split into two camps, a lot of people wonder whether or not the Copenhagen deadline can be met when there are so many gaps to fill in the next 12 months.

China and other developing countries have demanded that developed countries lead by example in emissions reduction. They've also asked for technology and capacity assistance. China hopes that the new U.S. administration will comply.

To Gao Feng, former chief negotiator for China and the current legal director for the body that governs the UN climate talks, Cop15 will most likely conclude with a two-path scheme that distinguishes between developed countries and those on their way.

Wealthier, industrialized nations would agree to additional emissions reductions, while emerging economies would offer long-term commitments. However, what shape those commitments should take, and what share of the responsibility developing countries should shoulder, is still unclear. Gao's office has so far collected nearly 40 proposals for actions developing countries could pursue. Less than ten of these will make it to the negotiation text to be discussed in at least two earlier meetings and Cop15 in 2009.

Some developed countries argue that fast-growing developing countries

like China and India should also bear binding emission cut targets. But Gao said this may be not realistic

“No one should expect developing countries to accept emission cuts as early as Copenhagen. This simply won’t happen,” said Gao.

The upside is there are other motivations for reducing emissions than international protocol. Xie Zhenhua, a minister who deals with climate change issues, said the government’s 4 trillion yuan stimulus package, if allocated well, could become a turning point in China’s transformation to a low-carbon economy – which many believe is key to lifting China out of the present slowdown.

In Gao’s mind, if developing countries have the flexibility to take voluntary actions now, new technologies transferred from and capital provided by developed countries will help them build their capacity to for clean energy and emissions cuts, making it much easier to negotiate binding targets later on. And smooth negotiations are the key.

“We cannot risk a failure of the Kyoto Protocol,” Gao said.

Story link: www.caijing.com.cn/English

Login for free at www.caijing.com.cn/english for more exclusive reports.

Please contact us with any suggestions at newsroom@caijing.com.cn

Reproductions in whole or in part without Caijing's permission are prohibited.

Copyright 2007 Caijing Magazine. All Rights Reserved.