

Climate deal leaves questions on green fund and tech transfer

Little progress made on fund to help countries cope with climate change.

T.V. Padma, Busani Bafana & Linda Nordling

13 December 2011

An article from *SciDev.Net*.

The UN Climate Change Conference (COP 17) in Durban, South Africa, ended on 11 December with an agreement that all major polluting countries would work towards legally binding targets for reducing carbon emissions.

But the bitter showdowns and high drama which preceded the last-minute agreement sidelined two key issues for developing countries — the workings of a Green Climate Fund, which is intended to channel money to help developing countries cope with climate change; and how to facilitate technology transfer, particularly in relation to the obstacles imposed by intellectual property rights (IPR).

The two-week summit culminated yesterday morning with the announcement of a Durban Platform of Enhanced Action, "a process to develop a protocol, another legal instrument or a legal outcome", which would be ready by 2015 and come into effect from 2020.

Meanwhile, a push by Africa, India and others for a second commitment on the legally binding Kyoto Protocol — the only global pact enforcing carbon cuts — produced a five to seven-year extension of the current protocol, whose mandate runs out in 2012.

The Green Climate Fund, which was agreed at COP 16 in Copenhagen in 2009, and which is intended to provide US\$100 billion each year by 2020 to help the mitigation and adaptation activities of the world's poorest countries, was launched at Durban.

In practice, however, Durban's only concrete progress relating to the fund was the agreement that it would be overseen by a body under the UN, as desired by developing countries, rather than the Global Environment Facility (GEF), which the European Union and United States wanted.

The final document does not clarify where the money will come from or how much cash, if any, is already there. Other aspects such as the fund's host country, the trustees, or its links with two other key committees — the adaptation committee to oversee adaptation activities in developing countries; and the technology executive committee to oversee technology development and transfer — have yet to be worked out.

Several civil society organisations criticised a clause which says that the fund will be able to finance private sector mitigation and adaptation activities at national, regional and international levels.

This would signal "a corporate take-over" of the fund, said Lidy Nacpil, international coordinator of the non-governmental organisation Jubilee, a network of anti-debt coalitions in more than 60 countries across Africa, Asia and Latin America.



Mark Karass/Corbis

The Durban climate talks spent little time on the details of the Green Climate Fund.

A second aspect of importance to developing countries is technology transfer, and it was agreed at Durban that a technology mechanism will be fully operational by 2012 to "promote and enhance the research, development, and deployment and diffusion of environmentally sound technologies for mitigation and adaptation in developing countries".

The Durban agreement also kick-started the search for a host for the Climate Technology Centre and Network to promote technology transfer between developed and developing countries.

The centre, it was agreed, will identify climate-friendly technologies; facilitate their deployment and adaptation to developing country needs; build national and regional technology management capacity; and support the research, development and demonstration of new climate-friendly technologies.

Requests for help from developing countries will be addressed by a large network of institutions, which will include national technology centres, regional climate technology centres, research organisations and other relevant institutions.

A call for proposals to host the centre will be prepared by next month (January) with a deadline of 16 March 2012.

But there is no mention in the Durban document on the technology transfer of IPR, a sticking point for developing countries, who say patent restrictions will hinder the flow of green technologies from advanced countries.

NGOs said that developed countries had opposed any mention of patents in technology transfer proposals.



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Silvia Ribeiro, Latin America director of the ETC (Erosion, Technology and Conservation) Group, Mexico, an international non-governmental organisation working on conservation and sustainable development, said: "Critique of monopoly patents on technologies, and the environmental, social and cultural evaluation of technologies, has been taken out [of technology transfer proposals]. Without addressing these fundamental concerns, the new technology mechanism will merely be a global marketing arm to increase the profit of transnational corporations."

"The deal has totally failed Africa," Harjeet Singh, ActionAid's International Climate Justice Coordinator, told SciDev.Net, adding that "there is no money on the table for Africa to start acting on climate change, and the money is in form of pledges — not legally binding. The Green Climate Fund is like an empty shell."

Saleemul Huq, senior fellow in the International Institute for Environment and Development's climate change group, said: "The Durban agreement keeps the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change process going, but at such a low level of ambition that it is questionable whether it represents sufficient progress compared with previous COPs".

Nature | doi:10.1038/nature.2011.9638

This article was originally published by [SciDev.Net](#) on 12 December 2011.