

Beyond Bonn: The Road to Cochabamba

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Bolivia's President Evo Morales waves after voting in the Chapare region on April 4, 2010. Morales is hosting a April alternative climate change conference in the city of Cochabamba, aimed at analysing the causes of the problem and coming up with measures to fix it. REUTERS/Daniel Caballero

The close of the recent climate negotiations in Bonn did not catalyze governments to urgently retake the climate negotiations after their dismal collapse at December's Copenhagen Summit.

As each day passes there are many signals that nothing is going to happen at the next climate summit in Cancun. Even before the negotiators arrived in Bonn, Germany, Yvo de Boer, the departing head of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the UN body overseeing the negotiations, speculated the world might not have a climate deal until 2012.

He suggested that countries should prepare to leave the talks this December, "so that a year later, [they] can decide or not decide to turn that into a treaty." The 2011 meeting will be in South Africa, in December.

In four months, the world has gone from "we must have an agreement in Copenhagen" to "oh, we're not going to have anything for two years."

WORLD 'TIRED OF SAVING ITSELF'

What's changed? Not the science, despite all the efforts of the sceptics. And there haven't been that many new techno innovations to realistically prevent disaster. The thing that seems to have changed is human motivation: the world has become a bit tired of saving itself. This critical lack of heat has allowed the business-as-usual to continue as usual.

The Copenhagen Accord has set in motion both a bad case of "Climate Policy Fatigue" and "Climate Policy Thuggery" if we take the new U.S. policy on climate aid to be any indication of future international relations. (Countries that did not sign the Copenhagen Accord will not be eligible for climate financing).

What is even more troubling, is that a [recent report by the European Commission](#) suggests that when you look through all the loopholes of the Copenhagen Accord at best there may be a 2 percent reduction in emissions versus 1990 levels - yes, this is at best! - and it is highly likely that there could be a 2 percent increase. This spells disaster in any language, and the consequences are playing out now.

How can we overcome this? Agreement on deep, legally binding targets for global carbon dioxide emission reductions is clearly a prerequisite for a safe future. The real question, however, is not whether this will happen in Bonn or Cancun or Johannesburg or regrettably sometime even later.

REMOVING BARRIERS TO CHANGE

The real question is: What do we need to do today to remove barriers to implementing massive changes in our industrial system?

Governments agree in principle that fundamental change is needed. But while some may be good at making grand and increasingly vague statements, when it actually comes down to it, most governments struggle even when they agree on targets.

Setting targets beyond what is expected may be laudable (as in the case of the Netherlands, with a renewable energy target of 20 percent versus an EU binding country target of 14 percent), but such ambitions do little to deal with the very real challenges of implementation.

Experience shows that there are numerous barriers that prevent societies from acting effectively, even when they've agreed upon targets collectively or set their own ambitions.

While every country has a unique set of issues to address, the commonality is that barriers exist in all of them, and people (at all levels) are learning how to overcome them. In many cases, barriers are related to a lack of government vision, inconsistent regulatory incentives, citizen participation (too much, too little), insufficient financing, and of course, vested power interests. We need to discuss these barriers and change strategies more thoroughly.

If we want to get serious about climate, when and where is this serious conversation going to happen? It wasn't in Bonn (or at least not enough of it).

If Bonn is any indication, governments may have run out of tricks to kick-start climate negotiations. The good news is that social movements haven't.

Take, for example, the fact that Evo Morales, President of Bolivia, and U.N. Ambassador Pablo Solon have invited all the governments of the world and interested NGOs to a conference in Bolivia, from April 19 to 22, to discuss "Structural Changes for the Environment".

The Road to Cochabamba reflects the growing synergies between an increasingly powerful global grassroots movement for climate justice and a small but growing gaggle of states seeking people-inspired and -backed alternative proposals. Arguably these movements for climate justice from above and below represent an important kind of double movement.

Why are we going to Cochabamba? What's the point, you may ask? The objective of Cochabamba is very different than that of the UNFCCC or even [Klimaforum](#).

ANALYSING CAUSES, FINDING SOLUTIONS

The idea is basically to analyse the structure and systemic causes of climate change and to offer up substantive measures to fix it. A key difference is that organizers have invited all 192 member states *and* civil society. About 15,000 people are expected, including representatives from 100 governments and 10 heads of state.

Even the U.S. now takes this call seriously. Last week, the senior U.S. climate envoy, Jonathan Pershing, acknowledged the importance of Cochabamba during a conference call with U.S. NGOs.

The crisis is really upon us, and there is no time for fatigue. Waiting for Johannesburg is unacceptable. After Bonn, the best road forward is to Cochabamba.

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2 responses to “Beyond Bonn: The Road to Cochabamba”

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1. *John Isom* says:

[17 Apr 2010 09:09:08 GMT](#)

Cochabamba builds on the line of resistance that Bolivia and other brave governments established in Copenhagen when they rejected the process and outcome, called the Copenhagen Accord, that the developed countries forced on the rest of the world.

Now, in Cochabamba, governments and civil society will attempt to build a series of declarations, alliances, and paths forward for creating a just, ambitious and binding climate accord, and for restoring the health and abundance of the Earth's ecosystems.

Such an accord will respect and nurture the abundance, diversity and resilience of Earth's myriad ecosystems. It will affirm the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities to determine their own fate and future in responding to climate change. And it will establish financing mechanisms and technology transfer as part of a larger recognition of the ecological debt that developed countries must pay to the rest of the world as a way to undo the damage already done.

2. [Tom O'Donnell](#) says:
[20 Apr 2010 10:36:24 GMT](#)

Good piece.

The central reality of climate change mitigation is that there is no serious plan at the diplomatic level to make the sort of changes that are needed. So, it's going to have to be initiated via bottom-up activism.

And, that activism has to be well informed so as to be credible and effective. The bottom-up movement will have to more and more include both ordinary citizens and social movement as in represented in this meeting, and scientists - both social and natural - to aid in finding good policy solution for the movement to press for.

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