

A FUTURE FOR INTERNATIONAL CLIMATE POLITICS A discussion paper by the Heinrich Böll Foundation¹

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Should people expect their political leaders to tackle multiple crises – including climate change, hunger, economic disparity, and a collapse of financial systems – in a comprehensive manner? And if so, what are the appropriate international fora to do so? Only two years ago, we were all busy preparing for the biggest UN summit in history: the 15th Conference of the Parties (COP 15) in Copenhagen. The whole world was watching as over 100 heads of state and many more negotiators, business leaders, and civil society actors gathered to strike a deal that would stop dangerous global warming and, thereby, save the world – and then failed. Two years later, not many are paying attention to the preparations for the next climate summit in Durban, South Africa. Political leaders are busy fighting the global financial crisis and economic recession that hit three years ago. Although it has changed form and names like a hydra, the crisis remains a serious threat to prosperity and welfare of all our economies if it is not tackled at the roots. However, the lack of public interest and increasing distrust and disengagement of relevant actors from the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) process has the potential to conceal what is really at stake.

Summary

Two years after the Copenhagen summit, the real world is moving away from a safe and equitable climate future faster than ever. Political leaders are busy fighting the global financial crisis. But the lack of public interest and disengagement of relevant actors in the UN climate negotiations (UNFCCC) has – in light of the rise of the G-20 as *the* new and powerful global governance forum – the potential to conceal what is really at stake. If the G-20 is “the premier forum for international economic development”² and we are serious about stopping climate change, we have to ensure that G-20 politics do not undermine our objectives for the climate, the environment, poverty eradication, and global justice.

Political engagement in this changing climate requires entirely new thinking about strategies and alliances that, in our view, should build on the following considerations:

- There is no alternative to a legally binding agreement if we are serious about preventing dangerous climate change.
- The UNFCCC needs to be safeguarded as the central forum for negotiating climate politics; at the same time, we need to shift our focus to those fora and political agendas that are undermining serious climate efforts, specifically the G-20.
- At the same time, policies for national energy, economics, and development have to provide the groundwork for a global shift toward a safe climate future. International deadlock is no excuse for national inaction.
- Climate politics require new resource politics at the local, national, and international levels and need to move beyond a purely carbon perspective.

The role of civil society in international climate politics today should focus on:

- rebuilding coalitions and developing a clear division of labor inside and outside of the UNFCCC, as well as across different thematic “silos” while taking into account changing geopolitics and global governance;
- refocusing advocacy efforts on the real spoilers and vested interests on the local, regional, and global levels; and,
- mobilizing global and local movements to reclaim the commons: the atmosphere, natural resources such as land, forests, biodiversity, and water, but also knowledge and public spaces.

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2. See http://www.g20.org/about_what_is_g20.aspx (visited October 31, 2011).

Climate change as a moral challenge

Climate change is not disappearing. It is real. People are suffering from its impacts now around the world. The famine at the Horn of Africa and recent floods in Thailand and Central America are only a few shocking examples of what a warming world with inadequate institutions, low adaptive capacities, and inequitable distribution of resources looks like.

The injunction to “do no harm” is an important value in Western society, yet when it comes to climate change, short-term economic self-interests often prevail. For this reason, uncertainty is no longer seen as an acceptable ground for delayed action. Climate change challenges our deeply felt conception of fairness, as its causes are often generated locally but the harm is felt on a planetary scale. Climate change gnaws at the very foundation of our societies, as it upsets the existing fragile social balance between the haves and have-nots. The poorest people, who bear little to no responsibility for the climate problem, face the most dire, even catastrophic, consequences. They are also the ones unable to cope with these consequences. Ironically, the security threat posed by climate disruption has become an important reason for climate action by the richest economies. Hence, climate change is not simply an economic or environmental challenge requiring that the polluter pay (a practice that may be legislated in order to internalize costs for damages that were hitherto deemed externalities). Climate change in the context of a much broader crisis of ecological injustice and persistent global poverty on the one hand, and resource overconsumption on the other, is very much a moral challenge and not simply an economic and environmental one. We know the answers to this problem, and not tackling it now but delaying action into the future seems to be a characteristic feature of today's politics.

The central challenge: Are we ready to commit?

The choice we are currently being offered by our leaders in international climate politics is a crucial and potentially very dangerous one. The key question negotiators are facing in Durban is: With the first commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol ending in 2012, should there be a second commitment period? What at first glance might look like a very technical or legal problem is in reality one with much wider implications. The challenge to keep global warming below a dangerous threshold of 2°C, or even 1.5°C, above pre-industrial levels requires an urgent shift toward a zero-carbon economy globally. This requires emission reductions of 80-95 percent by developed countries by 2050. But that requires a joint vision and global objective from which all parties derive their responsibilities, rights, and rules in a fair manner. The negotiations are far from addressing the central challenge to peak emissions by 2015, and there is almost no talk about real and fair effort-sharing between countries. Instead, we are being asked by our own political leaders to be pragmatic and realistic in our expectations concerning the climate negotiations. But realism in that respect means accepting a world that is 3° to 4°C warmer.

The crossroads where we stand could lead to a legally binding agreement and mandatory rules for governments on how to safeguard the environment, the atmosphere, and our livelihoods. Through national legislation, the agreement could then be imposed on companies and individuals. The alternative – which we are currently heading toward – is often called a “pledge-and-review” approach, which pertains not only to climate politics but also to law and regulations in the fields of human rights and corporate conduct. In practice, it means that because of a lack of a global vision and consensus, mandatory rules relating to, for instance, emission reductions, are abolished. Governments make pledges and may, or may not, work toward these goals, but there will be no accountability toward others. This is a system of “survival of the fittest” in which the winners and losers are pre-ordained. At least in the near-term, the losers are the poor and vulnerable. Ultimately, with climate change we are all losers. So next to serious, urgent, and adequate mitigation measures that cut carbon at its source, we have to address the challenge of adaptation – and also the loss and damage from the unavoidable impacts of climate change – today.

Governments and political systems around the world are faced with increased pressure as a result of the direct or indirect influence of corporate money and lobbying. Very often, corporate contributions are targeted and aim to prevent legally binding regulations for corporations and to secure investors' rights. We must recognize that, in this context, our democracies in their current form are often failing to protect the global commons, the rights of people (including those in third countries), and future generations against these vested interests. In recent years, we have in fact witnessed private sector losses being socialized on a massive scale.

Fighting to save the best features of the Kyoto Protocol (KP) – the only legally binding instrument to reduce greenhouse gas emissions – will require us to form unusual, new, and broader alliances

and strategically move beyond the UNFCCC process to mobilize political will and public support. We must take this path despite the fact that the KP is weak in its current form and implementation problematic, for example it allows for offsetting of emissions and fails to address serious market failures.

The real world

The last two years have not only seen the highest growth of CO₂ emissions globally (after an interim drop in 2009 due to the first round of the financial crisis), and not simply in emerging economies, such as China; global emissions in 2010 also reached an all time peak of 30.6 gigatons, according to the latest International Energy Agency data. Worryingly, the carbon and resource intensity of the global economy is still rising, *not* falling. As a result, recent climate science has moved beyond even the more pessimistic scenarios of the IPCC's Fourth Assessment Report.

The pledge-and-review regime envisioned in the 2009 Copenhagen Accord has so far failed to address global warming and left us with a striking "gigaton gap" of up to 10 gigatonnes. In Copenhagen, governments failed to deliver a fair, ambitious, and binding agreement. Instead, they presented individual pledges of countries that were grossly inadequate in light of the mitigation need, as defined by the IPCC (a minimum reduction of 25-40 percent by 2020 compared to 1990 levels for developed countries). Studies have shown that if the Copenhagen pledges were to be put into political action without the offsetting and loopholes being addressed, we would only see a reduction of emissions by developed countries of 11-16 percent compared to 1990 by 2020.³

Another fact of the real world is that governments of developed countries are utterly failing to live up to the double responsibility of not only cutting emissions at home but also providing adequate, reliable, and additional financial resources for emission reductions and adaptation in the poorer countries. Some of the most serious impacts of global warming forecasts are already being felt in these vulnerable regions. At the same time, mitigation policies and technologies very often do not take into account the need to build climate resilience. The task to compensate for false mitigation policies and measures that set the course for even higher vulnerability in face of a growing challenge is thus left to adaptation planning – policy coherence is something else.

A 4°C world?

All that taken into account: What is the value and use of the so-called 2°C target, adopted by, among others, the EU as the dangerous threshold that is to be avoided at all cost?⁴ It is – and will remain – a yardstick against which to measure the words and actions of our governments. However, due to weak 2020 mitigation targets, ever-growing dependency on fossil fuels – leading also to the extraction of extreme and risky forms of unconventional oil in environmentally and socially vulnerable regions (Arctic, Amazon, deep water, etc.) – means that we are currently heading toward a world that is at least 3° or 4°C warmer. This requires us to, on the one hand, increase our ongoing efforts and pressure on governments and businesses. On the other hand, it also requires us to fundamentally refocus our efforts to manage the unavoidable consequences through adaptation efforts, address the financial needs of the least developed countries and most vulnerable groups, and stave off false or inequitable solutions such as harmful mitigation technologies, increased offsetting, market mechanisms for the protection of global rainforests, or climate- / geo-engineering.

Rio+20: Are we outgreening our economy?

In 2012, heads of state, government representatives, and civil society actors from around the world will gather in Rio de Janeiro to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Earth Summit of 1992, take stock of progress made, and re-create momentum for sustainable development globally. Rio 2012 could set the course for an equitable, resource-efficient, and low-carbon economy.

However, the buy-in for the process has been weak so far, and even the most optimistic assessments warn us not to expect any quantum leaps in commitments to a sustainable future. Even worse, the concept of a "Green Economy,"⁵ as currently discussed in the context of Rio+20, does

3. <http://www.climateactiontracker.org/developed.php> (visited October 31, 2011).

4. In the Copenhagen Accord, governments agreed to the goal of limiting global warming to a level of no more than 2°C following year-long lobbying efforts of civil society. However, with climate science and global warming progressing, many now argue that warming above 1.5°C already constitutes dangerous global warming as defined in the UN Framework Convention. Neither of the targets has any legally binding nature.

5. The full title is "Green Economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication" (GESDPE).

not use a normative framework or criteria, or rule out certain high-risk technologies (such as nuclear energy, large dams, unsustainable biofuels, or GMO agriculture). Therefore, it holds both the risk of “greenwashing” and moving the world toward a “green” but inequitable future – despite laudable efforts of the United Nations Environment Programme to push the topic onto the international agenda. For many, there is the risk of further enclosure of the commons by putting a price on nature and natural resources (such as forests, land, and biodiversity) and, in the process, jeopardizing potential gains for the climate and the environment. Rio will thus not be the “big bang” for a sustainable future and is definitely not a back-up option if our governments fail to deliver in Durban. Similarly, the Mexico meeting of the G-20 shortly after Rio 2012 will not be the place to make up for whatever outcome emerges in Rio.

Expectations for COP 17 in Durban

Since the 2007 summit in Bali, the UN climate negotiations have been taking place on two different tracks: One deals with the future of the Kyoto Protocol and new targets for those countries that already have commitments under the KP. The second track, the so-called long-term cooperative action or LCA track, has a much wider scope and deals with mitigation, adaptation, finance, and technology. It aims to arrive at a comprehensive agreement for all countries.

A LEGAL PACKAGE – One of the key issues on the table in Durban is the design of a “legal package,” a master plan on how to manage the two negotiating tracks and finally deal with the future of the KP. Without that, governments will not be able to agree to emission reduction targets that are adequate to close the gigaton gap. It would be wrong to measure the success or failure of Durban by an agreement on the KP only. But the fact that many countries seem ready to abandon the only legally binding instrument available – incorporating over a decade of intensive and detailed work to implement its rules – is disconcerting. Critics rightly point to the fact that, due to the abandonment of the KP by the United States in 2001, the treaty covers only a shrinking portion of global emissions. But the symbolic, political value of the world’s historical emitters taking responsibility and continuing to lead the charge cannot be underestimated. Europe – and Germany as its largest economy – should stay the course here. Still, key developing countries have not given up hope on a bigger deal in Durban, one involving the United States. While we understand this position, we fear this could result in a game of “hide and seek,” with the atmosphere as the loser. All need to do more! A political deal on a second commitment period for the KP – *not* a transitional arrangement – should be made in lockstep with a deal, some kind of roadmap on a structured process that leads to a legally binding agreement covering all emitters, including the United States and big emitters from the developing world (such as the BASIC countries: Brazil, South Africa, India, China), and that provides incentives for low-carbon strategies in all countries and clear criteria for a fair effort-sharing based on historical responsibility and economic capability.⁶

MRV⁷ – Another key issue for Durban are mitigation efforts of developing countries. As part of the move away from a rules-based multilateral climate regime, countries such as the United States are attempting to abandon the existing common accounting system for rich countries, which was developed by the IPCC. We have all observed what happens when banks and large companies “cook their books.” The consequences for the climate would be similar. It is important to understand that each ton of carbon is *not* created equal. Caution is, therefore, necessary so as not to overestimate the role a forest mechanism (Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation, REDD+⁸) can play in a future climate regime. Ongoing REDD pilot schemes are not only problematic with regards to safeguards and human rights abuses, but have also highlighted the risk of fungibility of fossil to organic carbon, potentially undermining the integrity of a climate regime. At the same time, a lot of pressure is being put on developing countries to be more transparent with regard to their climate actions. Civil society has fought for increased transparency, safeguards, and good governance for decades. While we support efforts to create an integrated system of monitoring, reporting, and verification (MRV) under the UNFCCC, when such a call comes from a country known for its inaction, it rings hollow. Similarly, we remain worried by the continued use of loopholes, which in effect water down mitigation pledges by several gigatons. Durban would be a good place to finally come clean and turn vague pledges into sound targets.

6. One such framework translating the principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities” of the UNFCCC into an index for differentiation is the Greenhouse Development Rights Framework (<http://www.boell.de/GDRs>).

7. MRV (measurable, reportable and verifiable) was introduced in Bali 2007. It is currently being negotiated as an implementation tool and refers to the assessment of mitigation actions in developing countries (but also to finance from developed countries), including external oversight and checks.

8. REDD+ includes sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks.

FINANCE – In Copenhagen, governments of developed countries pledged to raise up to US\$100 billion a year by 2020, and we know that even that striking number is not enough. It is also easy to figure out that the less we do to mitigate the problem, the higher the costs of adaptation (but also loss and damage). But that trade-off unfortunately has not yet entered the minds of political leaders, or it has been wiped out by other considerations. But where is that money going to come from and will it be additional to overseas development assistance? The question of sources is even more relevant in light of the current debt crisis of the key countries whose governments we expect to finance climate protection and adaptation in developing countries. One such innovative source of finance, the Financial Transactions Tax, lobbied for by civil society and social movements for many years, is now almost within reach. The proceeds, though, are unlikely to be used for the purpose originally intended; they will more likely disappear in the empty European government coffers. More likely sources for long-term climate finance are levies on aviation (on the European level) and maritime bunker fuel (globally), which, if correctly implemented, would yield some significant new resources. Still, these would fail to provide the necessary sums.

The discourse on climate (but also development) finance is thus generally shifting toward a greater role of the private sector, which seems realistic, but this shift holds serious implications for legitimacy and political prioritization (such as mitigation over adaptation, profit over people, return on investment as a key driver). Closely linked with this concern is the realization that some of the key institutional players in climate finance (but first and foremost the World Bank) are working toward weakening or abandoning its system of social and environmental safeguards – one of the key mechanisms through which civil society in the past has fought to secure a fair, (gender-) equitable, and sustainable funding of projects. The trends toward utilization of less public money, fewer safeguards, and fewer adaptation efforts are leading us toward a fundamentally unsustainable world. Additional resources are essential, but getting adaptation right is not only about money. Adopting a new approach to development and fixing our institutions is yet another challenge.

It is clear that the UN climate negotiations – and everything happening in the run-up to and at Durban – can only be understood in light of ongoing geo-political shifts. Climate politics has thus to be put in the context of those power struggles. The same governments – or parts of those governments – negotiating for a safe climate future under the UNFCCC are, in other fora and political fields (such as agriculture, infrastructure, finance), actually undermining that effort. They are backed by powerful lobby structures and corporate money, thereby preventing us from reaching a fair, ambitious, and legally binding global agreement.

Geo-political changes

Global power relations have changed significantly in the last couple of years, and various new and interest-driven coalitions have emerged. One of the key developments with regards to climate politics has been the weakening of the transatlantic relationship, which had already begun when the United States walked away from Kyoto and where we learned that we were confronting a completely dysfunctional US political system, which means that the United States is unlikely to be part of any legally binding deal in the foreseeable future. But we also know that we still have to deal with the United States as the biggest historical and one of the highest per capita emitters. We need to find an arrangement for the United States to enter a binding agreement at a later point in time.

The G-77 is another coalition that has been weakened due to the enormous diversity of interests of its membership. Least developed countries and big emerging economies find it increasingly difficult to arrive at joint positions and demands when it comes to mitigation and effort-sharing. The more natural alliance appears to be that of the most vulnerable countries such as the African Group, the majority of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) – that is, the Small Islands Developing States (SIDS) – and least developed countries (LDCs). The recent joint statement by the African Group, LDC Group, and the ALBA Group⁹ points in that direction. The emerging economies, on the other side, are increasingly coordinating their positions through groups such as BASIC (Brazil, South Africa, India, China), BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa), or IBSA (India, Brazil, South Africa).

9. The ALBA Group includes among others Bolivia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Cuba, Nicaragua, Antigua and Barbuda.

The need to hold the G-20 accountable for 2°C

The last few years have seen the rise of one especially important global governance forum that is neither accountable to the citizens nor inclusive in its membership: the G-20. The G-20, broadly speaking, consists of two groups of countries: the G-7 – the old industrialized countries (from Europe in addition to the United States, Japan, and Canada) – and the emerging economies (i.e., China, India, Brazil, South Africa, but also Mexico, Argentina, Indonesia, South Korea, and Saudi Arabia). Both have very few joint interests except for when it comes to securing access to the natural resources (land, water, minerals, forests, oil, atmospheric space, biodiversity) and markets of those countries not present at the table – the poorer developing countries. Thus, the G-20 members strive for greater security for their investments and investors and a pledge-and-review regime globally that makes it impossible to hold them to account for any negative side effects or damages.

The G-20 was originally founded in the late 1990s as an informal club of finance ministers. In recent years, it has considerably extended its mandate beyond its core (finance and economics) and is now taking decisions, creating mechanisms, and directing international investment flows that have serious implications for climate, energy, and resource politics. In most cases these actually undermine sustainable development efforts undertaken in other fora. One such example is the Development Action Plan (DAP) agreed by the G-20 at their Seoul summit in 2010. The nine pillars of the DAP (the two most important ones being infrastructure and agriculture) have no environmental dimension but rather focus on safeguarding investors' rights over the protection of the environment and the people. It is one example where development planning in a silo mentality not only disrespects social, economic, and ecological needs of recipient countries, but actually increases vulnerability to climate change.

In 2011, the G-20 Leaders have put climate finance on their agenda and, in 2012, the Mexicans are expected to put "green growth" on the agenda of their summit on June 18-19, 2012, in Los Cabos. Yet, the body has made little to no progress when it comes to issues such as removing harmful fossil fuel subsidies, as pledged by the leaders at the 2009 G-20 summit in Pittsburgh. If the G-20 is "the premier forum for international economic development"¹⁰ and we are serious about stopping climate change, we have to ensure that G-20 politics do not undermine our objectives for the climate, the environment, poverty eradication, and global justice. Otherwise, the chance of winning this battle is receding rapidly.

Strengthen a weakened Europe

Possibly the most relevant geo-political challenge – including for the climate – is a weakening of Europe. The EU for many years has played a leading role in the UNFCCC. It has also always been a proponent of legally binding rules and has cast its arguments within a normative framework. The EU has concrete targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions (20%), increasing energy efficiency (20%), and promoting renewable energies in its overall energy mix (20%) – all to be achieved by 2020. The EU of 27, however, is less homogeneous than the EU of 15 that negotiated Kyoto, and it is having increased difficulties developing joint positions on international topics and is sometimes struggling to by-pass national interests of its larger members. For example, the EU has so far not been able to move its 20 percent emissions reduction target to even 25 percent, even though that is close to business as usual and real leadership would require the EU to go way beyond 30 percent.

The current debt and the euro crisis make it all too apparent that European leaders are utterly failing to tackle problems at their roots and are barely able to provide short-term and reactionary political responses. That is not only a problem for the stability of the euro but also for the climate context. The world needs Europe to be strong and bold enough to step up to the challenges ahead. The EU – and Germany as the biggest economy within Europe – need to prove the feasibility of leaving the fossil fuel-based development pathway, while devising a just transition that deals with the politics for potential losers in that rapid process. But the EU also needs to fulfill its international responsibility of climate finance, move away from a global resource race, and boldly strive for multi-lateral solutions to global problems.

10. See http://www.g20.org/about_what_is_g20.aspx (visited October 31, 2011).

Toward coherent and complementary international climate politics

Political engagement in this changing climate requires entirely new thinking about strategies and alliances that, in our view, should build on the following considerations:

- **There is no alternative to a legally binding agreement if we are serious about preventing dangerous climate change.**

For Durban that concretely means that we must urge our governments to agree on a second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol and a roadmap to negotiate a legally binding agreement for all other countries by 2015. Failure to secure the legally binding nature of mitigation commitments will, in practice, mean an abandonment of the 2°C target. Some have argued that there is a trade-off and that a legally binding agreement would by definition be less ambitious. We beg to differ, as the bindingness does not proscribe the nature of the commitments. Importantly, however, we need to start a review of the question about equitable effort-sharing. The lack of such a formal debate has, in our view, hampered the negotiations from progressing substantially, as especially fast-growing economies are concerned that their development rights could be curtailed without significant reciprocal action by historical emitters.

- **We need to safeguard the UNFCCC as the central forum for negotiating climate politics while at the same time shifting our strategies to those fora and political agendas that are undermining serious climate efforts (specifically the G-20).**

Climate politics (as carbon metrics) have permeated every realm of environmental policy, such as biodiversity and agriculture; sectoral approaches and plans are growing in scope and purpose. Large environmental and development networks and other civil society organizations will have to decide how much of their time and resources they will invest in the UNFCCC process in the years to come. With large geopolitical changes under way, it is clear that we cannot focus our efforts on only one forum. But whether a problem appears on the agendas of the G-20, the UNFCCC, or Rio 2012 matters less than the fact that, in the end, we are dealing with the same governments (albeit different parts of those governments in different fora). We need to thus identify strategic objectives, partners, and major spoilers, know our bottom lines, and go where the real decisions are being taken, where policies are being implemented, and where mechanisms are being put in place. This also requires a strong and clear focus on the national level to fight for coherent national policies in all fora. We have to safeguard the UNFCCC as the relevant forum for climate politics, since it is the only forum where the vulnerable states are at the table, and civil society has some role to play as an active observer (a role that needs to be improved quite a lot). At the same time, we have to move beyond a mere COP-focus and get beyond hoping for a big breakthrough in one venue after another: Copenhagen, Cancun, Durban... This complicated process needs serious long-term, professional civil society observation and engagement in the years to come. A good division of labor between civil society organizations is key, but in return requires trust that has partly been lost in the struggles of the last few years.

- **International deadlock is no excuse for national inaction.**

A lack of ambition at the global level cannot be an excuse for poor implementation of serious mitigation measures and adaptation strategies at the national level. An end to business-as-usual also means that all policies in all sectors have to be made climate-proof and contribute to a low-carbon, resource-efficient, and climate-resilient development. Ambitious, innovative, and effective measures and policies at the local and national levels will in the end prepare the ground for a fair global deal. Contributing to the global goal of reducing carbon emissions by up to 90 percent by 2100 is the responsibility of every government on this planet – albeit according to responsibility and capability.

An end to business-as-usual also means a switch in our energy consumption patterns – away from oil and especially coal – and new models and priorities of public funding, including the phasing out of harmful subsidies. To avoid dangerous warming, we will even have to leave fossil fuel reserves in the ground. But the right mix of policies, regulations, and incentives to ensure that on a large scale have yet to be identified.

National governments have an equally high responsibility to design and implement adaptation strategies, taking into account the needs and capacities of the most vulnerable groups – including indigenous peoples and women – within their countries. This requires a reassessment of a broad range of policies in sectors such as agriculture, health, water, or transport. Adaptation and climate

protection must go hand in hand. In order to ensure policy coherence at the national level, new institutions and processes of political decision-making have to be developed.

- **Climate politics require new resource politics at the local, national, and international levels and need to move beyond a purely carbon perspective.**

What we really mean when we talk about protecting the climate and adapting to unavoidable effects of global warming is a new way of using, dividing, protecting, managing, and governing our natural resources – land, water, forests, biodiversity, minerals, and fossil fuels. Struggles for more sustainable and equitable resource politics are taking place at the local, national, and international levels from the tar sands in Canada and Congo, the rain forests in Brazil and Indonesia, the minerals in the Arctic and Southern oceans, to the oil fields in Nigeria and Libya and small-scale farming communities around the world.

Some of the most dangerous trends we can witness in climate politics can actually be elucidated by looking at them from a resource perspective. These concepts resonate: examples for the enclosure of our commons, the “financialization” of nature, and the primacy of investors’ rights over environment and people are manifold. We demand our governments ensure that climate politics are coherent by taking into account the nexus between the different resource struggles and interconnectedness of the crises. But we also believe that civil society still has a lot to improve when it comes to developing truly coherent and comprehensive strategies and building the necessary cross-silo alliances to implement them.

It is also clear that with no legally binding global agreement in place and emissions rising globally, the very real threat of “runaway” climate change leads many to think that large-scale technological fixes with often new or untested technologies might spare us the need to cut carbon emissions at their source. But many of these technologies are very harmful to the environment and people and can only be truly assessed when we move beyond a purely carbon perspective (examples are nuclear energy, mega dams, GMO agriculture, biofuels, climate engineering). We need to be ready to detect the underlying vested interests of these false solutions, identify the key drivers and actors, and step up to defend a climate of justice.

- **Climate equity reloaded: Put the needs of the most vulnerable center stage!**

“Climate equity,” or “climate justice,” has been the political catch phrase for many civil society networks in the UNFCCC context for the last couple of years. And rightly so. However, with new developments under way and our core demands at risk, we need to redefine what we mean by climate equity and translate it into our strategies, projects, and actions. We need a stronger emphasis on the moral imperative – described above – rather than a technocratic win-win approach.

In a fight that we are so close to losing altogether, we need to be clear about the normative framework we are working in and also communicate it to others. The core pillar of this framework must concern the primacy of the needs and capacities of the most vulnerable groups. Yes, the financial crisis is a terrible threat to the well-being of our economies and many people will indirectly die in this crisis if we do not manage it well. But it is still a crisis of the rich, of those who have. The have-nots of this world might indirectly also be affected through volatile commodity prices, for instance. But the overwhelming threat that hundreds of millions of small-scale farmers, fishermen, women, children, and slum dwellers face is climate change in all its facets. Thus, a second pillar must emphasize adaptation, adaptation finance, loss and damage, and climate governance in the poorest and most vulnerable states and communities. The third pillar refers to an effort-sharing debate that starts with a legally binding regime and takes into account the true costs of the crisis (heading for a 4°C world) and the proposed solutions (technologies, policies, etc.).

The role of civil society in international climate politics

Civil society has played a key role in moving the international agenda on environmental issues, trade and investment, economics, and finance forward in the last 25 years. Its campaigns have made climate change an issue that heads of state ignore at their peril. The public understands that the plight of the poor and our fragile environment is not just another disaster but a catastrophe created by human excess and irresponsibility. NGOs also played a crucial role in the design and entry into force of the Kyoto Protocol, the continued focus on environmental integrity through the closing of loopholes, and addressing the intrinsic flaws in the instruments such as the Clean Development Mechanism. Importantly, it was NGOs that pointed out in Copenhagen that “the emperor had no clothes” and that the pledges could not hide the enormity of the gigaton gap. However,

many have rightly questioned in the last few years whether a growing gap between the “inside” and the “outside” strategies and open disagreement about core objectives and issues has prevented civil society from realizing its full potential. We strongly believe that civil society does play a crucial role in a dysfunctional democratic system, where governments are failing and vested corporate interests are pulling us in the wrong direction. But how can we do things differently when so much has been done wrong and so much is now at stake?

- **Rebuild coalitions and develop a clear division of labor**

We do not have to agree on everything in order to fight for the same big objective. Questions such as whether or how to use market instruments or cooperate with progressive businesses have in the past, and are still very often, seen as unbridgeable ideological gaps by some spectrums of civil society. In these – often purely rhetorical – struggles, we sometimes lose sight of the joint objectives and goals we are fighting for. We believe it would be worth the effort to rebuild coalitions of civil society – bringing together those fighting on the inside of the process with those fighting the “system” – in light of the magnitude of the problem and the real and powerful spoilers. However, in order to (re)create the trust needed to do so, we will have to be explicit about the normative framework in which we are working. We might lose some partners then. Not everyone will adopt the same criteria or draw the same red lines. But it will allow us to create powerful new alliances across a very wide spectrum of civil society working on various international fora – UNFCCC, G-20, Rio+20, international financial institutions, etc. – and through that, lay the groundwork for more transparency, synergy, and lasting impact.

- **Identify major spoilers and partners, refocus advocacy efforts**

Do we really think that our political leaders are so stupid that they fail to understand what is at stake? Some might not know the magnitude of the problem; others might fail to see the interconnectedness of the problems. But we believe that this is less of a problem than the lack of public support for unpopular measures that will primarily benefit the powerless or future generations. How can we help to create the political will? One way to look at this question is to state that politicians and governments are very often not the right target for our lobbying or advocacy efforts and that we need to become better at identifying the true spoilers – including ourselves in our unwillingness to be ready to face the challenge, jump into the cold waters, and swim without knowing the distance to the other side.

- **Mobilize a global movement to reclaim the commons**

People have prevented the building of new coal power plants at the community level around the globe. International resistance to nuclear energy has finally – and only after the catastrophe in Fukushima – led to a phase-out of nuclear energy in Germany. Thousands of people participate in the global day of action every year or take daily conscious decisions when buying energy-saving light bulbs, consuming electricity from renewable sources, or traveling on public transport. It is imperative that we stop playing out the local against the global when it comes to identifying the most effective strategies of mobilization and resistance. In light of the current crises involving climate, poverty, hunger, economics, and democracies, we need activities on all levels.

It gives hope to see how many people around the world are resisting malign corporate influence, misuse of power, corruption and inequality, and demanding more transparency, participation, binding rules, and democratic spaces to voice their concerns. This puts pressure on politics and occasionally even wipes out dictatorships. We need equally strong and targeted alliances against resource exploitation, economic greed, unsustainable development models, and injustice globally: Occupy Big Oil, Amazonia, the Arctic, Alberta... and reclaim the commons.

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