Forewarned is forearmed: preparing for Copenhagen

An analysis of previous meetings on the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) identifies potential barriers and ‘bargaining chips’ that could be used in the UN Climate Change Conference to be held in December in Copenhagen.

Using their combined experience at UNFCCC meetings over the last five years, the researchers established a number of ‘tripping points’ that could occur at Copenhagen. A tripping point is a collection of political barriers and bargaining chips, which can help parties overcome barriers, such as adaptation and technology. The authors conclude that reaching consensus at Copenhagen will not be easy but matching barriers with bargaining chips could help lead to agreement.

The barriers focus on how mitigation commitments are negotiated for developed countries and how ‘nationally appropriate mitigation strategies’ (NAMAs) are negotiated for developing countries. Currently, there are two negotiating tracks for developed countries: those for Annex 1 parties, who signed up to the Kyoto Protocol, and those for all UNFCCC parties including those without Kyoto commitments. This in itself is a barrier.

Another barrier is the method for setting post-2012 targets. For example, the choice of which year to use as a base year and whether targets should be long-term, as preferred in the US, or short to mid-term.

Deciding on developing countries’ responsibility in mitigation is a potential barrier. Some countries are considered to be ‘emerging’ and there is the belief that they should take on mitigation responsibilities. However, India, Saudi Arabia and China are firmly against reclassification as historically, they have not been responsible for climate change. Even if responsibility is agreed, deciding on whether mitigation strategies should be verified internationally or nationally is another possible barrier.

Agreement will also depend on how governments use a number of bargaining chips. The study identifies four distinct types. REDD (Reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation) could reduce greenhouse gases (GHGs). However, its value will depend on how it is designed and ensuring that emissions are permanent reduced and do not increase emissions elsewhere.

Transferring low emission technologies is another bargaining chip, but its potential depends upon the transfer between countries. Developing countries are proposing relaxed intellectual property rights whereas developed countries would prefer to maintain their current regime. A technology ‘body’ may be needed to regulate technology transfer.

Adaptation has an important bargaining value. Issues for negotiation in this area include defining, monitoring and financing adaptation actions. A major difficulty is reaching a common understanding of how to differentiate adaptation actions from development activities.

Financing itself is identified as another bargaining chip, not just in terms of raising funds but also how to govern them. One major debate could be whether to use large centralised public financing or deliver funds through market-based financing and individually developed projects. Proposals have included auctioning emission allowances, creating a global carbon tax and issuing carbon credits.


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