

Global Perspectives on Climate Change Policies and Solutions

The Nature Conservancy is one of the world's largest conservation organizations with programs in over 30 countries and a deep presence across the United States. We are advocating for world leaders to agree to a comprehensive, equitable and effective international framework that will keep global warming to no more than 2 degrees Celsius and help communities and countries that are already facing the impacts of climate change.

Global Perspectives provides views and insights from our policy and science experts around the world.

Q: Important discussions are happening in early June in Bonn, Germany that will shape the debate for a global climate agreement in Copenhagen. What has to happen in Bonn to keep us on a path towards success in December?

A: For the first time, countries have something specific to react to, in the form of the draft negotiation texts for a global climate agreement. Now is time to start hard negotiations over real issues. While there is much work to be done to bridge their differences, we are confident that as a whole, world leaders believe that a global solution must be agreed to in Copenhagen this December.

To get there, parties in Bonn must work to get the right options into the negotiating text and set up a successful outcome in Copenhagen. But real movement will only come when countries lay their negotiating cards on the table. This needs to begin with developed countries, which bear the greatest historical responsibility for emissions and have the most capacity to do something about it. Developed countries, particularly the U.S., need to commit to ambitious and legally-binding emissions reductions targets and significant financial and technological assistance to support developing countries.

At the same time, developed countries can't solve the problem alone. There is an urgent need for action from all countries. Negotiators must find opportunities and incentives that encourage developing countries and major emerging economies, in particular, to contribute to emissions reductions.

Q: Is the U.S. serious about its engagement in the U.N. climate negotiations? What are the implications of the U.S. legislative process, given that the U.S. position must be based in what its Congress will accept?

A: President Obama, Secretary Clinton and other senior officials have repeatedly said that the U.S. is back in the game and fully engaged in crafting a global climate agreement. Recent steps—from putting strong climate change expertise in senior positions to establishing stronger fuel economy standards—are beginning to turn these words into actions.

One of the most significant actions will be progress on the legislation currently under debate within the U.S. House of Representatives, and expected in the U.S. Senate before the fall. The House bill takes the first step of putting a cap on U.S. emissions, and includes important provisions for forest carbon and funding to help developing countries adapt to the adverse effects of climate change. It's crucial for Congress to work to strengthen these provisions, including bold emissions reductions that go farther to meeting the scientific imperative and push ahead urgently and strongly to pass legislation as quickly as possible. The closer the U.S. is to legislation, the more confident we can be about a deal in Copenhagen.

Q: The draft negotiation text references “ecosystem-based approaches” to adaptation. What is this and why should it get specific emphasis within the negotiations?

A: There is growing recognition that strengthening the natural systems that provide people with food, water, shelter and incomes can be very effective in building communities’ resilience to climate change impacts. For example, protecting coral reefs through resilient networks of marine protected areas can enhance food security and protect coastal communities. Protecting or restoring forests can help provide clean water and reduce flooding and erosion caused by storms. These types of ecosystem-based adaptation approaches have multiple benefits—alleviating climate impacts, building sustainable livelihoods and engaging and empowering communities.

Ecosystem-based approaches to adaptation are backed by many developing countries, the U.S. and the G8 environmental ministers. We urge all parties to include ecosystem-based approaches to adaptation in a new international agreement, and in their national adaptation programs. Developed countries have asked for specifics on what adaptation funding will be used for, and ecosystem-based approaches are an important tool for helping the most vulnerable communities that are dependent upon nature for their survival.

Q: Given the range of ideas that have been presented by parties, what opportunities are there to bring players closer together?

A: While much attention will and should be paid to emissions reductions targets, there are other vitally important elements that may provide the glue for a global climate agreement to stick.

Reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD) is clearly one of these elements. Developing countries have led the call for incentives to protect tropical forests as part of a global climate change solution. Stemming deforestation and the emissions it produces (20% of the world’s total) will enable these countries to be part of that solution. Lower emissions and healthier forests seems like outcomes that most can support.

Adaptation financing is another opportunity to bring countries together, if developed countries provide financial and technical commitments to help the least developed and most vulnerable countries who have contributed little to the climate change problem. Ecosystem-based adaptation, as a win-win-win strategy, has the potential to stretch those adaptation dollars and give everyone more for their money.

Looking to nature for solutions to climate change—like REDD and ecosystem-based adaptation—may help parties find bridges across some the issues that separate them.

Q: If you were to put odds on achieving some kind of global agreement in Copenhagen today, what would they be?

A: It’s hard to call odds at this stage in the game, but after these meetings in June we may have a better sense. There is much work to be done, and as always the devil is in the details. Frank discussions must continue in Bonn, in the U.S., and around the world to ensure we have an agreement in December.

So, 90% chance.