



CLIMATE TALKS CULMINATE IN COP15: A POLITICAL PLAYGROUND

Government representatives from 170 countries will attend climate talks in Copenhagen this December. But can they progress from petty squabbling to productive debate? Luke Bell reports.

An international agreement on climate change, The Kyoto protocol, first entered into force in February 2005. It committed industrialized countries to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions by 5.2% compared to levels in 1990. In 2012 the Kyoto protocol runs out. It is essential that a new protocol is drawn up to continue and, most importantly, improve the progress made so far.

2009 has seen a series of global meetings to address the issue - so far in Bonn (April and June) with further meetings scheduled in Bangkok and Barcelona before the final conference in Copenhagen. The aim of these meetings is to reach an agreement on the political responsibilities in addressing climate change. Who needs to reduce their emissions and by how much? What financial support can be given to the developing countries to enable reduction of emissions? How will that money be managed?

Important questions for important people, but past discussions do not exactly bode well for the prospects of an agreement in Copenhagen. The US famously rejected the Kyoto protocol back in 1997. Mr Bush argued the proposed 5% reductions would wreck the US economy, whilst developing countries were having to make minimal commitments comparison. In other words *'well if they don't have to do it, why should we?'*

China has recently overtaken the US as the world's largest emitter of CO2. Though the US has obviously emitted a much larger total of CO2 since the growth of its economy began. Hence, China argues it has a moral right to continue emitting CO2. In other words, *'well they did it for so many years so why shouldn't we?'*

Never has the term political playground seemed so apt.

Scientists argue that by 2050, the world's CO2 emissions must be cut by 80% compared to 1990 levels. If we are to achieve anywhere near the sort of progress required for such a task, an agreement must be reached in Copenhagen and a new protocol enforced. Petty squabbling will have to relent and informed, productive discussion must ensue if we are to have any hope of an agreement being reached. The playground needs to get serious.

In a democracy, politicians will always be concerned with votes since without votes, they have no power. Our voice will determine their policies, but we have to make our voice heard. There will be plenty of people doing just that in Copenhagen. The likes of Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, WWF and 'Don't Nuke the Climate' will all be there campaigning for the right choices to be made. Have a look online for ways you can get involved too.



If you're feeling pessimistic about the wisdom of our political leaders, let me pass on an inspiring thought... "Good government is no substitute for self-government," the wise words of Mahatma Gandhi. Whether or not a suitable agreement is reached in Copenhagen, the actions we take as individuals and communities will ultimately shape the future of our societies. It is the individual who drives consumerism, it is the end-user who creates the demand for oil, it is the community who supports its nearest supermarket rather than the local grocer.

Currently, estimates suggest the UK emits 558 million tonnes of carbon dioxide per year. If just 10% of communities managed to halve their emissions, the national carbon emissions would be reduced by approximately 25 million tonnes per year! That's already a 10% reduction on 1990 levels (only 70% to go!).

Climate change must ultimately be addressed at grass roots level through unified community action. Rely on yourself and your neighbours, on your local farmer, rely on your community spirit. It is that which can make the difference in the long run.

**"When one tugs at a single thing in nature,
he finds it attached to the rest of the world"**

John Muir