

CREDIBILITY GAP

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Developed countries and climate negotiations

Rich industrialised countries are getting out of their legal and moral responsibility to cut climate-warming gasses through a lack of commitment and creative accounting, and are unfairly shifting the burden to developing countries.

There is a gap between what science demands and what rich countries are promising

- The pledges made by Annex I (rich, industrialised) governments during the last major climate talks in Cancun fall well short of tackling catastrophic climate change.
- The United Nations Environment Programme shows current pledges by all countries risks global warming of 5C degrees.

There's a gap between rich countries' legal obligations and their actions

- Developed countries have obligations to take the lead in reducing emissions and to a second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol – these arise from the text of the UN Convention on Climate Change and the Protocol itself.
- These obligations reflect the developed countries' historical responsibility for emitting the majority of climate pollution and their greater capability to address climate change.
- To meet these requirements developed countries are required to reduce their emissions by a greater level than developing countries and to do so with internationally legally binding targets.
- Annex I countries like the Japan, Russia and Canada – who don't want to commit to reductions in a second commitment period under the Kyoto Protocol – are not only breaking their legally binding obligations but are endangering people, the planet and all living things.

There's a gap between how much countries say they're reducing and how much they're really reducing due to 'creative accounting'

- Not only are the targets made by Annex I countries insufficient to tackle climate change, but they're also riddled with loopholes that mean we're not counting emissions accurately.
- Loopholes included carrying over 'hot air' calculations of emissions from 'economies in transition', the double counting of 'off-setting' emissions and also use of dishonest baselines in land-use emission calculations (See Box).
- If loopholes are not closed, developed countries could actually **increase** their emissions while still technically meeting their pledges.

There's a gap between what developed and developing countries are doing

- Currently pledges for emission reductions are actually higher in developing countries than in developed countries (65% vs 35%) even though rich countries have greater capacity and a legal commitment to lead on reductions.
- In addition, offsets and market mechanisms allow Annex I countries to pay for reductions in developing countries while claiming the 'credits' for themselves.
- Because Annex I countries are going for the cheap options -- the 'low hanging fruit' -- this makes it more expensive for developing countries to take action themselves in the future.
- Off-setting effectively shifts the burden onto developing countries, while the developed countries can continue to pollute.

Closing the credibility gap

- Annex I cuts need to be done at home not through markets and off-setting
- A legally binding commitment by all developed countries under the Kyoto Protocol must be agreed in Durban.
- The United States (which repudiated the Kyoto Protocol) must take on comparable efforts under the convention, as agreed in Bali.
- This is what all countries agreed under the Bali Roadmap. All countries, most of all the developed countries, should honor this promise in Durban if the world is to avoid a catastrophic 5C of warming.

Cooking the books (and the planet)

Hot air: When the Kyoto Protocol was signed in 1997, emissions among 'economies in transition' (ex-Soviet Union and its satellites) were more than 40% lower than in 1990 – the year emissions cuts are measured against. This means they could still increase their emissions by 32% and meet their targets, or alternatively sell the 'hot air' to other countries trying to make theirs.

Off-setting: Under the Kyoto Protocol, a series of 'flexible mechanisms' were introduced to help rich countries reduce the cost of emissions cuts by paying for them elsewhere. This can mean they could be counted both in the country that carries them out and in the country that pays for them.

Dishonest baselines: Because stopping emissions from land use require a baseline (something to measure it against to determine avoided emissions), high degrees of uncertainty – as well as vested self-interest – can mean far more emission cuts are accounted for than actually occur.