



Special Report on Selected Side Events at UNFCCC COP-9
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Summary of the Side Events from COP-9

A Brief Analysis of the COP-9 Side Events

Attention all delegates! If you did not attend any of the side events at COP-9, then you missed out on an excellent opportunity to share experiences and explore new ideas.

In previous years, some delegates attending the intergovernmental climate change meetings considered the side events to be an opportunity for free food and a quick nap during the lunch period. But at COP-9, the side events also provided considerable food for thought. In fact, while the official negotiations crawled along at a snail's pace, over 100 side events convened, hosted by developed and developing country delegations, intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, the private sector and research institutions. These events addressed pertinent issues related to the official negotiations, and also forged ahead into uncharted waters, exploring those issues that have proved simply too "hot" to be handled by the COP.

Among the abundance of side events that took place, many were directly related to COP-9 agenda items, such as national communications, LULUCF, and the CDM. The multitude of events that focused on the CDM were particularly rich and varied, addressing aspects relevant to the negotiations and other interesting issues, including CDM projects in least developed countries, business prospects under the CDM, decentralized renewable energy and the CDM, operationalizing the CDM, sinks in the CDM, unilateral CDM, the experiences of designated national authorities, CDM projects in the transportation sector, long-term issues and the CDM, incentives and deterrents for the CDM, sustainability assessment of CDM projects, additionality concepts, small-scale CDM, capacity building for the CDM, and implementing the CDM in China. Side events also addressed other pertinent themes that are of high priority to many but did not receive a great deal of attention in the negotiations, including equity and adaptation issues, transportation, climate change impacts, renewable energy, and international emissions trading.

One of the most valuable aspects of the side events was the broad level of participation and the spectrum of views represented. The events provided a platform for stakeholders, ranging from indigenous groups to oil companies, to raise their concerns and highlight work on the ground. The events also provided a forum for discussions on the issue at the forefront of everyone's mind - the Russian Federation's ratification. Even the US Government, which rejected the Kyoto Protocol, took advantage of the opportunity to host a number of side events promoting its work on climate change and the UNFCCC.

Another important feature of the side events was their informal nature. Freed from the constraints of the official negotiations, ideas tended to flow more freely, and side event participants spoke their minds candidly, knowing that they were not being scrutinized in an intergovernmental arena. Unlike the COP itself, where there was firmly entrenched opposition to any discussions even remotely associated with the post-2012 question, enthusiasm ran particularly high for those side events addressing the future of the climate change regime. While there were numerous side events that addressed the post-2012 issue in its variety of permutations, the venues were always overflowing with eager participants clamoring to join in on the discussions.

Not surprisingly, one question on many participants' minds, was how to effectively introduce the valuable ideas put forward during the side events into the official negotiations themselves. During one side event discussion, participants suggested the possibility of inter-session workshops, or even a "stop the COP" day at COP-10, akin to a full-day side event, where negotiators and stakeholders could think "outside of the box" and exchange views on issues not related to the adoption of decisions. Other participants feared, however, that bringing the "hot" issues into the official negotiating arena too soon might stifle the creativity.

In conclusion, some would say that the most valuable outcomes of COP-9 occurred during the side events. Hopefully the innovative thinking that pervaded throughout the side events will be carried forward in the negotiations in due course.