CLIMATE AND ATMOSPHERE

IPCC FINALIZES FOURTH ASSESSMENT REPORT

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has concluded its 27th session after finalizing its Fourth Assessment Report (AR4). The session, which was held from 12-17 November 2007, in Valencia, Spain, marked the culmination of several years’ work by finalizing the Synthesis Report of the AR4. Having completed the reports of its three working groups earlier in 2007, the IPCC session in Valencia saw the adoption, after lengthy negotiations, of both the Summary for Policymakers of the Synthesis Report and a longer version of the Report. Discussions on the texts focused primarily on what should be included in the shorter version, with debates about how the text from the earlier working group reports should be used in the condensed summary.

The 23-page final draft of the Summary for Policymakers contains sections on the observed changes in climate and their effects, the causes of change, projected climate change and its impacts, adaptation and mitigation options, and the long-term perspective. After establishing the “unequivocal” warming of the climate system and the “very likely” impact of anthropogenic emissions, the report outlines a wide range of adaptation and mitigation options. It also suggests that neither adaptation nor mitigation alone can avoid all climate change impacts, but that they can complement each other and jointly reduce the risks of climate change significantly (http://www.iisd.ca/climate/ipcc27/; http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=24704&Cr=Climate&Cr1=).

Climate Variability, a Common Factor of Desertification and Climate Change

By Mélanie Requier-Desjardins, Observatoire du Sahara et du Sahel

Abstract

Climate change refers to significant long-term modification of the climate, mainly due to human activities. The desertification phenomenon degrades land and soil in dry areas, according to various factors, among which are a combination of climate variations and human activity.

Climate and Atmosphere

UNEP and Sweden to Help Developing Countries Phase-Out HCFCs

Sustainable Development

UNDESA Organizes Expert Group, Launches Year of Sanitation

Biodiversity and Wildlife

CITES Posts Animals and Plants Committees’ Agendas

Chemicals and Wastes

Stockholm POPRC 3 Develops Recommendations; Basel Posts OEWG Report; Pacific Island Workshop on SAICM Discusses Plans and Initiatives

Forests, Deserts and Land

UNCCD ESCOP Adopts Programme and Budget; Governor of Amazonas State Visits ITTO

Water, Oceans and Wetlands

New Ramsar Sites Designated; IMO Considers GHG Emissions, London Convention Parties Convene

Trade, Finance and Investment

GEF Council Adopts US$ 237 Million Work Programme

Intergovernmental Organizations

UNEP and Republic of Korea to Establish Trust Fund, Tree-Planting Campaign Close to Goal

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GUEST ARTICLE 1 (cont.)

The report even appears to understate the problem, as it is the product of a multi-year process that isn’t always able to include the most recent scientific data, such as the accelerating ice-melt in the Arctic and Greenland and the lower absorption of carbon dioxide by the oceans. When releasing the IPCC report, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon warned that we may have as little as ten years until we reach the tipping point for abrupt and irreversible climate change, including catastrophic sea-level rise.

Adding to this increasingly dark picture of the worst of times is the disappointing performance of the Kyoto Protocol, the world’s first attempt at an international climate treaty, designed to deliver reductions of 1 billion tons of CO2-equivalent per year between 2008 and 2012, for a total of 5 billion tons of emissions reductions. Unfortunately, the Kyoto Parties are regressing, increasing their emissions by an additional 1 billion tons of CO2-equivalent each year. While it is important that the Kyoto experiment continue, if Kyoto were a sports team, the fans would certainly be calling for a new coach and a new strategy.

This is the picture of the worst of times, where climate change is so serious it is considered by national security experts to be a greater threat than global terrorism.

But it also may be the best of times, with climate change moving quickly from scientific assessment into public consciousness, including into the boardrooms of the world. Recent issues of Environmental Finance show the optimism of the market as it moves aggressively into climate solutions. Markets are fueled by optimism - the one human emotion that may be even stronger than fear. Certainly optimism, more than fear, is what will save us. The challenge is in ensuring that market growth benefits all countries equitably.

A key role of modern environmental law is to harness and direct the power of optimism as well as fear, thus driving markets to a tipping point where they necessarily innovate and provide the environmentally superior solutions we need – essentially, a Moore’s Law for climate solutions.

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CLIMATE AND ATMOSPHERE

BALI CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE SET TO OPEN

The UN Climate Change Conference in Bali, which is expected to focus on arrangements for negotiating a post-2012 framework for action, will take place from 3-14 December 2007. The conference will consist of a series of UN events, including the twelfth Conference of the Parties (COP 12) and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC); third Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP 3); and the first session of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Further Commitments for Annex I Parties under the Kyoto Protocol; and a ministerial segment for COP 13 and CMP 3, which is taking place from 12-14 December 2007 (http://www.iisd.ca/climate/cop13/; http://unfccc.int/meetings/cop_13/items/4049.php).

On 20 November, the UNFCCC Secretariat released a report containing emissions data from 40 industrialized countries that are parties to the UNFCCC. The report shows significant differences among parties to the Kyoto Protocol in terms of emissions trends between 1990 and 2005, with Germany, the UK and others showing marked reductions, while others, such as Canada, showed overall increases. The report will be taken up in Bali by the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2007/sbi/eng/30.pdf).

The Secretariat has also recently released a number of other documents that will be considered at Bali. These include documents on deforestation in developing countries, carbon capture and storage, and “long-term cooperative action to address climate change by enhancing implementation of the Convention” (http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2007/sbsta/eng/misc14a03.pdf; http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2007/sbsta/eng/misc18a02.pdf; http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2007/cop13/eng/04a01.pdf).

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

UNDESA ORGANIZES EXPERT GROUP ON INTEGRATING CLIMATE CHANGE INTO NATIONAL STRATEGIES, LAUNCHES YEAR OF SANITATION

The Division for Sustainable Development of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DSD/UNDESA) organized an expert group meeting on “Integrating Climate Change into National Sustainable Development Strategies (NSDS)” (12-13 November 2007, New York, US). Participants heard presentations on, inter alia, NSDS, linkages between climate change and sustainable development, impacts of climate change on agriculture, links between climate change and national decision-making, national experiences in Ghana, Brazil, Barbados and the Cook Islands, adaptation strategies and technologies, adaptation and mitigation planning and response, and the role of forests and deforestation (http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/natlinfo/egm_ClimateChange/index.htm).

UNDESA also organized, on 21 November 2007, the global launch of the International Year of Sanitation, in collaboration with the UN-Water Task Force on Sanitation. The theme year is scheduled to encourage public-private partnerships, and will include regional conferences on sanitation as part of capacity building initiatives, including one that will focus on school sanitation (http://esa.un.org/iys/iys_launch.shtml).

Launch of year of sanitation (Photo courtesy of UNDESA)
And so we come to the second city in our tale of two cities: Montreal, where 191 countries of the world just celebrated the 20th anniversary of the ozone treaty know as the Montreal Protocol — acknowledged to be the world’s best environmental treaty – by explicitly providing climate benefits and solutions, in addition to its original ozone protection mandate.

The Montreal Protocol is reducing climate emissions by a net of 135 billion tons of CO2 equivalent between 1990 and 2010, and delaying climate change by up to 12 years — helping to keep us from a catastrophic tipping point for abrupt climate change. If early efforts starting back in 1974 to phase-out ozone depleting substances are considered, the effects of climate change have been delayed by a Planet-saving 35 to 41 years, according to a recent study published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

In September at the 20th anniversary of the Montreal Protocol, the 191 parties bought the world some critical time when they reached consensus to accelerate the phase-out of HFCFs in a way that promotes climate mitigation. As a result, the Parties will reduce GHG emissions by at least 15 billion tons of CO2-equivalent.

Moreover, the HCFC adjustment was the first time both developing and developed countries, including China, India and the US, essentially agreed on mandatory climate reductions. While the ozone treaty buys more time to avoid the tipping point for abrupt climate change while we get the post-2012 climate regime up and running, the Montreal Protocol also offers the world something more. It provides a beacon of hope – a model of successful environmental governance.

The Montreal Protocol’s “start and strengthen” approach is illustrated by its initial CFC phase-out in 1987: the treaty started with 50% phase-out by 2000 for developed countries. This regulatory signal was so successful, and the market responded so quickly with substitutes, that each subsequent year the Parties accelerated the phase-out schedules, ultimately to 100% by 1996 for CFCs, even as they added chemicals. The ozone treaty is now phasing out 96 ozone-depleting substances in more than 240 countries of the world just celebrated the 20th anniversary of the ozone treaty know as the Montreal Protocol — acknowledged to be the world’s best environmental treaty – by explicitly providing climate benefits and solutions, in addition to its original ozone protection mandate.

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industry sectors and many thousands of applications.

It is important to remember that when the Montreal Protocol was negotiated, CFCs and other ozone-depleting substances were considered essential for a modern way of life. The manufacture and use of these chemicals were multi-billion dollar enterprises, covering everything from cosmetics to telecommunications and refrigerators to computers. Viable substitutes for many applications did not exist in 1987, but the Parties forged ahead, and over time many businesses found they not only could innovate to develop substitutes but also comply with the treaty, often at a profit.

Montreal’s governance system includes a number of crucial lessons of success for the post-Kyoto agreement. One stands out: a dedicated funding mechanism for adaptation to developing country parties. There is no question that the most effective means to address adaptation is technology transfer and financing for climate change needs to envision mitigation and adaptation as a symbiotic unit. COUNCILS least able to adapt to climate impacts are already feeling the burden, and if we do in fact reach that tipping point for abrupt climate change, the brunt of the devastation will be borne principally by those least able to save themselves. There is no question that the most effective means to address adaptation is through concrete and immediate action on mitigation.

In the battle against climate change, time is truly of the essence. The lessons of Montreal need to be studied and implemented now. In just 20 years, the ozone treaty has phased out 95% of global production of ozone-depleting substances within a framework that is effective and considered equitable. A governance system that has delayed climate change by up to 41 years, and solved a part of the climate problem that otherwise would have been nearly equal to the CO2 contribution today, clearly has something important to teach the Parties in Bali next November. Its effects of climate change. Effective means to address adaptation is as a symbiotic unit. Coun-

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The question remains: which of the two cities will we choose?
If all other factors remain constant, climate change will increase the risks of desertification in dry areas. There are several possibilities to ensure that efforts undertaken for adaptation and the fight against desertification converge.

Information is vital for adaptation, and climate and environment monitoring is indispensable for forecasting risks. However, the results of the most advanced research must be made accessible and understandable both to national structures in charge of managing and preventing crises and as well as to final users (populations, civil society, NGOs). Translating and distributing information and scientific knowledge requires specific pedagogical skills. Exchanges of experience, for instance between the North and the South of the Sahara, should also be promoted in this framework.

To ensure better management of available information, it is essential to develop a base of regional knowledge of the crucial stakes involved in degradation of natural resources. Such a base will only be viable if it is regularly fed on a national level, through all initiatives related to the environment and socio-economic development. It would require setting up or reinforcing national systems for observing and evaluating natural resources. It would also be useful to specify how monitoring of desertification feeds into climate monitoring. Thus, setting up or reinforcing national information systems for environmental issues would make it possible to improve implementation of multilateral environmental agreements.

Regional cooperation is important to the extent that many African countries share natural resources (river basins, aquifers, protected reserves, etc.), belong to common institutions and are subject to the same environmental concerns, including degradation of land and climate variability and change. It may be possible to reinforce regional networks through African organisations on a sub-regional, regional or even international level. Such a regional platform should also involve sub-regional authorities, specialised sub-regional technical organisations working together with bilateral cooperation organisations, multilateral organisations with databases on Africa, as well as environmental NGOs.

Continued on page 4
GUEST ARTICLE II (cont.)

Devising strategies to adapt to climate variability and changes should be a process that reinforces, supports, stimulates and emphasizes the different environmental governance principles defined by the concerned countries and by the actions envisaged as part of the fight against desertification, or the conservation of biodiversity, actions that have not yet been effectively implemented. On the international level, it will be a good idea to redefine the framework for reinforcing relations between UNCCD and UNFCCC, in particular through decisions to be taken on adaptation.

Read the Full Article at: http://www.iisd.ca/mea-l/guestarticle37b.htm

Editor’s note: MEA Bulletin invites articles from practitioners, MEAs and academics on issues that are of interest across the MEA community. Please contact the Editor, lynn@iisd.org, for further information.

INTEGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

UNEP AND REPUBLIC OF KOREA TO ESTABLISH ENVIRONMENTAL TRUST FUND; TREE-PLANTING CAMPAIGN CLOSE TO GOAL


Meanwhile, UNEP’s Plant for the Planet: Billion Tree Campaign, which was launched in November 2006 with the objective of securing pledges to plant one billion trees worldwide in 2007, has recorded that 806 million trees have been planted thus far. This announcement came following confirmation by the Turkish Ministry of Environment and Forestry on 20 November 2007 that the country planted 150 million trees during 2007 (http://www.unep.org/billiontreecampaign/CampaignNews/20th_Nov.asp).

UNGA ADOPTS CLIMATE CHANGE RESOLUTION

The UN General Assembly (UNGA) adopted, on 19 November 2007, at UN headquarters in New York, US, a draft resolution (A/62/L.11/Rev.1) requesting the Secretary-General to prepare a comprehensive report of the UN systems’ activities in relation to climate change. The resolution originates from the consensus reached during the general debate of the 62nd UNGA session, under the theme “Responding to Climate Change,” to develop a global response to climate change. The report is expected to provide input for the thematic debate on this issue scheduled for early February 2008 (http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2007/ga10660.doc.htm; http://www.un.org/sg/president/62/letters/letterclimatechange161107.pdf).