

# Climate Change: Copenhagen and Africa

BT Costantinos, PhD  
President Lem Ethiopia, the Environment and  
Development Society

These days, Addis Ababans are increasingly worried at the 'smogdd' (a combination of smoke, fog, dirt, and dust) that that hangs over Addis. It is a threat to the health of the unborn, the young and the old, all the same. The human costs are indeed staggering in the long term. Simply said Addis Ababa has failed to limit emissions from factories, diesel cars and trucks waste dumps are irresponsibly sowing the seeds of next generation epidemics. On the world scale, global warming, accelerated by increases in the levels of greenhouse gases, is changing the composition of the atmosphere.

It is indeed the most important human challenge in the world today. Some of the adverse effects of global warming, predicted by scientists and politicians begin to occur throughout the world, including: growing incidence of droughts, floods; rising temperatures of oceans and sea levels; increase extreme weather events such as tornadoes and hurricanes; the melting of mountain glaciers and the reduction of snow cover; dying coral reefs, and coastal erosion, and loss of coastal ecosystems. Indeed global warming is happening.

The economic costs are all too obvious. BBC reports, "Europe's leading insurance companies are now so worried by global warming, they are likely to use their financial muscle to get governments and the world's oil companies to do more to cut greenhouse gas emissions. A greenhouse gas conference organised by the reinsurer, Swiss Re, has been discussing a report backed by nearly 300 financial institutions, which argued that global warming now poses a "serious threat" to the world economy. The insurers have been drawing on the findings of the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which concluded, "We can no longer be in any doubt that humans do affect the weather". The result, say the insurers, is that in the

next decade, the annual cost of global warming will hit \$150bn a year - that's five times the annual earnings of the entire population of Nigeria". Oxfam has developed a global warming adaptation-financing index based on the responsibility, equity, and capability of each nation. Accordingly, "The U.S. is responsible for 44% of the annual \$50 billion needed to fight global warming said aid agency Oxfam as expectations mount that the United States will reject stiff targets and timetables for reducing carbon dioxide emissions; ahead of the G8 meeting in Germany to discuss climate change".



What is to be done? Mainstreaming environmental concerns in stemming global warming will augur on developing a working knowledge on environmental development. Analyses of and managing rational policies that have climatic impacts and the requisite social, cultural, political, spiritual and human capital and corporate social responsibility are required. The themes underpin a critique of the current polices affecting climate dynamics and proposal for reform and strategic tools of implementation: options, scenarios, and modalities for priming policy and strategic instruments for sustainable livelihoods in the one Earth we have.

**Copenhagen:** While the recent climate change jamboree held in Bali, Indonesia, has borne little fruit, policy dialogue on this timely and apposite issue; Copenhagen is dreamt of legitimately enhancing the leadership capacity to effect change in stemming the tide of human demise; however governments are constrained by politico-economic doctrine and ideological leanings. After all, world leaders are expected to develop the capacity, through their statements and actions, to shape debate, dialogue, and morality, to determine what is environmentally and socially acceptable, culturally sound and politically uplifting. Indeed, leadership is a calling and

policy leadership requires intimate knowledge of public policy analysis, formulation, management and strategic plans and implementing them. This is especially important in African nations when the policy imperatives involve trying to change attitudes and behaviour of a national psyche; only informed by violent conflicts and the resultant human insecurity. The four essentials calling for an international agreement in Copenhagen says Yvo de Boer, UN Chief on Climate Change are:

- *How much are the industrialized countries willing to reduce their emissions of greenhouse gases?*
- *How much are major developing countries such as China and India willing to do to limit the growth of their emissions?*
- *How is the help needed by developing countries to engage in reducing their emissions and adapting to the impacts of climate change going to be financed?*
- *How is that money going to be managed?*

The Kyoto Protocol which sets binding targets for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions has been signed and ratified by 184 parties of the UN Climate Convention. One notable exception is the United States, although it is now back in the international climate change process and engaging domestically in the process. However, there is a Growing controversy between US and Europe. Discussions between Europe and the US on whether or not an upcoming "Copenhagen Protocol" should be build on the expiring "Kyoto Protocol" may undermine a new worldwide treaty.

"How to count national carbon reduction targets has caused a crucial controversy between Europe and the US (the Guardian). US negotiators have told their European counterparts that the US intends to discard the Kyoto architecture and the international system that regulates the calculation of emissions. Instead, they will replace it with a system of its own design where each country can set its own rules and decide unilaterally how to meet its target.

The US attitude causes growing concern among European negotiators". Europe wants to build on Kyoto, but the US proposal would in effect kill it off. The UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon is also worried about the slowdown of the negotiations. "We are deeply concerned that the negotiation is not making much headway... it is absolutely and crucially important for the leaders to demonstrate their political will and leadership," he says according to the Guardian.

**The African dilemma:** Indubitably, population growth and climate change are critically linked. Population is a major factor in the extent of warming. It will very much determine the effects on the livelihoods of that population. Greater human numbers may limit the ways societies can respond or adapt to droughts and a rise in sea level, changes in precipitation patterns, and other products of warming. If we take into account CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from deforestation and methane emissions from lakes, fields and waste dumps, when trying to estimate how much each country has contributed to global warming; we find that developing countries have contributed more than previously thought.

On the other hand, Africa's demographic challenges augur on poverty that has made us chronically dependent on international charity and heavily reliant on primary production that is vulnerable to extreme fluctuations in weather. The population has tripled in four decades and it is continuing to grow fast - presenting an interdisciplinary challenge; where environmental impact studies shows that even using the "achievable optimum" models with all interventions, no improvement can be observed in the population supporting capacity of communities. The population policies of nations in Africa describe the rationale for population programmes, and prescribes organisational mechanisms in the government for implementation; containing (as strategies) a mixture of programme interventions, new laws, studies and recommendations.

Nevertheless, this has yet to show the results.

What went wrong? Structural and policy impediments to develop and implement strategic

land use plans and environmental policies that focus on social, political and bureaucratic hindrances to manage effective environment and population policies addressing principally climatic and environmental uncertainty (lack of information, knowledge and predictability of courses of events) and complexity (systems components, differentiation and interdependence).

All said, African countries have not been able or willing to develop an environmentally sustainable development agenda at home, let alone contribute meaningfully and practically to the global climate change debate and process. In this sense, Copenhagen has very little news to offer for Africa besides becoming yet another forum for extra-budgetary aid that may convince donors that the impact of climate change driven by developed nation industries should not be felt in Africa.

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