

[Climate Change in Light of Recent International Negotiations](#)

Climate change is a global challenge, requiring a global solution. One country's efforts in reducing their emissions requires the concerted effort of other countries if global warming is to be reduced. The reason for holding international negotiations is to agree a strategy requiring commitment by all the countries to "Think Globally and Act Locally" in terms of their individual efforts to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions.

The international response was the formation of The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the UNFCCC, which was launched in 1992 at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. The Convention established a long-term objective of stabilising greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere "at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system". It also set a voluntary goal of reducing emissions from developed countries to 1990 levels by 2000 - a goal that most countries failed to meet. Currently 191 parties, including the US, have ratified the UNFCCC.

Recognizing that stronger action was needed, countries negotiated the Kyoto Protocol in 1997.

[What is the Kyoto Protocol?](#)

- A treaty negotiated in 1997 in Kyoto, Japan, which came into force in 2005
- An extension of U.N Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), signed at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro
- Aim: a long-term objective to stabilize greenhouse emissions, setting binding targets to reduce emissions 5.2% below 1990 levels by 2012
 - This goal was not met
 - While the US did not sign the protocol, many other developed countries have made headway
- Article 4 (7) of the Convention is that climate change policy "will take fully into account that economic and social development and poverty eradication are the first and overriding priorities of the developing country Parties"
 - The problem is that, as growth is perceived to be strongly correlated with emissions, the agreement is that no absolute caps can be placed on these countries' emissions. China and India are included in this category of developing countries
- The second 'commitment' phase of the Kyoto Protocol is currently underway, as stipulated in the Doha Amendment in 2012:
 - Pledge to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 18% below the 1990 levels, by the year 2020

The Most Important United Nations Climate Conferences so far:

- 1997: COP 3, The Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change:
 - As well as greenhouse gas emission reduction, this conference also outlined obligations, named “Kyoto Mechanisms,” which included emission trading and clean development

- 2000: COP 6, The Hague, Netherlands:
 - This conference was intended to wrap up three years of negotiations on the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol
 - The conference collapsed due to the US wanting carbon sinks as part of the agreement (as well as other provisions like nuclear energy, etc.), which received enormous criticism
 - In addition, the Europeans were not swaying on their stance that the US should not be given exceptions and should not be allowed to meet much of its greenhouse gas reduction targets without actually cutting emissions
 - After a number of discussions between the EU and the US, formal and informal, the new US president, George Bush announced that he was against the Kyoto Protocol

- 2001: COP 6, Bonn, Germany (a rerun of the conference in the Hague):
 - A major breakthrough was achieved, with governments reaching a broad political agreement on the operational rulebook for the 1997 Kyoto Protocol
 - Resulted in an agreement which included developing countries more. While the mainstream media of many nations hailed this as a magnificent step forward, and a saviour of the climate agreement negotiations, it left many trade-offs and questions, such as how to enforce any compliance, allowing carbon sinks to be included to get Japan, Canada and Australia on board, and so on
 - Led to a ‘watered down’ Kyoto Protocol
 - In the recent years since Bonn, greenhouse gas emissions had actually gone up by 18.2% in Australia, by 19.6% in Canada and 11.2% in Japan. The UN figures also showed that greenhouse gas emissions had increased in countries like The Netherlands, Norway, Spain and Saudi Arabia by 12.58%

- 2002: COP 8, New Delhi, India:
 - Pressure put on developing countries by developed countries to put reduction plans in place

- Principles formed what some described as the social justice and equity part of climate change issues. Unfortunately these have been largely ignored in the discussions that are usually dominated by the rich nations, and oil producing countries, who talk more about economic effectiveness only
- Since the US had refused ratification, the protocol needed Russia's support, as it could not enter into force without the ratification of at least 55% of the world's contributors to CO₂ emissions. Russia delayed
- 2004: COP 10, Buenos Aires, Argentina:
 - Discussions on:
 - Mitigation policies and their impacts
 - Technology
 - Entry into force of the Kyoto Protocol
 - Progress had been slow in securing commitments to reduce the emissions that lead to global warming, and the industrialised nations refuse to recognise the urgency of adaptation measures, something that is reflected by the lack of sufficient contributions to the fund created to this purpose
 - The EU delegation announced in Buenos Aires that it would increase its contribution to adaptation efforts from 100 million to 360 million dollars annually as of 2005. However, many believed that this amount is still insufficient
- 2010: COP 16/CMP 6, Cancun, Mexico
 - The Cancún Agreements import the essential elements of the Copenhagen Accord (newly selected emission targets) into the UNFCCC, including mitigation pledges and operational elements, such as a new Green Climate Fund for developing countries and a system of international consultations and analysis to help verify countries' actions. Agreement hinged on finding a way to finesse the more difficult questions of if, when, and in what form countries will take binding commitments
 - Cancun agreements: include a comprehensive finance, technology and capacity-building support package to help developing nations adapt to climate change and adopt sustainable paths to low-emission economies
 - The agreements confirm that developed countries will mobilise USD 100 billion in climate funding for developing countries annually by 2020, and establish a Green Climate Fund through which much of the funding will be channelled
- 2013: COP 19/CMP 9, Warsaw, Poland:
 - Warsaw was supposed to be the 'Finance COP' to bring the promised money

- Countries like Germany, Switzerland and others in Europe only managed to scrape together promises of 110 million dollars into the Green Climate Fund. Developing countries wanted a guarantee of 70 billion a year by 2016 but were blocked by the U.S., Canada, Australia, Japan and others
- Representatives actually walked out in protest against developed countries refusing to commit to a loss and damage mechanism – reparations, so to speak
- Adding of a third pillar to the convention (the first two being mitigation (emission's reduction) and adaptation (anticipating effects of climate change and minimising damage)), a loss and damage mechanism, in particular to aid developing countries that feel the adverse affects of climate change most strongly
- The meeting came at the time when the devastating Typhoon Haiyan had just killed thousands in the Philippines and affected millions more
- 2015: COP 21/CMP 11, Paris, France:
 - Cap of 2C, 0 by the end of the century.
 - But, the EU is set to emit 2 billion more tonnes than the Paris agreement stipulates
 - The new treaty ends the strict differentiation between developed and developing countries, with more focus on a common and shared framework

Some Good Outcomes

Both global and local efforts have, in some regards, contributed immensely to progress. Perhaps the most remarkable achievement so far is that such a strong and large bodied international effort has been yielded – as shown by the UNFCCC conferences each year and the publicity and fervour that accompanies them.

The EU

Accomplishments

- Increased use of renewable energy (wind, solar, biomass) and combined heat and power installations;
- Improved energy efficiency in buildings, industry, household appliances;
- Reduction of CO2 emissions from new passenger cars;
- Abatement measures in the manufacturing industry;
- Measures to reduce emissions from landfills

Corporations

- Companies who keep producing greenhouse gases (GHGs) as part of their core business will attempt measures such as inviting environmental groups onto their boards; launching green advertising, as BP did many years ago with its “Beyond Petroleum” campaign; or indeed becoming sponsors of a United Nations climate summit.
- Companies whose core business is not related to fossil fuels are keen to be seen to be 100% fossil free. Google, Microsoft and Adobe all made the leap last year to go 100% renewable.
- At the end of 2015 companies responsible for a fifth of the world’s oil and gas supply in the Oil and Gas Climate Initiative (OGCI) threw their support behind a new global agreement at the UN talks in Paris.
- BP has long supported measures to put a price on carbon emissions and continues to raise its advocacy this year. Other options include reduced demand for the most carbon intensive fossil fuels, greater energy efficiency, the use of natural gas in place of coal, increased investment in carbon capture and storage, renewable energy, smart buildings and grids, off-grid access to energy, cleaner cars and new mobility business models and behaviours.

Some Bad Outcomes

Despite persistent efforts to reach consensus, these international conferences have, on the whole, achieved too little in concrete terms. While their work is ‘binding’ it is not mandatory, and this is all too clearly seen in various countries’ reluctance to prioritise climate change over economic growth. Overall, there seems to be a worrying lack of urgency in these international negotiations, with too much emphasis on diplomacy rather than the job at hand. Amongst others, some of the problems that the UNFCCC conferences face are:

- Lack of quality (if any) media coverage
- Developed countries stalling on doing anything trying to blame India and China instead
- Lack of funding
- Disagreement on how to address it
- Discussions on climate and social justice and equity
- (i.e to what extent can we expect developing countries to suffer economically for the problems created by developed countries?)
- Inability to enact legally binding emission reduction quotas
- Discord between developed and developing countries

The UK

- Fracking – 159 new licences were awarded by the UK government at the end of 2015. The future economic benefits of fracking are often touted as a key

argument for investment in shale gas drilling. However, this investment in fossil fuel extraction goes directly against spirit of the Paris Conference which had been held just days before

Corporations

Many have noted that the Peru and Paris Conferences were ‘funded’ by the fossil fuel industry. Lobbying groups representing a handful of fossil fuel companies, including Shell and Chevron, hosted more than a dozen events. CAI spokesperson Jesse Bragg and the New York Attorney General who launched an investigation into ExxonMobil's alleged climate obfuscation said “Those corporations are able to say they’re part of the solution just because they write a cheque”

- In many cases, while big corporations in the fossil fuel industry (BP, Shell, Exxon, Chevron, etc.) proclaim themselves to be behind the climate change cause, there is a line that they withdraw behind before damaging their own successes too much

The impact of US elections

- Just as Bush’s election hindered the progress of the Kyoto Protocol at the start of the century, the oncoming elections this year pose similar concerns
- Fears of Trump’s election unpicking all the progress that has been made, having said “I’m not a big believer in manmade climate change,” while Democrat forerunners both support the Paris accord

Questions to be addressed:

- ✓ **What has changed as a result of these international negotiations?**
- ✓ **What has stayed the same/failed to change?**
- ✓ **Why are we failing?**
- ✓ **What is the role of individual countries or corporations?**
- ✓ **What can we expect in the future?**
- ✓ **What part can renewable energy play in this future?**