



XLII/XLIIème COSAC 

Stockholm 4–6 October/octobre 2009

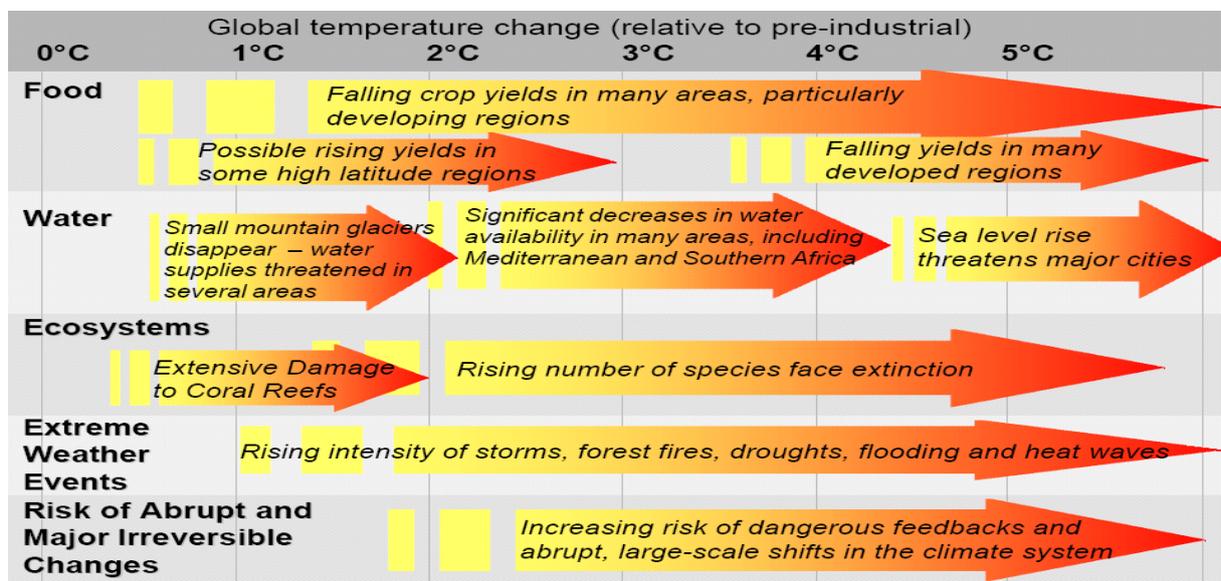
Background Document - Climate Change

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Our climate is changing much faster than previously expected. Recent studies indicate that emission and temperature increases are accelerating and that the 2 °C threshold may be passed much earlier than anticipated unless action is taken immediately.

To have a reasonable chance of staying below the 2°C threshold, we need to ensure that global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions peak by no later than 2020, that they are reduced by at least 50 % as compared with 1990 levels by 2050 and that they continue to decline thereafter.



A busy agenda

In December 2007, the international community agreed on the timetable and on a negotiating mandate in the form of the “Bali Action Plan”. The Bali conference was a breakthrough, inter alia, because developing countries accepted the need for them to take ‘nationally appropriate mitigation actions’ with the technical and financial support of the developed world.

The UN climate change meetings during the first half of 2009 saw a hardening of national positions as negotiations came into full swing. There are now texts on the table, following negotiations in Bonn in June, where all parties made sure that their positions were reflected. The task for the negotiators now is to narrow down the options in order to come closer to a workable and ambitious compromise that, to greatest extent possible, responds to the global scientific recommendation (i.e. staying below a temperature increase of 2°C).

The July 2009 G8 Declaration agrees to the common objective of preventing global average temperature increases of 2°C above pre-industrial levels, and halving GHG emissions by 2050, with developed countries reducing their emissions by 80%. It should be noted that there was no reference year for the emissions reduction objective, and no mid-term 2020 target was mentioned. It may also be noted that Russia distanced itself somewhat from the statement.

The Major Economies Forum (the 17 biggest world economies, MEF) Declaration, also agrees to a 2°C threshold, as well as to plans of moving towards a low carbon society and a deviation from business as usual for developing countries.

The last couple of months before COP15 in Copenhagen will be a race against time, with the EU further defining its negotiating mandate and building alliances, the US defining its internal position and re-engaging, and a heavy UN negotiation agenda (see below), along with the G8, the MEF, the G20 and the personal involvement of the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon, who hosted a high-level event at heads of state and government level in New York on 22 September 2009.

The role of the EU is to shape the negotiating mandate and forge alliances. The EU agreement on a domestic climate change and energy package in December 2008 strengthened its leading role in international climate negotiations. The package will deliver the 20 % reduction target by 2020, and confirms that the EU is ready to commit to a 30% target by 2020, should other developed countries take on comparable reductions and developing countries take appropriate action in accordance with the principle of common, but differentiated, responsibility. For the time being, this 30 % target remains by far the most serious offer on the international negotiating table.

The Swedish EU Presidency is organising a conference on climate change security on 15 October in Stockholm and the EU Development Days, where climate change will be a prominent part of the agenda, will take place on 22-24 October in Stockholm.

The main issues under negotiation in the run-up to Copenhagen are:

- comparable emission reduction targets by developed countries,
- nationally appropriate mitigation action by developing countries,
- a financial architecture to underpin the Copenhagen agreement.

Key obstacles and difficulties ahead

The complexity of the negotiations (192 countries negotiating on two parallel but separate tracks) and the very tight calendar will be a serious challenge, especially for smaller countries with more limited administrative capacity.

The late return of the US to the negotiations is a major step forward, but progress will naturally be slow until their position is shaped. The moderate level of ambition of US domestic legislation currently discussed is also likely to limit the US margin for manoeuvre.

The global economic crisis will certainly weigh on developed countries' financial margins for manoeuvre and the willingness of their industry to support an agreement. The current low energy prices do not encourage economies to embark on a low carbon development path. On the other hand, stimulus packages in developed countries are investing in green growth and clean energy technologies.

Several developed countries are still quite far from fulfilling their emissions reduction commitments under the Kyoto Protocol. The EU is on track towards its targets, but the Kyoto Protocol is not ambitious enough to deal with the climate crisis.

There are growing tensions between parties. While China is not responsible for most of the GHG emissions that have accumulated in the atmosphere in the last 150 years, it is impossible today to fight climate change without addressing emissions in China and other emerging economies. For competitiveness reasons, many developed countries are unwilling to embark on emission reductions if their main competitors do not make similar moves. Recently, some G77 members have shown increasing signs of impatience with the absence of clear financing proposals from developed countries.

Greater tensions have also been observed within the "G77 + China" negotiating group, where the prime victims of climate change (least developed countries and small islands developing states), whose survival is at stake, have started pointing towards the big emitters in their own group.