

Bonn Symposium 2009
Sustainable Development in Times of Crises - Opposition or Opportunity?
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The Agenda after Copenhagen

Thank you to the organizers for inviting me to speak to you here, at the end of the Bonn Symposium on "sustainable development in times of crisis".

During this conference, you have worked on issues related to sustainability in day-to-day life:
-> how education, the media, business and local authorities can set incentives for achieving sustainability.

The Bonn Memorandum highlights

- The contributions through the UN Decade on Education for SD
- The responsibility of the media in informing the public
- The opportunities and responsibilities the private sector has in promoting environmental and social sustainability in its own strategies and at the workplace
- And finally the manifold opportunities local authorities have for achieving concrete improvements in reducing the consumption of ecosystem services and environmental public goods.

The title of my contribution today, with which this symposium comes to an end, is "The agenda after Copenhagen". If we link this title to the title of the conference – SD in times of crisis – we have the setting of the current debate: Will it still be possible to achieve a breakthrough in Copenhagen, at the 15th conference of the parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, for global climate policy, for avoiding dangerous climate change?

It is strange to formulate the question like that if we consider that since the ratification of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, there never was so much consensus about the origins of global warming, The extent it has already reached, the need to limit it to a global average of 2°C and on the measures necessary to achieve this goal.

But there is disagreement on the basic elements:

- How much emissions should be reduced by when, and by whom
- How much fiscal support should be made available, by whom, for whom, and how money should be transferred
- Whether forest protection should be part of emissions trading
- On the importance and quantity of adaptation support to developing countries
- On the need and form of technology transfer

My contribution will thus focus on three questions:

1. Why is there so much disagreement?
2. What will the likely outcome of Copenhagen be?
3. How should we conceive agendas for action after Copenhagen?

1. Why is there so much disagreement?

- The causes of global warming and climate change are at the heart of our economies: energy supply and energy use. Changing these structures is costly, and it has effects on economic competitiveness in the short term. Moreover, the means for achieving these changes are unequally distributed in this world of a few rich and many poor countries – having to change without the means to do so is interpreted by many of the poor as impeding future improvements in welfare
- Mitigating climate change is thus an economic issue – and in a globalized economy. Losing or reducing one's competitiveness has high price. This means that agreeing on emissions reductions is seen as making major concessions – and not as making absolutely necessary contributions for securing our common future. Costs and benefits of climate change are unequally distributed as well, and this fact makes it difficult for many to clearly see that overall we will all lose out if we do not limit global warming.
- Is it possible to reduce the complexity of these negotiations by simply reducing the number of players and concentrate on the largest emitters worldwide in absolute terms? This resort to club governance is no answer: recent calculations by the WBGU have shown that we need to consider all current and future emitters if we want to limit global warming to 2°C, even the poorest countries will have to redirect their development onto a low-carbon pattern within this century.
- So, we are bound to achieve agreement among all 190+ UN member states. We need to learn to deal with complexity, with inequality in global governance – in negotiations, and in implementation. Issues of equity, not only of efficiency, therefore need to be at the heart of negotiations – on global level as well as on national or regional level when the negotiations are prepared.

2. What will the likely outcome of Copenhagen be?

Considering the degree of controversies, some have said that the outcome will only be a political declaration.

Which elements will this declaration contain?

The minimum would be two things:

- First, to agree on ambitious targets for emissions reductions by 2020 and by 2050, on the basis of the recommendations of the IPCC at least – on global targets, and targets to be achieved by developed countries and commitments by the major emitters among developing countries.
- Second, to agree on specific commitments for financial support to developing countries, for mitigation and adaptation, under a framework which commits both sides to measurable, reportable and verifiable activities.

In order to maintain the momentum for the fundamental transformation of energy systems, of production and consumption patterns we need it will be necessary to make the elements of this declaration legally binding, as soon as possible, some say by mid 2010.

What will be the content of this binding legal instrument? A Kyoto protocol type agreement for the years after 2012 will clearly not be sufficient. We will need an agreement which includes measures and activities of the major emitters among developing countries. And we need the US to be part of this process and to agree to a legally binding instrument.

These are questions which will be partially answered after the Copenhagen conference. Aloud they are important for the agenda to follow. In political terms, continuing negotiations will definitely be on the agenda – and it will be an arduous task to achieve the minimum elements mentioned above.

3. How should we conceive agendas for practical action in this context?

But let's reflect here about a more practical agenda: What can, what should be done in order to promote progress towards a low-carbon economy, towards climate-resilient development, knowing that the agreement to follow from the Copenhagen conference will not be perfect.

Negotiations should be supported by action:

- Action to reduce emissions
- To support developing countries in shifting towards a low-carbon economy and in improving their adaptation capacities, in implementing urgent action for adaptation
- To increase information and knowledge about climate variability and change and how it affects livelihood of the people today and in the near future
- To share experiences with early action, within Germany, Europe, with those eager to learn and act on other continents.

The worst thing to do after Copenhagen would be to sit down and wait – wait until the picture of the negotiations has cleared Up, wait until targets are definitely set, until money has been put aside.

Nobody can afford to wait and see.

The private sector can't because the cost of shifting towards low-carbon technologies and strategies increases with time – and there is the opportunity of reaping the profits of early innovators.

Local authorities should be early movers for similar reasons, and there are many opportunities for reducing emissions on local level. It is good to identify these opportunities and to prepare for using them. At some stage, there will be reduction targets on communal level. And local communities also need to plan for adaptation to climate change: adaptation is a local issue. Where will be the risks of warning, where new opportunities? Many local authorities and communities are engaged in partnerships with other towns – across Europe, and in Africa, Latin America or Asia. These partnerships offer many opportunities for action and joint learning.

The education sector needs to act urgently: schools and universities have the task to prepare future generations for life, and if we know something then it is that climate change will be part of the life of future generations. What do we need to learn in order to live up to the challenges embodied in climate change? From my perspective, the answer to this question includes, among others, a better understanding of how human life, our economy, depends on the well-functioning of local and global ecosystems. How the preservation of ecosystems depends on our capacity for coordinated joint

action, on our ability to see the common good – and not just our individual (or national) interests and advantages.

The media have many opportunities, and they are making vast use of them as far as I can see. But we need more:

- In many countries, climate change is still a marginal issue in the media. This needs to change urgently, and it needs to be based on good journalism about reality on the spot.
- The media can support learning processes by reporting on innovative approaches on local level to reducing emissions and to adaptation
- The media's work with regard to the quality, transparency and accountability of government's action is necessary everywhere, in North and South.

Finally, a word of caution: I have spoken about what needs to be done with regard to climate change. Climate change is an important part of global environmental change, one important threat to sustainable development – but it is not the only one.

There are other planetary boundaries to sustainable development, and in many of them human activities have reached a level which could damage the systems that make Earth a liveable place for the human species. Chemical pollution, air pollution, changes in land use, loss of biodiversity, desertification, ozone depletion in the stratosphere, ocean acidification, and interventions in the phosphorus and nitrogen cycles – in many of these areas we are beyond the safe operating space. And many of these areas interact with climate change.

Times ahead are not easy – and this should encourage us to identify and use the opportunities at our hands!

Thank you very much.