

**Comments by Tom Athanasiou on the BASIC Expert Group’s “Equitable access to sustainable development. Contribution to the body of scientific knowledge” paper.
28 November 2011**

It’s unwise to predict the future, particularly the future of the climate negotiations. But if you believe that their outcome is critical, and will bear heavily upon our common future, then you’ll hope that this report is taken seriously.

The South’s Ministers, at least, will probably do so. They know the problem of “equitable access to sustainable development,” and that it must be solved if there’s to be a successful global climate regime. It may also be reasonable to hope that, after Durban, the environmental NGOs will finally begin to face the challenge of fair-shares global burden sharing.

The governments of the North are another matter. The Europeans, certainly, do not imagine that the demands of sustainable development can be put aside, and even the United States, despite its political crisis, is in some kind of motion. Not that the Obama team will welcome this reassertion of the equity agenda. That would be too much to hope for from the “realists” that brought us the Copenhagen-era push for Pledge and Review. But at the same time, it seems clear that the orthodoxies of traditional realism no longer charm as they once did. They have become cover stories, and this no realism can survive.

This report, for its part, is a serious one. It wastes no time pretending that the global carbon budget has not already been exhausted, or that development-as-usual can proceed. Nor does it pretend that we can muddle through with bottom-up accounting and technological optimism. Not if we intend to stabilize the climate system. Developmental justice is a precondition for high ambition, and this report imagines that we’re serious enough to face this bottom-line fact.

“Equity,” unfortunately, is a notion that’s easy prey to self-serving twists. The authors here are thus to be commended for their effort to delimit the salient core of the climate-equity debate. The cost of this effort is high. For example, they focus on a 2000-2050 global emissions budget of 1440 Gt CO₂ that many among us view as dangerously high. The benefits of compromise, though, are also visible, for in the end the authors are able to mark out a consensus that, while still vague, is precise enough to indicate a way forward. If “equity” is defined as a universal right to sustainable development, then only two approaches to global burden sharing – cumulative per-capita budget sharing and the “responsibility and capacity index” approach to effort sharing that’s marked out by the Greenhouse Development Rights framework – are at all promising.

There are of course problems here. My particular criticism is that the authors give almost no attention to economic stratification within countries. Even South Africa, while speaking for an approach that includes economic capacity as well as historic responsibility, passes too lightly over the subject. But all told it’s the accomplishment here that’s most notable. This report is a marker of the debate that’s actually needed. May we have it soon.

Tom Athanasiou
Executive Director of EcoEquity, Greenhouse Development Rights author’s group

Comments by Niklas Höhne on

“Equitable access to sustainable development, Contribution to the body of scientific knowledge.”

28 November 2011

A long awaited paper making concepts on equity in the greenhouse concrete

Equity is fundamental in the climate negotiations. Decisions among all countries can only be reached if all countries perceive them as fair. But equity means different things to each and every one. It is therefore most important that those that advocate equity spell out exactly what they mean.

This has now occurred with the paper “Equitable access to sustainable development - contribution to the body of scientific knowledge” by experts from Brazil, South Africa, India and China (BASIC countries). It spells out qualitatively and quantitatively how the authors suggest translating equity principles into concrete proposals for action.

In the past, scientific literature on effort sharing with concrete quantitative evaluations was dominated by research from developed countries, which lead to the often quoted required reduction ranges compatible with a 2°C global pathway: Emissions in developed countries would need to be 25% to 40% below 1990 in 2020 and emissions in developing countries would have to be 15% to 30% below baseline in 2020 (Gupta et al., 2007, den Elzen and Höhne, 2008, den Elzen and Höhne, 2010). When my colleague Michel den Elzen and I collected information for this work, we actively approached researchers from developing countries for studies, but only with limited success. A new update of this analysis will now be able to draw on a much wider range of studies.

As mentioned beforehand, the equity can be interpreted differently, also differently to the interpretation given in the paper by BASIC experts. The suggested approaches all are relatively stringent to Annex I countries and therefore less stringent to Non-Annex I countries. Approaches at the other end of the spectrum would include proposing reductions where they can be achieved at least cost. But also ‘converging per capita emissions’ (an approach long favoured by some developing countries) would be less stringent to Annex I countries. A careful comparison over all possible interpretations of equity would be very interesting.

The paper recognises that the need to look closely at individual countries in the group of Annex I and Non-Annex I countries as they may be very different. In fact, I would suggest that there is no natural divide between Annex I and Non-Annex I. The question of “who picks up the remainder” has to be dealt with on a country-by-country level. Also the BAICS countries have fundamentally different emission profiles, responsibilities and capabilities. Given the large emissions gap between proposals and what is necessary for meeting 2°C (UNEP, 2011), each individual country needs to reconsider its proposed actions in light of equity.

As the paper intends to stimulate discussion, some questions could be asked:

- Does the historical responsibility and cumulative emissions as presented take into account all greenhouse gas emissions? It changes the relative shares of groups significantly if non-CO2 and forestry emissions are included or excluded. The UNFCCC mandated group (Ad-hoc group on the modelling and assessment of contributions to climate change, MATCH) evaluated this question for several years and presented results, including their uncertainties (Höhne et al., 2010).
- How does historical responsibility and cumulative emissions take into account technological progress? Countries like the UK have a long history of high emissions, due to use of steam engines 100 years ago. Emerging economies do not have to go through such development. They can leapfrog to renewable energy.

The issue of equity has not yet been discussed extensively and concretely in the international climate negotiations. This paper will be a very valuable contribution to the discussion on equitable efforts against climate change.

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**Comments by Jennifer Morgan on the BASIC Expert Group's "Equitable access to sustainable development. Contribution to the body of scientific knowledge" paper.
30 November 2011**

When a group of experts of this caliber get together to think through one of the most challenging issues in the climate change debate it should be required reading for all of us. This new analysis is a sound foundation to consider the core issue of equitable access to sustainable development. It is a complex and important topic which cannot be overlooked but rather must be analyzed, understood and acted upon.

Jennifer Morgan
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**Comments by Lord Nicholas Stern on the BASIC Expert Group's "Equitable access to sustainable development. Contribution to the body of scientific knowledge" paper.
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"We must find a way of combining the fight against poverty and for development with that of managing climate change. These are the two defining challenges of our century-- if we fail on one we fail on the other. As the evidence in the paper implies, there is a very serious risk that the achievement of our 2deg C target (even with a 50-50 probability) could soon become impossible on current global plans -- we are moving into concentrations of greenhouse gases which will be very threatening to development and poverty reduction. Thus strong reductions from all countries are necessary, led by rich countries but involving all countries, including the 6bn of the 7bn world population living in the developing countries. As the paper argues, equity, on the basis of past and current emissions, wealth and access to technology must imply strong help from developed countries in financial support and sharing technology, as well as cutting their emissions. But on current plans emissions from developing countries alone could well exceed global carbon budgets within a quarter of a century with grave implications for the fight against poverty. That is why reductions by rich countries cannot be enough to rise to these two vital challenges. They must also provide strong financial and technical support. And developing countries, must also deliver substantial reductions, consistent with world emissions peaking in the next 10 years or so, if we are to avoid the grave risks of climate change derailing development and the fight against world poverty. The good news is that path of low-carbon growth will be full of innovation and investment and be cleaner, safer, more energy secure, more bio-diverse and more inclusive. An attempt at high-carbon growth will be self-defeating. The paper provides an important contribution to making these crucial points."

Lord Nicholas Stern
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