

The Copenhagen UN Climate Talks: What does success look like?

Climate change kills. It is taking lives today, and will threaten entire communities, countries, and ways of life within a generation, unless world leaders agree a fair, ambitious and binding deal.

The outcome to be agreed at the Copenhagen UN climate talks in December needs to commit governments to avert catastrophic and irreversible levels of climate change. And it needs to help poor people cope with already unavoidable levels of climate change in the coming years and decades. Just as important, the agreement must provide confidence that the needed changes will happen.

Solutions are close at hand. In addition to safeguarding survival for all people and the planet, they have wider benefits – including significant economic returns – less local pollution and related health costs, more jobs, less conflict, more security. The price tag for a sustainable future pales in comparison to the costs of inaction. Influential corporate coalitions are calling for ambitious climate policy at national and global levels. The choice governments face is clear. Now is the time to act.

Top ten ways to score a climate deal in Copenhagen

Ultimately, the test of the Copenhagen agreement will be whether it delivers on the objective set by the UN Climate Convention.

“The ultimate objective of this Convention and any related legal instruments that the Conference of the Parties may adopt is to achieve... stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system. Such a level should... allow ecosystems to adapt naturally to climate change,... ensure that food production is not threatened and... enable economic development to proceed in a sustainable manner.” – Article 2 (Objective) of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

For Oxfam International, the success or failure of a Copenhagen agreement – it’s ability to deliver on this objective – depends on the extent to which it meets the following ten criteria:

Does it keep global warming as far below 2°C (3.6°F) as possible?

This requires steep cuts to ensure the growth in global emissions peaks before 2015, and concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere fall below 400ppm (parts per million) as soon as possible. A fair distribution of mitigation responsibilities will mean:

1. Emissions reduction targets for developed countries (Annex I) are at least 40% below 1990 levels by 2020, with individual country targets based on their respective responsibility (for historic emissions) and economic capability;
2. Developed countries deliver most of these cuts through domestic action, not offsets;
3. Developing countries contribute to global reductions by limiting their emissions growth with mitigation finance and technology support from developed countries starting in 2010 and rising to at least \$100bn per year from 2013.

Does it protect poor people from unavoidable climate impacts?

Women, children, and elderly people are the most vulnerable. All people living in poverty have a right to information, training and money that can help them escape poverty despite growing climate impacts. Rich countries created the climate crisis and have the financial and technological resources to tackle it. This gives them an obligation to finance adaptation measures. The Copenhagen agreement must:

4. Deliver substantial fast-start adaptation financing in 2010-2012. Oxfam has estimated urgent adaptation needs are at least \$50bn every year;
5. Provide for a progressive scaling-up of adaptation financing from at least \$50bn per year in 2013, rising to \$100bn or more by 2020, in line with relevant scientific and economic assessments;
6. Ensure all climate-related financing for adaptation and mitigation comes on top of existing commitments by rich countries to deliver 0.7% of their national income as development aid to help achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. Rich countries cannot force poor countries to choose between building flood defences and building hospitals.
7. Finance an international climate insurance pool, and take steps to help people recover from damages and losses resulting from unavoidable climate impacts.

Does it commit governments to the historic shift needed?

The current international climate framework will not avert collective disaster. Just as the economic crisis requires comprehensive reform of the financial system, governments need to stop tinkering at the edges and establish new rules, new institutions, and new relationships to deliver the profound changes urgently needed to avoid climate chaos. The Copenhagen agreement must:

8. Result in a legally binding agreement between all countries that builds on and strengthens existing principles and rules, including the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and its Kyoto Protocol;
9. Include a new global climate finance mechanism, governed with equal representation of all countries, that is effective in delivering predictable flows of new and additional resources for adaptation and mitigation actions in developing countries;
10. Contain the strongest possible compliance and enforcement mechanisms, including international standards for accounting.

All policies, incentives and rules designed to advance mitigation or adaptation objectives under the Copenhagen agreement need to complement each other. Safeguards are needed to help ensure global and national responses do not adversely affect the poorest, most vulnerable people and communities. Women, smallholder farmers and other groups on the front lines of climate impacts are also primary agents of change, and need to be empowered and supported to help deliver climate solutions through targeted and equitable responses.

Contacts

Anna Mitchell + 44 77 96 99 32 88; anna.mitchell@oxfaminternational.org
Angela Corbalan + 32 473 56 22 60; angela.corbalan@oxfaminternational.org
Laura Rusu + 1 202 459 3739; lrusu@oxfamamerica.org
Natalie Curtis + 44 7824 503108; ncurtis@oxfam.org.uk
Binbin Wang +86 13810377810; bbwang@oxfam.org.hk