

Optimism and different approach needed

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THE global parley to tackle climate change began yesterday in Cancun, Mexico. But this meeting of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), also known as the Conference of Parties (COP16), is already clouded by the failure of last year's COP15 held in Copenhagen.

What was to be a gallant goal-setting agenda of legally binding targets for carbon emissions in the post-2012 scenario, COP15 ended in failure, save for a piecemeal declaration of intended future efforts and commitments called the Copenhagen Accord. COP15 was marred with

politicking and bad form from the very beginning.

Since the dismal developments at COP15, intergovernmental events leading up to COP16 have not been too fruitful either. During the last negotiating session before COP16, in Tianjin, China, expectations were much lower than for those sessions preceding COP15 – so low in fact that some officials have conceded that legally binding targets would not be reached at COP16.

These constant setbacks have served only to harden the sense of pessimism, exhaustion and frustration among those involved in the process. A participant in the Tianjin meeting noted that the constant politicking between the global North and South as well as between the two biggest

polluters, the United States and China, remains a sore point in the negotiation process. It has even led some to question the viability of the minor progress that has been made. Indonesia, for instance, doubted that an agreement on the Reduction of Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation would be reached in COP16, as it was barely discussed in Tianjin.

Another potential obstacle to success at COP16 is the UNFCCC mechanism itself. Given the fact that the UNFCCC system has 192 parties involved, it remains questionable how a genuine and democratic outcome will occur with such differing opinions and capacities among participant states. While some observers have suggested an overhaul of the UNFCCC's governance system, others have suggest-

ed the need to push for regional and sub-regional solutions.

The latter would be a feasible solution as sub-regions and regions would be better equipped to sync their development efforts based on their unique constraints. This way, they can inform the global process of more realistic goals and expectations.

Asean, for instance, has, at the very least, indicated that the issue of climate change cannot be seen in isolation, and has thus merged it with existing initiatives on energy security and sustainable development.

The bumpy road to Cancun needs to be repaved with improvements in at least two aspects.

First, COP16 requires a greater sense

of community and optimism rather than just economic sense and pessimism. Governments, which are often bogged down with the costs involved in addressing climate change, must be willing to leave aside narrow state interests. Governments must cooperate to acknowledge the severe intangible costs involved of not coming to a consensus – such as rising sea levels and its range of consequences – or at the very least, realising concrete targets for moving forward.

Second, the structure of past approaches needs to be revised. Emphasis should be placed on regional frameworks, which would allow for a more realistic assessment of countries' abilities to effectively fulfil their commitments at the international level. Improvements in these two areas can lead to effective solutions to addressing climate change.

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