

The G-77, BASIC, and global climate governance: a new era in multilateral environmental negotiations

*O G-77, o BASIC, e a governança global climática:
uma nova era nas negociações ambientais multilaterais*

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Twenty years have passed since the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was opened for signature at the first Rio Conference on Environment and Development in 1992. Most observers agree that over those two decades, multilateral negotiations on climate change have become “ossified,” “gridlocked,” and otherwise unlikely to produce meaningful results in the near future (Depledge 2006; Dimitrov 2010; Victor 2011). The line between the developed North and the developing South is often seen as the fault line of disagreement in those negotiations, although neither side has ever been homogeneous. This article takes up the question of whether differentiation in the South is now sharp enough that the basic North/South framework is no longer useful for understanding global environmental governance. It also asks whether fragmentation of the South is likely to diminish or enhance Southern influence in environmental negotiations, especially negotiations on addressing climate change.

The article updates earlier influential works on the role of the Group of 77 (G-77) in global environmental governance, with the G-77 being the coalition of developing countries that has been “functionally the negotiating arm of the developing countries’ collective” for almost 50 years (Najam 2005, 307; see also Williams 2005).¹ The G-77’s role is being redefined as it negotiates alongside an increasingly crowded field of coalitions (Roberts 2011), with some of those new collective voices rising out of the G-77 itself. Notably, four of the largest and/or fastest growing developing states – Brazil, China, India, and South Africa – joined together for the first time as the BASIC group in Copenhagen in 2009. I pay special attention to this group, asking how the rise of the BASIC coalition affects the status of the G-77 and its members’ ability to achieve their central goals in the negotiations: a seat at the table and resources to support their sustainable development aspirations.

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1 The G-77 is sometimes called the G-77/China, since China is officially only an associate member. I am shortening this to G-77 for simplicity.

I begin with a brief introduction to the two main coalitions of interest, the G-77 and the BASIC countries. In the next sections, I use the groups' documents to illustrate how BASIC members explain their motivations in climate negotiations and their relationship to the G-77. I examine the empirical evidence for how the BASIC countries may be affecting the ability of their G-77 partners to achieve the latter's aims, concluding that they advance some aims while detracting from others.

The G-77, BASIC, and their ambitions for global environmental governance

Since the decolonization wave that brought many new states into existence in the 1950s–1970s, the developing countries of the world have tried to maintain solidarity in international negotiations. Labels like the “South,” the “Third World,” or “developing countries” insist on their essential similarity, at least in opposition to the developed “North.” The G-77 has been the institutional manifestation of that collective identity in many international settings, including climate negotiations. Studies of the G-77 have identified key dimensions of the institution and the aims it has pursued in the environmental arena, and I survey those here. The BASIC group is newer and less familiar, so I also briefly present its history.

The G-77

The G-77 began in 1964 to give a voice to demands for a New International Economic Order within the UN. Seventy-seven countries formed the original group, and the name Group of 77 continues even though the group now has more than 130 members. In addition to its new members, the G-77 has also lost some members over the years. For example, Mexico and the Republic of Korea withdrew from the G-77 when they entered the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Member states of the G-77 meet to coordinate their positions and a rotating chair (the position rotates between Africa, Asia, and Latin America) speaks for the group in international negotiations and to the press.

Any group of 130 countries will have many differences and the G-77 is no exception. The South has always been politically and economically heterogeneous. Given this diversity, it is striking that through the mid-2000s, observers were readily able to identify a common set of concerns that the G-77 could represent in global negotiations. For some analysts, these common concerns were based on a structural division between North and South, rooted in different material realities and historical experiences (e.g. Miller 1995; Roberts and Parks 2007). For others, the South's collective action was based less on objective facts than on members' willingness to adopt a collective identity (e.g. Najam 2005, 306; Williams 2005, 51–53). Williams makes this argument most strongly, arguing “...the **construction** of a North-South divide is an integral part of the bargaining process...” (Williams

2005, 57, my emphasis). Finally, some maintain that G-77 and BASIC unity are strongly grounded in their constructed collective identities, but there are material bases for their unity as well (Vihma, Mulugetta, and Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen 2011). Whatever the foundation of their collective status, what aims has the G-77 most consistently pursued in international negotiating sessions?

A founding purpose of the G-77 was for more influential participation in global governance in order to address the shared “poverty of influence” (Najam 2005, 305) of this “imagined community of the powerless and vulnerable” (Williams 2005, 55; see also Barnett 2008). This sense of vulnerability has two sides. In one, the concern is about the G-77 members’ lack of positive influence on the substantive outcomes of international negotiations while, in the other, the concern is to limit incursions into their national sovereignty and their ability to make their own choices about their development strategies (Kasa, Gullberg, and Heggelund 2008, 118). Both considerations require more effective participation in international negotiations. New, weak, and poor countries saw themselves as systematically disadvantaged in global negotiations compared to developed countries that brought large delegations of technically and politically experienced negotiators to global meetings. Not only did the North know how to maneuver through the rules of international bargaining – Northern countries had set up the rules. Yet bilateral negotiations were often even worse for individual developing states. By arguing for multilateral decision-making in the UN and then banding together in the G-77, Southern states could better share their experience and personnel and gain negotiation leverage. Ultimately, they want to help set up any new rules.

The first aim for more effective participation is a means to the second, primary aim: the G-77 wants its global participation to enhance the national development of its member states. In broad terms, this is a concern with poverty alleviation and economic growth in their economies as a whole. Development also includes a concern with capacity building for both negotiations and implementation of any international agreements. All of these require transfers of financial resources and technology from the North, including more specifically for mitigation of and adaptation to climate change in the climate regime (Vihma, Mulugetta, and Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen 2011, 326; Williams 2005, 56). Beyond these general terms, members of the G-77 want to make their own development choices, and the group on principle makes few specific demands about development paths (Kasa, Gullberg, and Heggelund 2008). Over time, the G-77 has moved away from a strong stance that assumes that greater environmental protection is incompatible with its development goals, accepting the aim of sustainable development, although G-77 member states have defined the effectiveness and legitimacy of international environmental agreements in terms of whether they result in development outcomes like poverty reduction (Najam 2005). Because this is such a complex and multifaceted aim, below I look only at the recent politics of development assistance and technology transfer, especially in the climate negotiations.

To conclude, the G-77 is a diverse coalition of most of the developing countries. Since 1964, its member states have negotiated together for two broad aims: first, to achieve greater influence in international negotiations and reduce their individual and collective vulnerability, and second, to use their international participation to improve their national development outcomes. Members of the G-77 have assumed that they can come closer to these aims if they present themselves in international negotiations as an undifferentiated set of actors whose similarities outweigh their differences – whatever the material reality.

The BASIC coalition

Even as the G-77 asserted (and asserts) the similarity of its members, some countries in the G-77 coalition have had notably different development outcomes than others. China stands out, to take an obvious example. Remarkably high growth rates for a remarkably long period of time have brought it to standing among the world's very largest economies, a "G-2" with the United States in some domains (Beeson 2009; Foot 2006). While no country matches China's rise, other emerging powers share some combination of its large size, rapid economic growth rates, and increasing international stature (Alexandroff and Cooper 2010; Armijo 2007; Hallding, Olsson, Atteridge, Vihma, Carson, and Román 2011; Viola 2010). In November 2009, just before the Copenhagen meeting on global climate change, four of those emerging powers joined to coordinate their positions in the BASIC coalition of Brazil, China, India, and South Africa. The environmental ministers of BASIC have met quarterly since November 2009 to coordinate their participation in the negotiations. They issue Joint Statements at the end of each meeting, which report that they also use the meetings to share successful experiences and to work through key concepts like equity.

The four countries of the BASIC coalition illustrate that the concept of "emerging power" is a "family resemblance" comparative category. That is, they share a set of material features that are commonly analytically associated with being an emerging power, but each has a somewhat different set of the attributes (Collier and Mahon 1993, 847). China and India share the distinction of having had very fast economic growth rates for the last decade or more, while Brazil and South Africa are closer to the global average. Brazil, China, and India are among the top ten of the world's very largest economies, while South Africa is two deciles lower. Given the much larger populations of China and India, however, the South African GDP per capita (PPP) is close to that of Brazil's, while China's is only two-thirds the size and India only one-third. In fact, Brazil matched India's current GDP per capita (PPP) back in 1981.² All are considered regional powers, although China and India are neighbors and so cannot both be in any straightforward sense. This

2 All data from <<http://data.worldbank.org>>, accessed August 13, 2012.

pattern extends to the climate area, where all of the four are increasingly important current contributors of greenhouse gases (GHG), but China and India contribute through increasingly-high aggregate emissions while Brazil and South Africa are higher in per capita terms (Viola 2010).

The BASIC coalition has been a very active collective participant in the Copenhagen negotiations, working with the US to negotiate the controversial Copenhagen Accord that called for voluntary reductions in greenhouse gas emissions rather than the mandatory reductions many participants expected. Its ministers have met quarterly ever since. Other countries – and especially Northern ones – treat the BASIC group as a separate unit within negotiations. Yet the BASIC countries have taken pains to underscore that they continue to remain a part of the G-77 coalition, inviting the current president of the G-77 to all of their meetings and insisting in the Durban negotiations of 2011 that the G-77 represented their positions in the meetings. In the remainder of this article, I examine the BASIC/G-77 relationship in greater detail, focusing on the question of the BASIC coalition's impact on the ability of the remainder of the G-77 to meet its primary aims in international environmental governance.

Participation and international environmental negotiations

One of the most important historic commonalities among the members of the G-77 is a sense that they have been excluded from equal participation in global negotiations. More fundamentally, G-77 members have not helped to set up the rules for international institutions and events. The large regional powers among the BASIC countries, in contrast, have drawn increasing international attention and can play something of a veto role in global negotiations and rule-making, even if they cannot necessarily assert a positive agenda (Hurrell and Sengupta 2012). In this section, I provide evidence of that larger role in the climate negotiations, and ask about its effect on the rest of the G-77.

As the BASIC countries have grown in prominence over the last 15 years or so, they have sought and been given increasingly central roles in global governance (Alexandroff and Cooper 2010; Armijo 2007; Hallding et al. 2011; Scott 2010). They have also joined in their own arrangements – the IBSA of India, Brazil and South Africa; the BRICS of the four countries plus Russia, and others – in an attempt to manage their more prominent role and coordinate their positions for greater influence. The BASIC countries have been less anxious to take a lead in the climate negotiations, but developed countries began to single them out for special climate attention and participation as early as 2005. In that year, they and Mexico were the “Five” at a meeting of the G-8 + 5; this group was identified as the 13 largest greenhouse gas emitters (Hallding et al. 2011, 32). In subsequent years, they were repeatedly invited to appear at smaller events to discuss climate issues, such as the G-20 and the 17-member Major Economies Forum on Energy and Climate.

In these smaller meetings, the BASIC countries did gain considerably more decision-making influence, but also received much more pressure to take action immediately on reducing their climate emissions. In the UNFCCC meetings, in contrast, they were able to join the G-77 as part of an undifferentiated South that was not yet required to take climate action through the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities. The BASIC countries' willingness to participate in these forums indicates some openness to discussing their emissions, and with other participants in the Major Economies Forum in 2009 accepted the goal of keeping global warming to 2 °C, an aim that would require stringent emissions reductions (Hurrell and Sengupta 2012, 470). The four have also pushed back against the special forums, however, insisting that the UNFCCC must be the primary venue. After the Copenhagen negotiation in December 2009, many of the Joint Statements of their quarterly Ministerial Meetings restated this point.

Even in the UNFCCC meetings, the BASIC countries stood out. The Copenhagen negotiations presented some of the most striking evidence of the BASIC countries' partial separation from the G-77 and its consequences for all these participants from the South. On the one hand, the BASIC countries were absolutely central to the final outcome, with global newspaper coverage of the four BASIC presidents sitting down with US President Obama to shape the eventual Copenhagen Accord. They single-handedly removed the "legally binding" clause from the already-weak agreement, with even the EU left out and forced to accept their decision (Dimitrov 2010, 809–810). Dimitrov, in fact, accused China, India, and Brazil of having directly "prevented an agreement" (Dimitrov 2010, 796) of the kind he preferred, with legally-binding commitments for them as major emitters. The BASIC countries were part of all of the small group negotiations that reached the final conference agreement, and consulted with each other "hourly" during the decisive days of the negotiations (Hallding et al. 2011). Despite their leadership, Sudan as chair of the G-77 strongly resisted the Copenhagen Accord, raising especially strong procedural objections to the fact that the documents negotiated by all countries together were rejected in favor of an agreement of the few (Vihma, Mulugetta, and Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen 2011, 324–325). In the final discussions, Sudan (as a country) joined with Bolivia, Cuba, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Tuvalu, and Venezuela to prevent the meeting from adopting the Accord on procedural as well as substantive grounds.

The BASIC countries were sensitive to the procedural criticisms. In their first ministerial meeting after Copenhagen, the final Joint Statement stressed the need for inclusive negotiations within the context of the UNFCCC. The Joint Statement of the next, Third Meeting (April 2010), was even more explicit: "Small groups can make a contribution in resolving conflicts, but they must be representative and their composition must be determined through fully inclusive and transparent negotiations, with a mechanism for reporting back to the multilateral forum." Similar comments continued through the next years. When South Africa hosted

the Conference of Parties in 2011, its refrain of “an open, transparent, inclusive and party-driven process” was a mantra that actually seemed to drive procedures. In fact, corridor complaints more often focused on the lack of smaller group negotiations that could move negotiations faster than the full group could.³

After the Copenhagen meeting, the BASIC countries also took pains to insist that they planned to remain part of the G-77 as it negotiated within multilateral meetings, given open breaks in the G-77 in Copenhagen and since, they have also reiterated their desire to strengthen the coalition. In the Joint Statement of their 11th Meeting in July 2012, for example, the BASIC Ministers wrote, “Ministers emphasized that BASIC countries, as part of the G-77 and China, continue to work to maintain the strength and unity of the Group. The Ministers reaffirmed the importance of the unity of the G-77 and China as the common voice of developing countries in the climate change negotiations.” G-77 representatives have been invited to nearly all of their Ministerial meetings, and have attended many, along with representatives of the Least-Developed Countries and the Arab, African, and Small Island States groups. The BASIC countries have made similar statements in other settings. Brazilian lead negotiator André Corrêa do Lago said at Durban that “BASIC is not a negotiation group.”⁴ The Chinese chief negotiator Xie concurred during the only BASIC press briefing there, stating the BASIC countries were developing countries and members of the G-77, and not a separate group.⁵

Despite the stated intentions of BASIC countries, they and especially China continue to gain prominence at the expense of the G-77. The declining prominence of the G-77 in negotiations can be seen in a recent set of surveys of participants in the climate negotiations between 2008 and 2010. While 27% of participants identified the G-77 as a leader at the 2008 Poznań sessions – the same percentage as the United States –, just 19% of respondents thought the G-77 had been a leader in the 2010 Cancún session, while the US rose to 50%. Meanwhile, China was identified as a leader by 47–52% of respondents in all years. China was the most recognized as a leader with its 52% in 2010, as the European Union had dropped from 62% to 45%. More than 10% of respondents also recognized the BASIC countries as a group and Brazil and India individually as leaders (Karlsson, Hjerpe, Parker, and Linnér 2012, 49).

The continued alliance of the G-77 countries is something of a puzzle. There is no question that various groups within the G-77 have different concrete interests with respect to climate change. The Association of Small Island States (AOSIS), the least-developed countries (LDCs), and the African block are the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and have the least resources to address them. The oil producers of OPEC see equally dire threats from an end to fossil fuel use

3 Observation of the 17th Conference of Parties of the UNFCCC, Durban, South Africa, December 2011.

4 Ambassador André Corrêa do Lago, Press Briefing, COP-17, Durban, December 1, 2011.

5 Zhenhua Xie, statement on behalf of the Chinese government during the High-level Segment of COP-17, Durban.

(Barnett 2008). The comparatively industrialized countries of BASIC are major current contributors to greenhouse gases (although still less historically than the developed countries) and worry about the economic impacts of climate action. The G-77 countries had remained remarkably unified despite these differences (Barnett 2008; Depledge 2006), but the Copenhagen conference saw the first open splits among them, as some of the most vulnerable countries began to challenge the BASIC countries to do more to reduce emissions.⁶

Nonetheless, there are also instrumental reasons for Third World countries to continue to join together, formulating a collective response to the North's dominance in global governance (Williams 2005, 53–54). Most observers agree that the G-77 members have a larger negotiation role with the BASIC countries among them than they would otherwise, while the larger BASIC countries have increased leverage from their position as leaders of the developing world (Williams 2005, 55; Hallding et al. 2011, 29). Certainly the BASIC countries have voiced their commitment to remain with the G-77, describing their group as “anchored” in the G-77 (Joint Statement of the 3rd Meeting of Ministers, April 2010). In both of their 2012 meetings, they have repeated that point: “Ministers emphasized that BASIC countries, as part of the G-77 and China, continue to work to maintain and strengthen the unity of the group. The Ministers reaffirmed the importance of the unity of the G-77 and China as the common voice of developing countries in the climate change negotiations” (Joint Statement of the 11th Meeting of Ministers, July 2012).

The right to develop: financial resources and transfer of technology

The Southern countries of the G-77 have historically seen international negotiations as a place where they can pressure for assistance in their national development, and even evaluate environmental negotiations on these grounds (Najam 2005, 315). On the theme of financial assistance for development, the BASIC countries and the G-77 often share the same preferences in climate negotiations. Consequently, the greater power and visibility of the BASIC coalition generally supports G-77 proposals in the negotiations where they might otherwise be overwhelmed by the much stronger economic forces of Northern countries. Once funds of various kinds are set up, however, the interests of the two groups diverge, especially when private actors are involved. The same factors that make the BASIC countries top recipients of foreign direct investment – they are economically dynamic, have comparatively good infrastructure, and can manage more and larger economic projects – makes them more attractive recipients for climate funding and technology exchange, as detailed below. The BASIC countries are aware of these problems and have made some efforts to address them in the negotiations.

⁶ Observation of the 15th Conference of Parties of the UNFCCC, Copenhagen, Denmark December 2011.

Several of them have also begun to play a modest, but novel, role as donors of technical and financial assistance to poorer Southern countries.

As discussed above, the origin of the G-77 lies in its members' common aspirations for national development and their conviction that multilateral negotiations should further that aim. Yet any climate action or inaction clashes with how some parts of the G-77 define their development prospects. Reducing emissions is a challenge to the interests of OPEC and other fossil fuel producers, which have insisted that some of the adaptation funds come to it to help in its diversification from fossil fuel extraction. They have done all they can to slow the negotiations and block action (Barnett 2008, 4; Depledge 2006, 12–13). At the same time, not taking action creates significant development challenges for LDCs and AOSIS members. LDCs' agricultural economies and the very physical existence of small island states depend on climate action (Barnett 2008). AOSIS and the LDCs agree with the BASIC countries on the importance of the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities, but have begun to ask all emitters – including BASIC – to assist with mitigation of climate emissions (Vihma, Mulugetta, and Karlsson-Vinkuyzen 2011, 328). Despite this conflict of interest, all members of the G-77 including the BASIC countries have been able to articulate some common interests in maintaining the right to develop and seeking financial and technological support from the North for that development.

In the climate arena in particular, these general agreements have led to a strong, shared focus on states having an equal right to develop. The BASIC countries have framed their demands in terms of a global carbon budget, where quotas of carbon emissions must be distributed in ways that allow all countries the space for development. In their view, this requires a serious and prior effort by developed countries to reduce their own emissions so that developing countries may emit the greenhouse gases that accompany their own development. This demand has been made in all of their Joint Statements from the Ministerial meetings, and continues to be a non-negotiable starting point. They have so far granted less open attention to the arguments of others that suggest their own emissions need to be curtailed for the development aspirations of others (e.g., Harris 2011). This point is likely to eventually be raised in their regions, given that South Africa, for example, has emitted 40% of all of Africa's historical greenhouse gas emissions (Hallding et al. 2011, 56).

Another element of the BASIC demands is less potentially contentious. The BASIC countries have consistently articulated and supported the G-77's permanent demands for more financial and technological assistance from the North, saying that Southern mitigation and adaptation activities depend on it. Here, the BASIC countries have tended to articulate very similar preferences to those of the G-77 as a whole, including “opposing donor dominance in international financial mechanisms and preferring rights-based claims to resource transfers, rather than traditional ‘assistance’” (Vihma, Mulugetta, and Karlsson-Vinkuyzen 2011, 317).

They have insisted that climate finance include new and additional funds rather than displacing current development assistance, and supported the G-77 preference for public, rather than private, sources of funds that follow national (recipient) preferences.

In their first meeting after the Copenhagen negotiations, the BASIC countries asked for early implementation of the Copenhagen promise of US\$ 30 billion of new financing per year over three years (“fast start” financing) and US\$ 100 billion per year by 2020, from many sources. At Cancún, countries create a new fund to channel these, the Green Climate Fund, whose Transitional Committee worked to put the rules in place in Durban, although many points are undecided. Figuring out whether funds are in fact “new and additional” will require quite complicated calculations (Stadelmann, Roberts, and Michaelowa 2011). Starting with their October 2010 meeting and repeatedly since, the BASIC Ministers have moved to ever stronger language insisting that the money must come, showing steadily more impatience with the North’s slowness in acting on its “obligation” to fund Southern action, especially for adaptation. The Green Climate Board is meeting for the first time in August 2012. In addition, they have repeatedly stressed that the reporting mechanisms must be standardized and transparent.

In some ways, the interests of the G-77 have been strengthened by this support from the economically more powerful BASIC countries. Especially in contrast to Northern countries, they share similar ideas about how the funding should take place. After the Cancún meeting, the BASIC countries have also taken care to stress that some sub-categories of the G-77 – the Small Island Developing States, the LDCs, and Africa – have special priority for funding assistance for adaptation. The BASIC countries also can put more pressure on the North by conditioning their own mitigation action on this financing, a situation that some read as blackmail (Harris 2011).

At the same time, the presence of quickly-developing countries like the BASIC countries in the G-77 may complicate the situation. A counterview argues that the new economic might of countries like China, India, and Brazil has actually made their bargaining position more difficult, as the North now feels threatened (Hurrell and Sengupta 2012, 472–3). Northern countries fear the BASIC countries, especially China and India, as economic competitors. In Timmons Roberts’ view, the intertwining of the climate issue with US fears that it is losing its hegemonic status to China will prevent any easy resolution to questions like a just distribution of carbon space (Roberts 2011).

Current climate finance

Whatever the long-term structural and geopolitical implications of the rise of the BASIC countries, more prosaic conflicts of interest are already apparent between the BASIC countries and the rest of the G-77. The most important source

of funding for climate action to this point is the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), created through the Kyoto Protocol to allow developed countries to meet some of their climate mitigation targets through financing mitigation efforts in developing countries (Lecocq and Ambrosi 2007). Empirically, BASIC absorbed almost all of that source of climate finance. A full 52% of the CDM projects that have received Issued Certified Emissions Reductions since the first projects in 2005 have been based in China, while India hosted another 21.5%, and Brazil nearly 8%. Along with South Africa's 0.5%, the BASIC countries together hosted more than 81% of all CDM projects issued.⁷

Current climate technology transfers

A similar situation has emerged with technology and technology transfer, another key demand of the G-77 in the climate negotiations. Currently, just ten countries do 80% of the world's research and development and hold 95% of the patents (Victor 2011, xxxi). In the area of clean energy technology in particular, Japan, the US, Germany, Korea, the United Kingdom, and France hold 80% of the patents (UNEP, European Patent Office, and ICTSD 2010, 4). Extensions of that technology outside of the major technology powers go disproportionately to the BASIC countries. Despite all the calls for licensing of such technology to developing countries, there is still very little of it in the climate area, although it is not rarer than in other industries. When licensing of clean-energy technology has occurred, China (25%), India (17%), and Brazil (12%) have been the main recipients. Investors reported that they made such licensing agreements with countries that had significant infrastructure and human capital, presented favorable market conditions and investment climates, and protected intellectual property rights (UNEP, European Patent Office, and ICTSD 2010, 7). Developing countries are also making inroads in filing their own patents in a few specific areas, notably India in solar, and Brazil and Mexico in hydro/marine patenting (UNEP, European Patent Office, and ICTSD 2010, 4). Thus it is the BASIC countries and some similar ones that are also the main actors from the developing world in the realm of technology and patents, while many members of the G-77 fall short.

BASIC as providers of climate finance?

The BASIC countries are beginning to play larger roles as donors to other countries, obviously a new departure for countries that were and are still recipients of development assistance themselves (Draher and Nunnenkamp 2011; Kragelund 2011; Woods 2008). While all give increasing amounts of aid, they vary quite a

⁷ Calculated from data at <http://www.iges.or.jp/en/cdm/report_cdm.html>. This includes data up to July 31, 2012.

bit in the details of their assistance – and in whether they provide assistance related to climate change in particular. Here I describe the varying positions of each on development assistance and climate action and briefly examine their collective action.

South Africa is among the most ready of the BASIC countries to make binding commitments to mitigate its climate emissions and has been expressing willingness to move in that direction since the mid-2000s (Vihma, Mulugetta, and Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen 2011, 324). President Zuma made the commitment publicly in Copenhagen, pledging an ambitious target for action that his negotiating team thought would be his final, not first, offer.⁸ On the other hand, South Africa has always conditioned its promises on receiving international financial support (Republic of South Africa 2011), and has not suggested it will provide financing for others. Its usual development assistance has been oriented to its region, but has been truncated in the wake of recent weak economic growth instead of expanding to cover climate (Kragelund 2011, 594).

India is by all measures the poorest of the four, but Jairam Ramesh, its lead negotiator in Copenhagen and Cancún, thought that India could take on many of the costs of its own action. Speaking to a hostile Indian parliament, he told parliamentarians why he had not insisted India receive priority for climate funding: “Green technology is an area where India can be a world leader [...]. A country like India should be able to stand on its own feet and say we will do what we have to do on our own” (Dubash 2012, 245). Indian negotiators at Durban, however, had backed away from such arguments and now strongly stated that their poor country could not be expected to take on the economic development costs of solving the climate change problem. Despite these stances, India does offer development assistance, with a special focus on its neighbors and technical assistance. Other initiatives, especially in Africa, aim to promote trade and investment (Kragelund 2011, 596).

Of the four, China and Brazil are the most interesting transitional cases. In climate negotiations, the Chinese are reluctant to publicly accept a “responsible power” role that they adopt more enthusiastically in other settings (Scott 2010). The Chinese negotiator in Cancún, for example, spent a good part of his speech to the plenary insisting on China’s ongoing poverty, but eventually promised assistance to developing states for their climate efforts.⁹ At minimum, he said, China would not compete with poorer states for climate assistance from the North (Hallding et al. 2011, 29). Actual Chinese development assistance is difficult to sort out, not least because Chinese accounting is quite different from the OECD’s. Funds distributed through the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation since it began

⁸ Media Statement 49, December 6, 2009; Interview with a South African scientist, Durban, December 4, 2011.

⁹ Available at <http://unfccc.int/files/meetings/cop_16/statements/application/pdf/101208_cop16_hls_china.pdf>; see also Hallding 2011, 74.

in 2000 have mostly fallen into categories that the OECD would not count as official development aid. The aid has not been analyzed for its relationship to climate change mitigation or adaptation, but much of it falls in the category of “infrastructure projects including roads, power plants and telecommunications” (Kragelund 2011, 598).

Of the four BASIC countries, Brazil has made the most explicit statements promising climate assistance, during the Copenhagen meetings. Lula came to the high-level segment of the meeting with a Brazilian pledge to take action to mitigate its climate emissions, and said that Brazil would not need the world’s resources to do so. He went beyond this statement in an informal plenary the next day (apparently without pre-approval from the Ministry of External Relations), offering that Brazil would give climate assistance to others if that offer would help to break the diplomatic logjam.¹⁰ While the offer was never formally tabled, Brazilian development assistance does address climate issues. As with the other BASIC countries, it is difficult to put a dollar figure on total Brazilian development assistance, much less climate assistance. A survey done by researchers for the Brazilian government showed total spending of US\$ 362 million in 2009 and a five-year total for 2005–2009 of US\$ 1.6 billion (IPEA and ABC 2010, 21).

Brazilian climate-related assistance is most apparent in the technical cooperation agreements that form a significant part of this assistance.¹¹ In particular, Brazil executed technical cooperation agreements in the area of bioenergy and biofuels in Guinea, Kenya, Liberia, Mozambique, South Africa, Zambia, and eight countries that form the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), while similar agreements were signed with Argentina, Nicaragua, and Suriname. A branch of the Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation (Embrapa) in Panama studies biofuels, and Brazil also has a Memorandum of Understanding with the United States to disseminate biofuels technology. The climate impact of these programs is currently heatedly contested – an issue that cannot be settled in this article. Some scientists and activists have maintained that sugarcane-based biofuels actually contribute to the stocks of greenhouse gases once the full life cycle of the fuel and associated land-use change are considered (Dauvergne and Neville 2009; Fargione, Hill, Tilman, Polasky, and Hawthorne 2008; Scharlemann and Laurance 2008). The Brazilian government argues equally strenuously for the positive contribution of its biofuels for the climate, working with the United States to show the sustainability of its biofuels model for Africa and Latin America (Hochstetler 2012; Ministério de Minas e Energia 2010).

Beyond their individual efforts, there are even more incipient collective initiatives from the same countries in their other formations. India, Brazil, and South Africa as IBSA have created a fund that uses the United Nations

10 These speeches are online at <<http://www.itamaraty.gov.br>>, as press releases in December 2009.

11 Available at <<http://www.abc.gov.br>>.

Development Programme to distribute about US\$ 3 million annually, with equal contributions from each member. These fund small-scale projects in the poorest countries, and have not touched on climate issues (White 2009). In March 2012, the four BASIC countries and Russia decided to form a BRICS development bank and are in active negotiations on the matter. Very basic questions like who will be eligible for loans from this bank are still under discussion. The member countries have used their own national development banks quite differently, so it is likely to take some time for the bank to operate effectively.¹² None of these are currently sources of climate finance, but they are additional indicators of a partial change in orientation towards development assistance by the BASIC members.

Conclusion

The G-77 has been an important negotiating coalition for developing countries for almost 50 years, and has coordinated their positions on climate change for 20 years. To what extent is it still an effective forum for the South and how has it been affected by the emergence of a new BASIC coalition of some of its largest and most dynamic members?

Most observers have seen a relationship of mutual benefit or at least mutual dependency between the members of the G-77 and BASIC (e.g. Hallding et al. 2011; Kasa, Gullberg, and Heggelund 2008; Vihma, Mulugetta, and Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen 2011). In general, the G-77 is seen to benefit from the greater visibility and negotiating weight of its larger and wealthier members, while the BASIC countries avoid isolation and gain legitimacy for their demands when they are couched within the G-77's agenda. After the initial Copenhagen conference when the BASIC countries appeared most distinct as a negotiating coalition, they have taken pains to reinsert themselves in the G-77. They have taken up the G-77's demands for greater procedural equality and transparency and brought weight to the G-77's preference for extensive public climate finance from the North (even if it is slow to materialize).

On the other hand, this article has shown that many members of the G-77 appear to have some concrete disadvantages from asserting similarity with the BASIC countries. Many G-77 members now argue that their future development depends on climate action by the BASIC countries, which Brazil and South Africa are more ready to do than China and India (Hallding et al. 2011; Hochstetler 2012). The G-77 is less and less recognized as a leader in climate negotiations, while the BASIC countries and especially China have gained visibility for themselves. The BASIC countries have taken large shares of existing climate finance in the Clean Development Mechanism and acquired much of the clean energy technology

12. Interview with six members of the International Section of the Brazilian Development Bank – Banco Nacional do Desenvolvimento Econômico e Social (BNDES) –, Rio de Janeiro, May 18, 2012.

that was transferred. Increased recognition of differentiation might serve as an argument for more development assistance from the BASIC countries to the G-77, still mostly at the level of rhetoric. More broadly, some have argued that the emerging power status of China and the other BASIC countries is a hindrance to negotiating concessions from the North.

In the end, the G-77's perspective is unlikely to shape the final outcome. The BASIC countries showed themselves to be seriously divided over climate action at Durban, especially on the question of their own action. Without agreement on that fundamental question, the BASIC coalition seems unlikely to continue to play a central role in climate negotiations.

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Abstract

The G-77 has historically organized the participation of developing countries in multilateral environmental negotiations. This article analyses the impact of a new coalition of emerging powers – Brazil, China, India, and South Africa as BASIC – on the G-77's role in climate governance. While there are important benefits for both sides in their relationship, I argue that the G-77 is also disadvantaged in several concrete ways by the BASIC countries.

Keywords: BASIC; climate change; G-77.

Resumo

O G-77 tem historicamente organizado a participação dos países em desenvolvimento em negociações ambientais multilaterais. Este artigo analisa o impacto de uma nova coalizão de potências emergentes – Brasil, China, Índia e África do Sul, como o BASIC – sobre o papel do G-77 na governança climática. Embora existam importantes benefícios para ambos os lados da relação, eu alego que o G-77 também sofre desvantagem sob várias formas concretas por parte dos países do BASIC.

Palavras-chave: BASIC; mudança climática; G-77.