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Communication

Developing Countries and the Future of the Kyoto Protocol

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Fundamental Dilemmas

Developing countries are home to five out of the six billion people, but historically have contributed only around one-quarter of the greenhouse gases from energy consumption now accumulated in the atmosphere. Energy use and emissions per person in developing countries on average are still only around one-quarter of those in industrialized countries. Resources for economic restructuring are much more limited in developing countries, with average per capita incomes less than one-quarter of those in the industrialized world.[1] Moreover, adverse impacts of climate change are likely to affect developing countries particularly badly.

A compelling ethical case can thus be made that poorer countries should be free to develop economically without greenhouse gas constraints, while rich countries—which after all have built much of their wealth through energy-intensive industrialization—should go ahead and reduce their emissions in the global interest. Poorer countries insist on their 'right to develop', and greenhouse gas constraints (along with other environmental policies) are often seen as obstacles to development. As Adil Najam observed,

> The principal and unchanged interest of the South has remained *development* and a better quality of life for its people; its principal fear, that the North is using environmental issues as an excuse to pull up the development ladder behind it.[2]

But limiting global warming to avoid the worst of the potential negative impacts will require a drastic change in the emissions trajectories in both rich and poor countries, so developing countries will need to take part in the effort. Developing countries already account for around half of annual global greenhouse gas emissions, and future emissions growth will come mainly from current developing countries.

Engaging key developing countries is also vital to help make greenhouse gas control politically acceptable in industrialized countries. There is little prospect of the US taking

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1 Comparing GNP adjusted for purchasing power. The difference is even greater when comparing GNP at exchange rates. Data from World Resources Institute (WRI), *Climate Analysis Indicator Tool* (Washington, 2003).

2 Adil Najam, 'An Environmental Negotiating Strategy for the South', *International Environmental Affairs*, 7 (1995), pp. 249–287.

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Notes

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