

EDITORIAL

COP22 – Marrakech 2016: Is the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol dead?



In late 2011, I wrote an editorial for this journal on the United Nations conference on Climate Change (COP17), which took place in Durban, South Africa titled: *COP17 - Durban: Is this the funeral party for the Kyoto Protocol?*¹ There were arguments and counter arguments between developed and developing countries on how to deal with the problems

of climate change. One of the most critical issues was an extension of the Kyoto protocol to cut down on greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, which have been linked to the unpredictable climate changes in recent times. The Kyoto Protocol is the international agreement of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The major feature of the Kyoto Protocol sets binding targets for 37 industrialized countries and the European community for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. This amounts to an average of five percent against the 1990 levels over the five-year period 2008-2012.² The major distinction between the Protocol and the Convention is that while the Convention encouraged industrialised countries to stabilize GHG emissions, the Protocol committed them to do so.

In November 2012, COP18 took place in Doha, Qatar, and annex A to the Kyoto Protocol was formulated, which replaced the list under the heading "Greenhouse gases" in annex A to the Kyoto Protocol: Greenhouse gases, i.e. carbon dioxide (CO₂); methane (CH₄), nitrous oxide (N₂O), hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), perfluorocarbons (PFCs), sulphur hexafluoride (SF₆) and nitrogen trifluoride (NF₃). The recently concluded COP22 in Marrakech, Morocco concluded that many EU countries, including the UK, Sweden, Denmark and Germany, risk losing their leading role in renewable energy development. Several EU member states have cut back on investments in renewable energy and energy efficiency, questioned the agreed long-term mitigation targets, or failed to set the necessary policy framework to deliver on their short-term goals.³ None of the big GHG emitters is acting in line with the 1.5–2°C reduction, therefore the first three ranks are left empty. France ranks 4th leading the table for the first time, profiting from the exceptional diplomacy enabling the COP21 Paris Agreement. Sweden (5) and the United Kingdom (6) both benefit from promising climate policies established by former governments.³ In Morocco, the developed country parties still reaffirmed their USD \$100 billion mobilization goal to reduction of GHG.

The South African national department of Environmental Affairs has highlighted the climate change impacts on human health in the country. It enumerates the health risks in South Africa that climate change would aggravate over the next few decades, which include: heat stress; vector-borne diseases (such as malaria, dengue fever and yellow fever); extreme weather events; air pollution; communicable diseases (such as HIV/AIDS, TB and cholera), and non-communicable diseases (such as cardio-vascular and respiratory diseases). It concludes that climate change could also have deleterious effects on mental and occupational health, and its adverse impacts would be worsened by food insecurity, hunger and malnutrition.⁴

With the detrimental impact of climate change highlighted for South Africa, it is obvious that we need to be very serious about reducing the impact of climate change on health. Reduction in the carbon footprint should be part of the strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This should translate into concrete steps, such as reduction in air travel by civil servants, business men and politicians, and future COP conferences resorting to video conferencing with less travel from all over the globe, to mention but a few. In 2011, I predicted that, if the Kyoto protocol were not extended at COP17, history would record the conference as the "funeral party" of the Kyoto Protocol. Very little has changed since then with the big GHG emitters. South Africa's 56-page White Paper on "national climate change response"⁵ has strategic priorities that have not translated into tangible action plans to curtail the climate change impact on human health in the country. Time is not on our side as we are experiencing one of the worst droughts in the recent history of the country.

Have a restful and peaceful Christmas holiday, while we all contribute to reducing greenhouse emissions in whatever way that we can. Let us all go green to save the world and the impact on health. See you in 2017 with useful tips for a greener world!

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References

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