

The G8's Climate Change Performance

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Introduction

On 8-10 July 2009, the leaders of the world's most powerful market democracies assembled at the recently selected, earthquake-scarred site of L'Aquila in central Italy for their 35th annual summit of the Group of Eight (G8) (Kirton 2009; Kirton and Koch 2009). At L'Aquila, the G8 leaders confronted unusually large and looming global challenges. Climate change and clean energy were two agenda issues of major importance. In confronting these challenges, the G8 was boosted by its respectable record of compliance with its key commitments from last year's summit, where finance and climate led the list of promises kept (G8 Research Group 2009).

The L'Aquila Summit opened on Wednesday, July 8, at 13:00, when the leaders of the G8 (including the European Union) met alone. At a working lunch, they first dealt with the world economy. They then had a working session on global issues focused on climate and energy. On day two, Thursday, July 9, the leaders of the G8 gathered with those of the G5 and Egypt starting at 10:00 to discuss global issues and development policies, as well as the Heiligendamm Process. They were joined by the heads of the International Energy Agency (IEA), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization (WTO) for a working lunch to discuss "future sources of growth." After lunch the G8 plus G5 plus Egypt were joined by Australia, Indonesia, South Korea and Denmark for the session, co-chaired by Italian host Silvio Berlusconi and U.S. president Barack Obama, of the Major Economies Forum (MEF) on climate change and energy. Berlusconi hosted a large number of guests for dinner, including the 17 MEF members, along with leaders of the Netherlands, Spain, Turkey, Algeria, Angola, Ethiopia, Libya, Nigeria, Senegal, the Commission for the African Union (AU), and the heads of the IEA, the ILO, the IMF, the OECD, the UN, the World Bank, the WTO, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Fund for Agriculture and Development (IFAD) and the World Food Programme (WFP).

Past Performance

Over the last 35 years, G8 climate governance has been marked by a three phase pattern of performance. The G8 first began to govern climate in 1979, when it called for an end to increases of CO₂ concentrations in the atmosphere. This was followed by a period of autonomous and effective performance on climate issues through the early and mid 1980s. The second phase of G8 climate governance, lasting from the late 1980s to the early 2000s was characterized by a high amount of delegation to the UN process of climate change negotiations. The third phase was a return to increasingly autonomous and strong climate governance, marked by the strong deliberations and commitments made on climate change at the 2005 Gleneagles Summit and subsequent ones.

The Climate Challenge

The latest scientific evidence shows that climate change — a problem of potentially existential dimensions for some countries and conceivably even human life on the planet itself — is more ominous and urgent than the most recent report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change predicted. The United Nations 1997 Kyoto protocol has been a clear failure in controlling countries' carbon emissions, and the UN system remains deadlocked as its December Copenhagen conference to devise a successor climate control agreement draws nigh.

Prospects for the G8 2009 Climate Performance

On the eve of the L'Aquila Summit, the G8 clearly and all the MEF more vaguely were on course to accept that they all, as the major carbon-producing and removing powers on the planet, must meaningfully control their carbon in the beyond-Kyoto regime. Led by the G8, they would likely all accept that warming must be limited to no more than 2 degrees Celsius, and that emissions by 2050 should be reduced by 50% globally and 80% in the developed world. As anyone could do the arithmetic, this alone means that the G5 and MEF members would accept that they should contribute by controlling their carbon by the remaining amount. Due to continuing resistance from India, they might not say so directly or with numerical targets or timetables. But they would be promised the financing, technology, trade, investment and flexibility (such as a bottom up, sectoral approach) to make and meet their necessary contribution. They might add something on sinks, starting with forests and even extending to agricultural lands, to mobilize this second half of the climate control arsenal far more than the UN process has.

Other helpful elements could come on medium term targets, short term targets, and energy efficiency (including in buildings and cars). On all the targets and timetables they might not specify a one-size-fits-all single baseline, let alone the arbitrary, obsolete and ecologically irrelevant 1990 one. But this would not erode the value of what they would decide, for what was required is real action right now by all. The language on the contribution of nuclear power could be more forthcoming than at recent summits, now that Berlusconi as G8 host had accepted nuclear power at home for Italy and German chancellor Angela Merkel could see her political future in Germany governing without her current coalition partner, the nuclear-vetoing SPD. This would be enough to provide the fundamental “all in” principle to constitute the foundational normative architecture for a beyond Kyoto deal at Copenhagen that could be appropriate and adequate for controlling the compelling climate challenge that the global community as a whole now confronts.

L'Aquila's Climate Performance

The G8 leaders at the L'Aquila summit largely produced this prospective performance. They made a series of ambitious and strong agreements and commitments on climate change during the first day of negotiations, when they were alone. All G8 nations agreed that all major carbon producers must agree to control their carbon in the “beyond Kyoto” regime. They further agreed to a cap of 2 degrees Celsius additional?? global warming beyond that of the pre-industrial age. Here they importantly said they would follow the

science, and implicitly agreed to act at any time for as much as it takes to stay below the 2 degrees. They also reiterated as a goal at Toyako of a 50% world reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, with an 80% or greater reduction for developed nations. This was a category they left undefined but one which could conceivably include all existing and future members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which now included Mexico and south Korea. Anyone could do the arithmetic to see how much they needed and expected developing countries to do. They called for more specific targets in the form of national and medium term goals. They urged the Major Economies Forum (MEF) countries to adopt quantifiable goals for emissions reductions by a specified year. They stressed that poverty eradication and climate change mitigation are linked and agreed on the importance of a green growth plans for developing countries. They strongly supported the creation of a post Kyoto climate regime at COP15 in Copenhagen in December 2009. They endorsed the negotiations including land degradation and sinks in the form of forest destruction and degradation.

The leaders also linked climate and the economy in their green recovery plan. They agreed to work towards a greener economy and agreed that the global recession should not affect climate change mitigation efforts. They called for continued work on lowering tariffs on goods related to climate change mitigation through the World Trade Organization (WTO). They stressed the importance of the free-market for mitigating climate change globally, and agreed that efforts such as carbon cap and trade systems and taxation were the appropriate policies for mitigation.

There was also extensive discussion on technology issues related to climate change. The leaders called for accelerated investment in green technology and better diffusion, deployment, and cooperation with developing states. They reiterated their Toyako initiative to launch 20 Carbon Capture and Storage projects by 2010 with increased investment and collaboration with developing nations, the International Energy agency (IEA) and the Carbon Sequestration Leadership Forum (CSFL). They agreed that nuclear energy was an important part of the green energy mix.

This year's climate negotiations have also focused on adaptation measures. The leaders agreed that even with current and increased mitigation measures, the world will nonetheless experience seriously adverse effects of climate change. The leaders agreed to discuss adaptation at Copenhagen. Beyond this, they additionally promised to provide funding for adaptation—but no specific amount—and work closely with developing countries to create national adaptation plans.

The MEF on Energy and Climate reiterated in their meeting on the second day of the summit many of the agreements made at the G8 negotiations. China, the world's top greenhouse gas emitter, was absent at the negotiating table, which may have had a negative effect on the outcome of the talks. The MEF agreed to a cap of two degrees Celsius and pledged to take steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions meaningfully from business as usual in the midterm. They did not set any quantifiable targets or timelines for emissions reductions either globally or amongst themselves. They agreed to negotiate more concrete targets and timetables at the upcoming Conference of the Parties (COP) 15 in Copenhagen. However, they were promised assistance in the form of freer trade, financial support, and technology deployment and development and capacity building from the G8 nations in the negotiations the day before.

They also reiterated the importance of adaptation, with a focus on helping the world's poorest, who will be most affected by climate change. The MEF also launched a Global Partnership for low-carbon, climate friendly technology. They stressed the need for transparency and predictability of investment in green technology. They agreed, as a soft medium term target and timetable, to work to double public sector investment in low-carbon technology by 2015, and, in the very short term, establish national technology roadmaps and action plans by November 15, 2009.

Conclusion

The climate negotiations of the G8 countries lived up to many prospective achievements that were probable and identified as such by perspective observers before the summit's start. Firstly, the G8 leaders decided on a cap of 2 degrees Celsius, and agreed to a global reduction of greenhouse gas emissions of 50 % by 2050 with a reduction target of 80% for developing nations. However, short and medium term and country specific goals were as expected, largely unspecified. No single baseline year was set for reduction targets. No time was set for when greenhouse gas emissions should peak and subsequently start to decline.

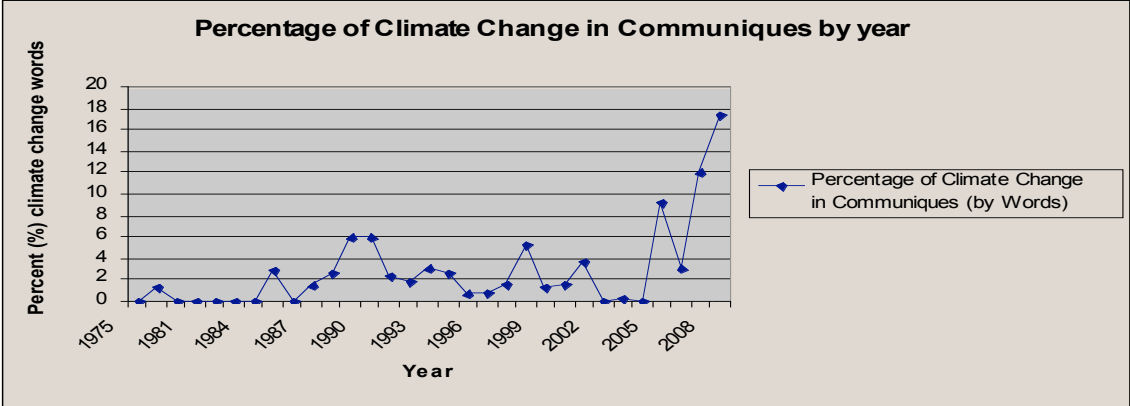
The negotiations lived up to expectations in terms of the scope of climate discussions and decisions. The talks covered forests and land degradation, energy efficiency for building and cars, and a marginally stronger if still seriously inadequate statement on the advantage of nuclear power as part of the energy mix. The enhanced emphasis on carbon capture and sequestration was seriously overblown.

The MEF negotiations partly lived up to expectations. Developing nations for the first time agreed that they would reduce their emissions as part as part of a new global climate control regime, but they failed to join the G8 nations in pledging concrete emissions reductions. They unanimously agreed on the cap of climate change at two degrees Celsius.

References

- G8 Research Group (2009). '2008 Hokkaido-Toyako G8 Summit Final Compliance Report.' <www.g8.utoronto.ca/evaluations/2008compliance-final/index.html> (July 2009).
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- Kirton, John J. and Madeline Koch, eds. (2009). *The G8 2009: From La Maddalena to L'Aquila*. (London: Newsdesk Publications).

Appendix A: G8 Climate Change Deliberation, 1975-2008



Appendix B: Summary of Climate Change References in G8 Summit Communiqués

Year	Total CC Words	% of Overall Words	Total CC Paragraphs	% of Overall Paragraphs	Total Documents with CC	% of Overall Documents	Total Dedicated CC Documents	% of Overall Sections
1975	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1976	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1977	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1978	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1979	28	1.3	1	2.6	1	50	0	0
1980	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1981	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1982	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1983	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1984	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1985	88	2.9	1	1.9	1	50	0	0
1986	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1987	85	1.5	1	1.1	1	14.3	0	0
1988	140	2.7	1	1.2	1	33.3	0	0
1989	422	6	7	5	1	9.1	0	0
1990	491	5.9	5	3.6	1	33.3	0	0
1991	236	2.4	5	2.8	1	20	0	0
1992	137	1.8	4	2.5	1	25	0	0
1993	154	3.1	1	1.2	1	33.3	0	0
1994	107	2.6	2	2.1	1	50	0	0
1995	87	0.7	3	1.1	1	25	0	0
1996	167	0.8	3	1.4	1	14.3	0	0
1997	305	1.6	5	1.7	1	16.7	0	0
1998	323	5.3	4	4.1	1	25	0	0
1999	198	1.3	1	0.3	1	25	0	0
2000	213	1.6	2	0.5	1	20	0	0
2001	232	3.7	3	2.1	1	10	0	0
2002	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2003	62	0.3	3	2.3	1	5.9	0	0
2004	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2005	2667	9.3	68	9.9	3	8.1	2	5.4
2006	1533	3.1	26	2.6	3	12	0	0
2007	4154	12.0	47	9.0	5	41.7	0	0
2008	2568	17.5	21	14.2	3	60	0	0
Average	423.4	2.57	6.29	2.15	0.94	17.11	0.06	0.16

Notes: The chart accounts for all official documents. Only documents with an English version were included in the calculations.

“Total CC Words” refers to the number climate change subjects within the official documents for the year specified. The words are calculated by paragraph because the paragraph is the unit of analysis. This number excludes document titles but includes subtitles.

“% of Overall Words” refers to “Total CC Words” as a percentage of the total number of words contained in all official documents for the year specified.

“Total CC Paragraphs” refers to the number of paragraphs climate change subjects are mentioned within the official documents for the year specified. Each point expressed in the documents is recorded as a separate paragraph.

“% of Overall Paragraphs” refers to “Total CC Paragraphs” as a percentage of the total number of paragraphs within the official documents for the year specified.

“Total Documents with CC” refers to the number of documents that contain climate change subjects but the document itself is not dedicated to climate change.

“% of Overall Documents” refers to the “Total Documents with CC” as a percentage of the total number of official documents contained in the year specified.

“Total Dedicated CC Documents” refers to the number of documents that contain a climate change subject in its title.

“% of Overall Sections” refers to “Total Dedicated CC Documents” as a percentage of the total number of sections within the official documents for the year specified.