

**CLIMATE CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT:  
REFLECTION ON TECHNICALITY AND THE NORTH-SOUTH DIVIDE  
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**Abstract:** The paper discusses two main features of Climate Change: its technicality and the centrality of the development issue. Framed within the general approach of political ecology, which analyses the relationship between environmental issues and political, economic and social factors, it argues that a managerial discourse has become hegemonic in the Climate Change domain. To explain this dominance, it is necessary to turn to the macro-discourse of development (a highly technical one itself) and to draw parallels between the development and the environment fields, both of them having been linked through the sustainable development discourse. International climate politics has indeed to be understood in the context of the global debate on development and of North-South relations. The paper also highlights an emerging paradox between the presumptions on which the aid regime is based on the one hand, and the industrialised countries' stances regarding developing countries' emission reduction efforts on the other hand. The North-South divide and the question of development were not as visible during the Cancun conference, but they will remain a determining factor of the future climate negotiations.

**Keywords:** Climate Change, Development, North-South Divide, Environmental Politics

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In December 2009, 40,000 people gathered in Copenhagen for the United Nations Conference on Climate Change. The Conference ended up in a Summit, with the presence of over 110 Heads of State or government. This unprecedented number of people and world leaders (which exceeded previous conferences, including the Rio Earth Summit and the Bali Conference) reflects the importance of the challenges to be met and the high expectations people had. The 15th Conference of the Parties (COP15) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which also served as the meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol, was supposed to decide on a new deal to be implemented after the first commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol expires in 2012. Expected as an achievement, the outcome of the Conference was finally described as a “new start” and engendered frustration and discontents. Reasons for the failure have been attributed to multilateralism and the consensus rule, as well as to the reluctance of major actors to cooperate, in particular the United States and China, and the conflicting interests and positions between industrialised and developing countries (Christoff, 2010;

Dimitrov, 2010). The North-South divide has been at the very heart of the negotiations. The organisation of the conference itself reflected the conflicting views of industrialised and developing countries, with parallel discussions on two lines of negotiations. One consisted in maintaining and amending the Kyoto Protocol, which does not require emission reduction by developing countries (supported by the latter). The other one consisted in negotiating a new deal (supported by industrialised countries). The two options were discussed at the same time, which made the discussions a bit chaotic and further highlighted the scission between these two groups of countries. At the opposite, COP16, organised in Cancun in 2010, has been described as a success. It managed to restore trust and resulted in the adoption of the Cancun agreements. The Conference made progress on the reduction of emissions from deforestation and forest degradation and on carbon stock (REDD+), on the monitoring, reporting and verification of emission reduction (MRV), and on the financing mechanism to support developing countries affected by Climate Change (Green Climate Fund). These achievements can be explained by several elements. Firstly, expectations were so low after COP15 that any outcome would have been seen as positive. Secondly, countries did not have any other choice but agreeing on something if they did not want to lose face, and another failure would have proclaimed for good the end of multilateralism in climate negotiations. Thirdly, the process was transparent and inclusive (while the Danish presidency was highly criticized for its lack of transparency and neutrality during COP15). Fourthly, COP16 focused on technical issues and avoided political and contentious discussions. That said, development and North-South relations are still at the core of Climate Change politics. This paper discusses two main features of Climate Change: its technicality and the centrality of the development issue. These two characteristics are closely linked and also constitute key elements of sustainable development and international environmental politics. It argues that a managerial discourse has become hegemonic in the Climate Change domain. To explain this dominance, it is necessary to turn to the macro-discourse of development (a highly technical one itself) and to draw parallels between the development and the environment fields, both of them having been linked through the sustainable development discourse. International climate politics has indeed to be understood in the context of the global debate on development and of North-South relations. After discussing the technicality in both the 'development and environment' and the Climate Change discourses, the relationship between Climate Change and development is explored as well as its impact on climate policy.

## **2. APPROACH**

This paper links the dominant Climate Change discourse to development to provide a new light on its understanding. While most studies discuss the representation of Climate Change in the media (Carvalho, 2007; Boykoff, 2008) or the role played by fear (Risbey, 2008; Hulme, 2008), the analysis contributes to the debate on the ideas behind global environmental discourses, following Crist (2007), Bäckstrand and Lövbrand (2006) and Adger et al. (2001). The aim of the paper is to explore the North-South divide, and the very question of development. It discusses two features of Climate Change politics: First, its technicality, which results from the

development discourse which is a highly technical one itself, and from the fact that development and environment have always been linked; second, development, which is at the core of Climate Change and Climate Change politics.

The analysis is framed within the general approach of political ecology. Political ecology analyses the relationship between environmental issues and political, economic and social factors. For Robbins, political ecology has a “normative understanding that there are very likely better, less coercive, less exploitative, and more sustainable ways of doing things” (2004, 12). It considers other ways of representing social facts, implying that other practices are possible, and aims at unravelling the complexity surrounding environmental issues. It is also interested in power relations and their impacts on the way the environment is treated: “Politics is inevitably ecological and [...] ecology is inherently political” (Robbins, 2004: xvi-xvii). Political ecology precisely seeks to “understand the political dynamics surrounding material and discursive struggles over the environment” (Bryant, 1998: 89). It tries to articulate the natural as constitutive of the social, and the social as constitutive of the natural (Goldman and Schurman, 2000: 568).

The section on the technicality of development and the environment is based on the observation of the development practice and climate policy and of the historical evolution of the concept of development. The discussion on the North-South divide focuses on the Copenhagen and Cancun conferences, and on the statements pronounced during COP16’s High Level Segment in particular. A strong emphasis is put on the World Bank throughout the paper because of the role it plays in both development and climate politics (largest multilateral development actor and trustee of the Green Climate Fund).

### **3. DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT AND TECHNICALITY**

#### **3.1 Development and the Environment: Two Faces of the Same Coin**

Discourses are ways of representing areas of knowledge and social practice (Fairclough, 1992: 3). Social phenomena result from particular representations of what reality is or should be. The way reality and facts are interpreted and represented, and the acceptance of such representations by the whole society, are then crucial in terms of the resulting social practices and social change. According to Laclau and Mouffe (1985), there is a confrontation between discourses to gain the hegemony in the capacity of establishing the meanings of things. Adger et al. (2001) identifies two major discourses in the Climate Change domain, namely a managerial one (which is dominant and reflects on the international politics) and a profligacy one (represented by NGOs such as the Climate Action Network), which advocates preventive actions and a new economic order instead of technical solutions. Bäckstrand and Lövbrand (2006) show that the ecological modernization discourse is prominent in climate governance, as illustrated by the carbon market developed through the UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol. Clapp and Dauvergne (2005) distinguish between four worldviews on global environmental change: market liberals, institutionalists, bioenvironmentalists, and social greens. The two first ones are the most influential ones, while the two last ones are critical of globalisation,

overconsumption and large-scale industrial life that they foresee as the cause of global environment problems. For Crist (2007: 33-34), framing Climate Change as “the most urgent problem we face” would encourage the idea that the required approaches are those which directly address the problem, implying the adoption of technical solutions only. She denounces the narrow character of the solutions advocated so far (such as reviving nuclear power, improving wind turbines, increasing the efficiency of fossil-fuel use or capturing carbon dioxide), which would leave the root causes of the environmental crisis unaddressed.

The prominence of the technical interpretation of global environmental problems comes from the technicality of the development discourse. Development has always been defined and considered in technical terms, at least in its dominant acceptance. Despite an ongoing evolution of the consensus on development, its economic dimension has always been prominent and it has always been assessed in numerical terms and has echoed the idea that more is always better than less, associating accumulation, opulence and profit with both an objective and a norm. A social construction in itself, it has influenced the way environmental discourses have been shaped, as shown below.

At the end of the 1940s, the world has been divided between developed and under-developed countries. The origin of the distinction between these two categories and the official and public apparition of the concept of “underdevelopment” is indeed attributed to President Truman’s inaugural address in 1949, in which he mentions the need to assist underdeveloped areas: “Underdevelopment began, then, on January 20, 1949. On that day, two billion people became underdeveloped. [...] They ceased being what they were [...] and were transmogrified into an inverted mirror of others’ reality” (Esteva, 1992, p. 7). According to Escobar, when in 1948 the World Bank rated countries as poor if their per capita income was below 100\$, then two thirds of the world population became poor: “that the essential trait of the Third World was its poverty and that the solution was economic growth and development became self-evident, necessary, and universal truths” (Escobar, 1995, p. 24).

Technicality is then understood as a reality being reduced to simplified problems and terms, discarding any other (social, cultural) information that may call into question the definition of the problem and the solution offered. The reality is translated into a specific jargon and technical terms, as Catherine Caufield summarises in reference to the World Bank: “by translating complex and messy real-life problems into numerical terms that could be broken down and analyzed, the Bank’s Washington experts could formulate solutions to problems in countries they hardly knew” (1998, p. 61). For example, the World Bank’s approval documents outline development projects and justify the purpose of the intervention. They therefore present the region in which the projects take place. Virtually all these documents include an appendix setting out economic indicators (poverty, life expectancy, GDP, exports, share of private consumption, etc.). This technical data helps classify the country in relation to other countries in the same region and to other countries in “its” category, of which the indicators are also presented. The emphasis on numerical data and the technical definition of problems and solutions is consistent with a lack of consideration for such nevertheless essential elements as social and political factors, which play an important role in a development process.

The development concept has obviously evolved so as to improve and to include all the components expected to lead to a better and satisfactory lifestyle worldwide, leading to the adoption of the comprehensive concept of sustainable development. However, development has broadly remained the same, and prefixes (human, participatory, sustainable, etc.) have been added to integrate new “fashionable” ideas, without engendering a profound paradigm shift (Germond-Duret, 2009 and 2011). Professor Ravi Kanbur, from Cornell University, was appointed by the World Bank to write its 2000-2001 World Development Report. He resigned from this position after censorships attempts of sections on globalisation, which paved the way to a reflection on free-trade and political empowerment (APIC, 2000). Through his re-conceptualisation of poverty, Kanbur was introducing sociological considerations into the economy. This example shows the predominance of the economy in the development concept, despite a change in micro-discourses and the inclusion of new elements.

The elaboration of the concept of human development, and of the human development index (HDI), is based on the pluri-dimension of poverty and represents in a sense a progress. However, the HDI remains a quantitative measure, with development thresholds, which allows categorizing who is poor and who is not, and a technical one, which does not fully reflect a given situation and people’s feeling, while giving the impression it does. Furthermore, the HDI does not allow to take a fresh look at countries, as GDP per capita generally coincides with the HDI, GDP falling itself in the composition of the HDI, both directly (the GDP index accounting for one third of the HDI) and indirectly (relation between instruction and income, and relation between income and health spending).

Today, development objectives have been split in a set of eight overarching goals, the Millennium Development Goals, which notably include poverty, hunger, gender, health and environment protection. Rist (2008) highlights the contradictions between these objectives and the means employed to achieve them. He notes that the 2007 Report on the Millennium Development Goals indicates that the number of people living on less than one dollar a day has fallen significantly as a result of economic growth. But at the same time, inequalities have extended and the consumption share of the poorest 20 per cent has decreased. He denounces the division of “development” into distinct goals and the absence of thinking on their systematic linkage. For instance, the diminution in the number of poor people has been at the price of increased pollution and growing inequalities (Rist, 2008, p. 234).

While one cannot deny a hegemonic macro-discourse of (economic) development, the micro-discourse of sustainable development has gained a hegemonic position itself: it is persistent, it is recognized and used by a variety of actors (local authorities, governments, international institutions, industries, academic institutions), it has been widely institutionalized and has social impacts not only in terms of policy formulation but also of the attention one has now to pay to the environment, in rhetoric at least. Its actual and systematic implementation is still to be proven, though, and the fact that so many different actors use this concept can be considered as suspect. For Fairman and Ross (1996), the sustainable development rhetoric does not reflect a real shift in beliefs and values, but is a symbolic answer to the lobbying by Northern environmental NGOs. In fact, the reflection on sustainable development came from the economy. The history of sustainable development is

indeed more than the history of environmentalism. It has to do with the relationship between economic development and the environment.

The release of the Meadows report in 1972 is often considered as the first major step towards the idea of sustainable development (Meadows et al., 1972). In addressing the question of population and natural resources, the report tackled the relationship between economy and the environment. One of its main ideas was that the industrial society was going to exceed most of the ecological limits within a matter of decades if it continued to promote the kind of economic growth witnessed in the 1960s and 1970s. It called for a rethinking of the content of economic growth. The same year, on the initiative of Sweden, the UN General Assembly decided to convene the first major UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm. The Stockholm Conference witnessed a split between the industrialized and the developing world due to two conflicting ideas: Firstly, that the exploitation of natural resources by the North degraded the environment and contributed to the unequal distribution of wealth; and secondly, that environmental degradation resulted from a lack of development, that is to say from poverty. So economic development was at the heart of the reflection (i.e. development or underdevelopment as being at the origin of the “problem”). In 1980, the “World Conservation Strategy” (commissioned by the United Nations Environment Programme and released by the World Conservation Union, see IUCN/UNEP/WWF, 1980) talked about the problems posed by economic development rather than discussing the relationship between environment and development. But it gave little attention to the political, social or cultural dimensions of resource use and was criticized for describing a very Malthusian future, since it saw the root of environmental degradation in the increase of the population. As to the relation between economy and the environment, the Brundtland report, which defined sustainable development for the first time, considered economic growth as a central element to environmental management, and that deteriorated environments were unfavourable to development (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). It also recognised that different patterns of consumption have a different impact on natural resources. So development and economic growth have always been at the centre of the reflection on sustainable development. While, in its public acceptance and in people’s mind, this concept is strongly associated with the environment, in practice environmental considerations are generally not as a priority as economic growth. Hopwood et al. (2005) have classified the views of different actors on sustainable development according to their consideration for socio-economic well being and equality on the one hand, and environmental issues on the other hand, as well as what they see as the necessary changes in society’s political and economic structures (status quo, reform, transformation). While a simplification, their classification shows that the view shared by the most important and influential international actors (World Bank, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, World Business Council for Sustainable Development, European Union) are in favour of a status quo and that their conception of sustainable development does not lie on strong environmental and social concerns. Besides, Young (2002) considers that the consecration of this concept has not led to a major change in thinking: “World Bank’s economic analysts and educators have continued to treat labour, capital and natural resources largely as mere variables on a graph, or

externalities to equilibrium models of idealised economic development – structurally neglecting the evolving complex reality” (p. 31).

So the development discourse is technical, builds up the idea that we can manage the social and the environmental, and has strongly permeated into sustainable development. In view of the preceding discussion, it is considered that a managerial discourse possesses the following characteristics:

- Identification of technical and anti-political problems;
- Identification of technical and anti-political solutions;
- Reliance on (economic, natural) science;
- Lack of consideration for social aspects;
- Implementation through technical and anti-political institutions.

The next section shows that environmental problems and Climate Change follow this same trend and that a managerial discourse has gained hegemony.

### **3.2 Climate Change as a Hegemonic Managerial Discourse**

Climate Change is the first ever challenge to the “western” way of life, and to consumption and production patterns based on an extensive and immoderate use of non renewable resources, notably fossil fuels. When the IPCC released its first report in 1990, pointing out that there was a real risk that human activities could affect the environment to a potentially very serious extent, it somehow attested that “Modernity” was the cause of major natural disturbances. It represents a challenge because mitigating its effects or limiting this phenomenon requires a move away from a fossil fuel based economy. This challenge could represent an opportunity to rethink production and consumption patterns. Instead, the problem has always been dealt in a technical way (as exemplified by the Kyoto Protocol economic tools such as Emission Trading Scheme and Clean Development Mechanisms), letting apart the fact that people may continue to have a destructive behaviour even if GHGs emissions were reduced, as advanced by Crist (2007).

Until recently, the mitigation proponents opposed the adaptation ones, with the first ones refusing to consider the second option, fearing it would lead to a business-as-usual approach. The dominant discourse now is to favour both approaches. For example, the Climate Action Network (CAN), which groups 450 NGOs worldwide and is proactive in the fight against Climate Change, clearly recognizes the two options and makes recommendations as to both mitigation and adaptation (Climate Action Network, 2009b).

Development and environmental issues have always been thought as problems that can be resolved “through globally coordinated actions” (Adger et al. 2001, p.682). In addition, they have merely been seen not as social phenomenon, but as highly technical ones. In the same way as development, the environment has always been considered as something we can “manage”, which led to the creation of managerial institutions, such as the Global Environmental Fund (GEF), implemented under the auspices of the World Bank, which works in a “technical and businesslike” way (Young 2002). According to Young, political complexities are set apart and decisions taken within the GEF are highly bureaucratic: “politically loaded

issues are easier when treated as technical matters and solved from above without too many conflicting values and perspectives engaging in the discussion on equal terms” (p. 12). The GEF would in fact reinforce the “managerial attitude towards nature” (Escobar, 1996, p. 53). Young mentions “anti-politics technocrats” and a “depoliticised leadership”, which consists in “avoiding challenges to tasks presented as technical” (2002, p. 182). This means that the politics inherent to any ecological decisions is completely wiped off.

A good indicator of a reinforced managerial discourse is the involvement of actors, which themselves have a strong technical bias. The World Bank is in that respect an interesting actor to observe. It is the biggest multilateral donor. It plays an important role within the GEF, and was invited to be the trustee for the Green Climate Fund established in the Cancun agreements. Its consideration of Climate Change as a priority is recent, though. In a 1999 speech by James Wolfensohn (former World Bank President), Climate Change is mentioned as one issue among others, which can be dealt through the GEF:

“We need to implement international agreements on climate change, desertification, and biological diversity, just like we did with ozone depletion. We must move to action on these global conventions. We must ensure that the Global Environment Facility is fully funded to do its work” (Wolfensohn, 1999).

Five years later, it has become an “urgent priority”, which calls for new and clean technologies, with renewable energy being a main concern (Wolfensohn, 2004). But for the World Bank, climate is considered as “an economic issue” (Zoellick, 2008), carbon trading and new market mechanisms are among the advocated solutions, and the relationship between climate and growth is clearly stated:

“[The] intelligent management of resources and the environment contributes to growth” (Wolfowitz, 2005).

“Meet[ing] the challenge of climate change without slowing the growth [...] will help to overcome poverty” (Zoellick, 2007).

The 2010 World Development Report is itself devoted to Climate Change, which is presented as a threat to development. The solutions envisaged include natural resources management, energy provision, urbanization, social safety nets, international finance transfers, technological innovation, and governance (World Bank, 2009). The World Bank’s practice somehow contradicts its stated concerns for Climate Change, as exemplified by the financing of a coal-powered power plant in India that will “emit more carbon dioxide annually than the nation of Tunisia” (Bulkeley and Newell, 2010: 52).

As to the Climate Action Network, classified within the profligacy discourse by Adger et al., it seems that it shifted from a social-oriented approach to a managerial one. Indeed, the solutions it favours are now very technological, and no references to a change in the way of life or in the economic order are made. It said in preparation to COP15 that “a set of global technology objectives” should be agreed upon, mentioned “climate risk insurance mechanisms”, and advocated for a



“worldwide revolution in research, development and rapid diffusion of environmentally-sustainable technologies (EST), particularly renewable energy and energy efficiency” (Climate Action Network, 2009b). Given that it represents almost 500 international NGOs and that it is the focal point of the Environmental NGOs (ENGOs) within the UNFCCC, it plays an important role, benefits from a high visibility, and observing its positions is thus both relevant and instructive. Perhaps this shift is a strategic one: the CAN knows that if it wants to have an impact on negotiators, it has to be a “credible” interlocutor and to talk the same “language” and, consequently, make proposals that can be accepted. If this is the case, it is a supplementary indication of the supremacy of the managerial approach, because it would mean it can definitely not be challenged anymore.

Developing countries themselves now concentrate all their efforts on the request for finance and technology, and do not advocate any more profound changes, with the exception of some anti-capitalist and Latin American countries, as exemplified by the organisation by Bolivia of the alternative Cochabamba World People’s Conference on Climate Change in 2010.

To this respect, the role played by science is crucial, and in the climate domain, social sciences are largely underrepresented. As economics is the dominant discipline in the development field (despite many anthropological studies, economics remain the development science and development projects are for most based on economic studies), natural sciences dominate the research on Climate Change, and, within social sciences, economy is also the prevailing one. It is obvious and not surprising, given the need to understand the global climate system and the impacts to be faced, but the understanding of the social, political and economic structures that lead to overuse, over-extraction and overconsumption, as well as the social impacts of Climate Change, are not as explored as they should be. Bjurström and Polk (2011), analysing the IPCC third assessment report, conclude:

“The research community consequently imposes a physical and economic bias that the IPCC reproduces in the policy sphere. [...] This physical and economic bias distorts a comprehensive understanding of climate change. The weak integration of scientific fields hinders climate change from being fully addressed as an integral environmental and social problem”.

So the managerial discourse has gained a dominant position in the environmental and climate domains. Problems and solutions are defined in a technical manner, social aspects are let apart, identification of problems and solutions relies on science (study of natural and physical phenomena), and institutions involved are anti-political. In fact, the way development itself is conceived (as a norm to be achieved following pre-determined steps, as advanced by Rostow, 1960) is influential of the whole way the functioning of the society is conceived, including its relation with the natural environment.

#### **4. CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE NORTH-SOUTH DIVIDE**

According to some authors, the North-South divide would be obsolete (see for example Nigel, 1986; and more recently Robinson and Harris, 2000). Bradley and

Roberts (2008) showed, however, that the climate domain is characterized by several inequalities:

- Inequality in responsibility;
- Inequality in vulnerability;
- Inequality in the emission reduction efforts;
- Inequality in the international environmental regimes;
- Inequality in the international economic regimes.

For several authors (Ikeme, 2003; Macaspac Penetrante, 2010; Müller, 2002), the North-South divide would have reinforced in the climatic domain because of the questions of fairness and equity. The major issues have indeed to do with who has to bear the cost of mitigation and adaptation measures, which is related to the very responsibility of countries (responsibility for past emissions and responsibility for current and future emissions). These questions are eminently linked to economic and development considerations. Macaspac Penetrante (2010) rightly advances that the Copenhagen Conference somehow gave the impression that it was more about Africa's development than Climate Change. Developing countries claimed that they want to grow economically and to reduce poverty, and that they do not want their ability to do so to be challenged because of the reduction of GHGs and of the costs it would engender. Industrialised countries said they do not want to bear the costs alone and expected more efforts from emitter countries, and notably from China.

China was the main target during COP15. It has now overtaken the United States as the world's largest producer of CO<sub>2</sub>; so emission reduction efforts are expected from it. It announced before the Conference that it would cut its emissions of CO<sub>2</sub> per unit of GDP by 40 to 45 percent by 2020 from 2005 levels ("carbon intensity"), which, in other words, means that it has decided to slow down emission growth. China argues that it is not responsible for past emissions, that it is not a big GHGs emitter on a per capita basis and that its developing country status should be taken into consideration. A crucial issue indeed concerns China's status as a developed or developing country: considered as a big economic power by the US, China advances that a large part of its population is still very poor. China is both a recipient and a provider of official development assistance, which testifies the ambiguity of its situation.

In fact, as to the relationship between the North and the South, it looked like a double contradictory discourse had emerged after COP15: On the one hand, since the beginning of the aid regime, countries have been classified according to their level of development and efforts have been made to help them "develop" and evolve from one level to another, generally through economic growth, considered as the way towards poverty reduction. On the other hand, developing countries have been criticized by industrialised countries for their lack of cooperation in the global emission reduction objective, precisely because of their very focus on economic development. So, one witnessed a double contradictory discourse of: 1) "Normalisation" of countries according to the same development levels (Germond-Duret, 2010); and 2) Denunciation of developing countries, which want to focus on development first and are for this reason reluctant to contribute to the global effort. The merging of these two discourses inevitably leads to antagonisms, not only in

discourses but in practice as well. Differences of treatment between what is required from developing countries and what is done by industrialised countries also lead to tensions. For instance, nine Executive Directors wrote to the World Bank President Robert Zoellick in January 2010 protesting against the US declaring they would not support coal fired power generation projects in developing countries (while maintaining their own reliance on coal power). After decades having told developing countries they should follow the North's model to enjoy the same development level, the South has been now criticised for following this advice a bit too well.

The Cancun Conference, however, gave the impression that the North-South divide was put aside. The "bad guys" were this time Japan and Russia, who rejected a second commitment period, and praised for an agreement that would include the US and China. And Parties managed to agree on the outcome of the conference, with the exception of Bolivia.

Statements of Heads of States and Governments pronounced during the High Level Segments of the Cancun conference have been analyzed. The objective was to point out references to the following ideas on Climate Change and development:

1. Development (of the North) as responsible for Climate Change;
2. Poverty as responsible for Climate Change;
3. Climate Change as a threat to Development;
4. Development as the remedy to Climate Change;
5. Development (of the South) as impeding emission reduction efforts;
6. Fighting Climate Change as a way to promote Development;
7. Fighting Climate Change as an obstacle to Development.

140 statements were analysed, that is to say all the statements made available on the UNFCCC website minus the ones delivered in Arabic (for linguistic reasons). The idea was not to know how often development was mentioned but, when it was the case, how the relationship between Climate Change and development was envisaged. Therefore, the percentages presented in Figure 1 do not represent the number of statements that mention these ideas, but, among the statements mentioning development and Climate Change, the ones that mention the proposed ideas. Among the 140 statements analysed, a relationship between Climate Change and development was mentioned 85 times.

The analysis shows that development remains a developing countries' concern. Indeed, the idea that Climate Change represents a threat to development was only mentioned by developing countries, with the exception of Australia and Switzerland. Australia mentioned that it understands the effects of Climate Change on water, weather and food production and that it will be affected too. Switzerland mentioned the economic cost associated with inaction, and the consequences in terms of water and food supplies as well as poverty in the South.

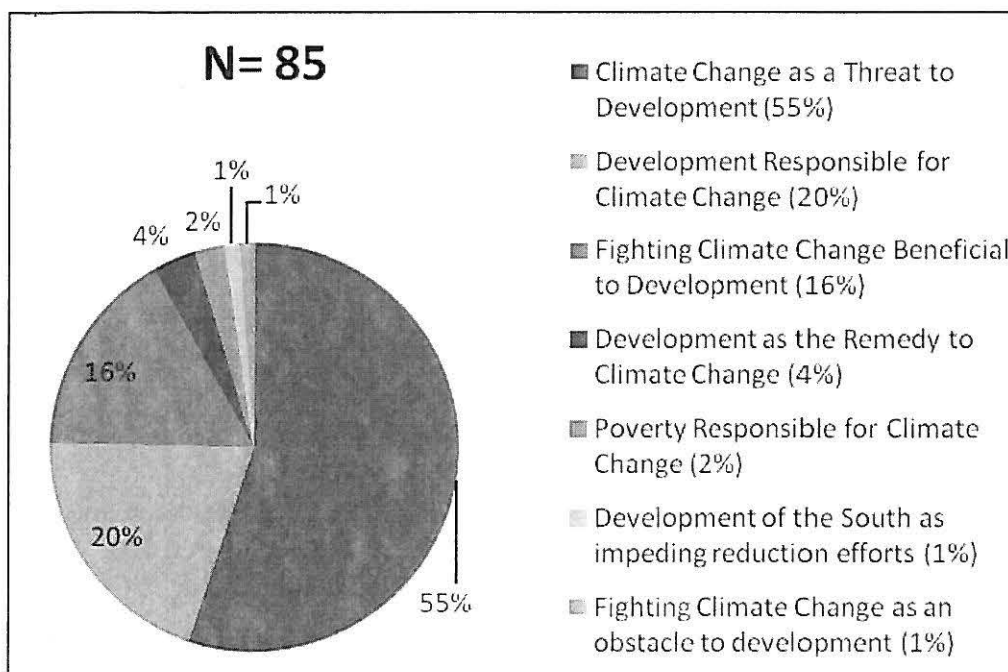


Figure 1. Statements mentioning Climate Change and Development in COP16's High Level Segment

As to the development (of industrialised countries) as the cause of Climate Change, this idea was also mainly mentioned by developing countries, including China, as well as Cyprus (“developed countries have overexploited natural resources and therefore have the obligation to heavily invest in the mitigation and the reversal of the destruction of the natural environment”), Greece (“we have expanded production and consumption activities to the limits of the global ecosystem. We have created an environmental “bubble”) and Sweden (“the rich world has laid claim to by far the greatest portion of the earth’s natural resources and in effect has bought itself an economic standard at the cost of environmental destruction”). Fighting Climate Change is seen as an opportunity to promote development, or at least as not being in contradiction with a development process, by a range of different countries (Angola, Australia, Botswana, Brazil, Cape Verde, Chile, Colombia, Croatia, Cuba, Georgia, Germany, Guyana, Nepal, and Suriname).

The Cancun conference was not as tense as the Copenhagen one, and developed and developing countries put their main divergences aside. A comparison of the statements pronounced by Andreas Carlgren, the Swedish Minister of the Environment, during the two conferences is quite revealing:

COP15, Copenhagen, 2009: “At the [Stockholm] conference, India’s Prime Minister Indira Gandhi raised the question: ‘Are not poverty and need the greatest polluters?’ Mrs Gandhi confronted the world with the fact that poverty is both major cause and consequences of environmental degradation”.

COP16, Cancun, 2010: “The poorest people, who are the least to blame for the problems, are affected first and worst”.

So poverty was depicted as a cause of pollution in 2009, but the rhetoric had changed one year later with poverty being this time not considered as responsible for environmental degradations.

## 5. DISCUSSION

Development, and the North-South divide, has always been at the heart of international environmental concerns. The development discourse is technical and dominant and dictates the relationship between development and the environment. Climate Change is then dominated by a managerial discourse. A paradox is, however, emerging between the presumptions on which the aid regime is based on the one hand, and the industrialised countries' stances regarding developing countries and emission reduction efforts on the other hand. The North-South divide, prominent at Copenhagen, was not as visible at the Cancun conference, but development remains an important concern to developing countries. One of the reasons advanced to explain the relative success of COP16 is precisely the focus on technical questions. The depoliticisation of Climate Change may lead in the short term to constructive discussions (and we can see from the 2011 Bangkok conference that outcomes are positive so far) but discussions on obligations, and on the concrete impacts of the proposed reduction targets in terms of Climate Change, cannot be avoided further, as the end of the first commitment period is approaching. The peaceable discussions at Cancun do not erase the conflicting views on the post-Kyoto regime, and divergences of opinion exist concerning the very Cancun agreements, seen either as good enough, or as a step towards a binding agreement, depending on countries' interests.

The key element that will determine a potential long-lasting cooperation between industrialised and developing countries is the transfer of technology and financial resources. That question raises two issues. First, the realisation of the promises: For example, the financial assistance promised at Rio has never materialised, and in Cancun, several countries have denounced the fact that the fast-track financing identified in Copenhagen has not been delivered. Second, the efficiency of such transfers: Over fifty years after the beginning of the aid regime, the results in terms of aid efficiency is less than satisfactory. It seems that we are heading towards a new development paradigm, which may soon even supplant the one of sustainable development, which is the "green growth" one. Initiatives such as the UNEP Green Economy (i.e. investing in clean technologies, renewable energies, green buildings, etc.) have gained support from a variety of different actors, including Greenpeace and the World Bank, and developing countries have endorsed the idea as well. The perspective of promoting economic growth while using renewable energy and lowering the reliance to fossil fuels is appealing and is now part of development agencies' rhetoric. But one needs to be cautious here. The development regime has been full of promises. Different vectors of development and different key motors and strategies have been identified along the years: investment in the industrial sector in the 1950s, investment in rural development and social services in the 1970s, structural adjustment in the 1980s, promotion of good governance in the 1990s and community engagement strategies more recently. But

the same challenges are still here, and progress towards reaching the Millennium Development Goals has been uneven so far.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis has highlighted the relations between the development discourse and the dominant Climate Change one, both reducing reality to simplified problem-solution binomials and resulting from the same technical way of understanding society's fate and needs and its relation with the natural environment. In the context of the current climate negotiations, and the North and South conflicting views, one witnesses, however, an emerging paradox between the social practices required by the development discourse, and the obligations dictated by the Climate Change discourse. A contradictory double discourse has emerged, opposing the normalisation imperative (development) to the emission reduction effort imperative. The managerial discourse remains hegemonic and translates into politics. It ultimately reflects on people, shape their knowledge and ideas.

These reflections raise the following question: What can oppose the hegemonic managerial discourse? What can challenge this way of constructing reality in the modern era? These questions open the way to further research on the drivers of dominant ideas, on discourses hegemony, and on the conditions for change.

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