



Developing Technical and Financial Solutions for the Survival of Small Island Developing States (SIDS): Looking Beyond Copenhagen

Summary Report
By Graciela Chichilnisky¹

In preparation for the Copenhagen Climate Summit, the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) and Columbia University Consortium for Risk Management (CCRUM) organized a luncheon on November 12, 2009 at the West Terrace of the Delegate Dining Room at United Nations Headquarters. The event focused on “Developing Technical and Financial Solutions for the Survival of Small Island Developing States (SIDS): Looking Beyond Copenhagen.”

The event was cosponsored by UNEP, UNIDO, UNDP, GFDD, The Global Compact, Intergovernmental Renewable Energy Organization (IREO), SU/SSC and Global Thermostat. The 150 participants represented AOSIS Permanent Missions to the United Nations, NGOs, IGOs, the private sector and academia. The event brought together an impressive list of speakers which included Yvette Clarke, United States Representative from the 11th District, Brooklyn, New York; Professor Peter Eisenberger, former Vice Provost and founding Director of The Earth Institute at Columbia University; Kevin Conrad, a lead Negotiator for the G77 and senior diplomat from Papua New Guinea; and Sasha Mackler, Research Director of the National Commission on Energy Policy. Dessima Williams, Chair of AOSIS and Permanent Representative of Grenada to the United Nations, and Professor Graciela Chichilnisky, Director of CCRUM, were co-convenors and served as co-hosts for the programme.

Ambassador Williams commenced the proceedings and explained the importance of the event and the seriousness of the situation for AOSIS member states, expressing support and optimism about the role that AOSIS would play in forging a successful COP XV outcome in Copenhagen. The presentation by Professor Peter Eisenberger described how direct air capture of carbon provides a remarkable opportunity for SIDS to attract investment and increase their energy supplies in building power plants that suck carbon from air and reduce the risk of climate change. Professor Eisenberger further explained that these technologies are ‘carbon negative’ because they can capture more CO₂ directly from the atmosphere than is emitted in powering them, thus allowing a new paradigm in which more energy equals more emissions reductions.

This can help attract Kyoto Protocol funding that to date has not been available to small emitters such as the 43 AOSIS members, which together represent 25% of the UN vote in Copenhagen but less than 0.5% of global emissions. Sasha Mackler, Research Director of the National Commission on Energy Policy, corroborated Eisenberger’s statements stressing the need for a policy framework to promote the development and deployment of direct air capture technologies to avert the risk of climate change, given the daunting climate and economic development challenges.

Professor Chichilnisky’s presentation built on the preceding remarks and proposed two initiatives as building blocks for a solution in Copenhagen COP XV that would be a win-win for industrialized and developing countries. First, she suggested a modest extension of the Kyoto Protocol’s Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) to include ‘carbon negative’ technologies, providing new incentives for significant investments in developing countries with very low emissions, such as SIDS. These nations do not receive much CDM funding at present because their emissions are so low – Africa emits

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3% and Latin America 5% of total global emissions. With 'carbon negative' technologies these regions can absorb much more carbon than they emit and therefore attract very substantial CDM resources. The professor recommended the creation of a US \$200 billion per year fund for the purpose of building power plants that draw carbon from air in Africa, Latin America and the SIDS, thus addressing the dual challenges of poverty and averting climate change. The funding itself could be from private sources but underwritten by the industrialized nations. Second, she advocated overcoming the US-China impasse by introducing a new financial mechanism based on the carbon market that reproduces Article 4 of the UNFCCC and creates a politically tenable way for China to commit to emissions reductions while it receives appropriate compensation for limiting its emissions.

Christopher Riti, Delegate Adviser to the Permanent Mission of Grenada to the United Nations, then discussed a complementary SIDS initiative to establish a regional clean energy development bank, known as SIDS Dock Ltd., which would help connect SIDS to capital and carbon markets in order to catalyze clean economic growth and attract financial resources for adaptation to climate change.

The next speakers were Representatives Yvette Clarke, from New York's 11th District, and Michael Honda, from California's 15th District (which includes Silicon Valley). Both spoke eloquently expressing solidarity with the small island states and support for a solution to the extreme climate challenge that they face. Representative Honda, who addressed the participants via a pre-recorded video, emphasized the value to the US economy of exporting renewable energy and how it can help the SIDS' economies through the transfer of these technologies. Travis Bradford, Chief Operating Officer of Carbon War Room, representing Sir Richard Branson, likewise argued that solving the climate challenge should be driven by the incentive to create the raw resources for a new foundation of economic development in developing and developed countries.

The forum was concluded by Kevin Conrad, Executive Director of the Coalition of Rainforest Nations and Papua New Guinea's Special Envoy for Environment and Climate Change. The Climate Envoy underscored the futility of any global climate agreement that lacks the participation of the US and China and reaffirmed the importance of advancing the two proposals for COP XV outlined. He further emphasized that SIDS must reframe the climate negotiations around the terminology of 'deployment of technology' as opposed to the 'transfer of technology' – the former being both more accurate technically and less controversial politically.

In addition to the breadth of topics covered by speakers, key points of agreement emerged from the forum about the importance of direct air capture technologies and the Kyoto Protocol carbon market and its Clean Development Mechanism. It is considered that both of these are necessary components of any solution to the dual objectives of mitigating catastrophic climate risk and promoting economic development. One of the most interesting and important results from the event was the understanding that SIDS have a critical role to play in leading all nations to an agreement at COP XV and in its aftermath, demonstrating to the world, by example, how to reduce emissions and the climate threat while addressing the challenge of sustainable development. A follow up conference is expected to take place in 2010 to take stock of the Copenhagen results, and help bring the results of the negotiations further into the next decade.

This meeting took place with the support and collaboration of Francis Lorenzo of the Permanent Mission of the Dominican Republic to the United Nations and a number of other representatives from AOSIS states, many of whom attended the luncheon gathering.