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## Rich nations must take the lead in a clean-energy revolution

By José Antonio Ocampo and Nicholas Stern

As the United Nations conference on sustainable development begins it is the rich countries that have the most to prove. The last summit in Rio de Janeiro 20 years ago provided the opportunity for countries to sign the UN framework convention on climate change, which should have stabilised global annual emissions of greenhouse gases at 1990 levels, and placed prime responsibility on the industrialised nations, who have done most to pollute the atmosphere, to lead by example.

But rich countries have not led and annual global emissions have continued to rise. Even taking into account pledges by rich and poor nations for action by 2020, the world appears to be heading for likely global warming of 3°C or more, to a temperature not seen on earth for about 3m years.

Having witnessed, for instance, failure by the US and Canada to honour their signatures to the Kyoto protocol, poor countries are understandably sceptical, as we approach another summit, of lofty ambitions expressed by rich nations.

It will take more than words to restore the confidence of poor countries. Some rich countries are dragging their feet on tackling climate change, while unfairly criticising the developing world, apparently unaware of the strides that these countries are making in finding a new path. China, India, Mexico, Brazil and other emerging powers have laid out ambitious plans to tackle deforestation and to reduce radically their emissions to output ratios. Most importantly, they are implementing those plans.

One of the biggest injustices of climate change is that the poorest countries are most exposed and vulnerable to the impacts of climate change even though they have done least to raise atmospheric levels of greenhouse gases. Now they must contend with the brutal arithmetic of a tight budget for global emissions as they try to fight poverty, develop and grow, while managing the enormous risks of climate change.

Rich and poor countries agreed in Cancún in December 2010 that global emissions should be reduced to avoid a rise in global average temperatures of over 2°C. To have a reasonable chance of this, global average emissions have to be reduced from the present level of about 7 tonnes per capita of carbon-dioxide-equivalent to around 2 tonnes in 2050.

This is a huge challenge as developing countries will be home to 8bn of the projected global population in 2050 of 9bn. Even if the rich countries reduce their emissions to zero by 2030, developing nations would need to hold their emissions to about 5 tonnes per capita by 2030 and 2.5 tonnes by 2050. For comparison, current per capita emissions are 22 tonnes in the US, over 9 tonnes in the EU, about 7 tonnes in China, and 2 tonnes in India.

So rich countries not only have to accelerate their actions, but must also support the poor countries as they make the transition to low-carbon economic growth.

It would be morally unacceptable to try to insist that developing countries drop or scale back plans to fight poverty and raise material standards of living. The developing world is understandably suspicious that this is a hidden agenda. Yet it is a fact that their growth is the biggest source of the rise of emissions. The answer is clear: radical change in emissions per unit of output. This revolution carries many benefits: cleaner, quieter, safer, more energy-secure, and more biologically diverse energy. Rich countries must support this with technology and resources.

The developed world must not attempt to preach to the poorer nations. As they deal with the largely self-inflicted damage to their economies, rich countries must show they understand the dangers that arise from hesitation in acting against climate change. They will discover by investing in the low-carbon economy, adopting clear and credible policies, and building new technologies and markets, they will help to create the only truly sustainable growth path for the future, and help find a way out of the depression of their own making.

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