

# COP 18 at Doha - a key checkpoint in the climate change negotiations

By [Neil Morris](#)

29 Nov 2012

Progress towards an international agreement on tackling climate change has been painfully slow, dogged by fundamental disagreements between the countries involved and exacerbated by the financial crisis and political elections.

Little is expected of the forthcoming COP 18 meeting in Doha, yet it remains a key checkpoint in the path to a global deal. Devoid of the political fanfare of previous COPs, this year's event will provide important substantive and technical direction on the building blocks of a future agreement.

It is useful to think of the key issues at Doha in two discrete but interrelated parts. The first part consists of taking the necessary decisions to ensure that the Kyoto Protocol seamlessly transitions to a second commitment period in 2013. Whilst the key conditions for this have been put in place through technical sessions in the lead up to COP18, negotiators need to resolve some key issues at the meeting, including the term of the second commitment period (five or eight years) and the carry-over of national emission allowances from the first period. The African position on these issues, whilst not perfectly homogenous in itself, will likely be closely aligned with the stance of the G-77 plus China. Agreement on the second commitment period should really be a done deal at Doha, but we would be well served to keep our expectations in check, lest we forget the painful lessons from Copenhagen in 2009.

## Businesses and investors will be looking to Doha

The second set of issues at Doha relates to how the international climate change framework affects people and economies, particularly in developing countries. In Africa, facing important choices for how to develop our industries and societies rapidly and sustainably, our governments, businesses and investors will be looking to Doha for signs that the direction of travel towards a low-carbon world is not going to change regardless of day-to-day events. Only then will we have the clarity and security needed to make the long-term technology investments that can promote development and tackle climate change. Making the wrong decisions because long-term policies are unclear can lead to costly mistakes in the form of vulnerable infrastructure and communities, as well as stranded assets, particularly in the field of energy.

In addition to these twin sets of issues of the substance of a global agreement, negotiators at Doha will discuss how national efforts on climate change are recognised. The evolving international framework needs to create transparency, allowing the efforts of one country to be measured against another and helping to ensure that tackling climate change in one place does not simply move harmful activities to other countries. It allows us to move forward together. It also needs to bring an element of standardisation so that all countries will know they are fighting the same battle under the same rules. It would also mean that civil society groups that could hold parties to account and ensure that countries deliver on their obligations, enabling global governance that has been lacking in the past, would oversee compliance with these rules. The principles of governance and accountability that such a system can safeguard have been a long-standing demand of developing countries and will go a long way in bringing them to the negotiating table at Doha.

## The benefits of green growth need to be clearer

But for the agreement to succeed, the benefits of green growth need to be clearer to everyone, particularly in Africa where economic growth and pressing developmental issues are often seen to be at odds with environmental sustainability. Political consensus is important to building a strategy that will survive electoral changes, but the business community must also play a central role. The private sector is going to do most of the heavy lifting when it comes to green growth, so it is important that it makes the case effectively for low-carbon investments.

Whilst many of the issues at COP18 make for neither sensational media headlines nor political fanfare, they make up the vital groundwork needed to keep the world on track for an international agreement. Despite the challenges, a global deal remains worth fighting for, and Doha will be a key checkpoint in the journey.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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