



INSTITUTE FOR GLOBAL DIALOGUE

Issue 111/October 2014

GLOBAL INSIGHT

a focus on current issues

Policy Brief

The G77 and China in the climate change negotiations: a leaky umbrella?

At the time of drafting the brief Dr Masters was Senior Researcher, Institute for Global Dialogue associated with the University of South Africa. She now works for the University of Johannesburg SARChi chair.

Lesley Masters

Introduction

From its origins in 1964, the Group of 77 (G77) has evolved in both its composition and agenda focus. From the initial 77 countries that made the first Joint Declaration at the conclusion of the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) the membership has grown to over 130 member states representing the geo-political South. This heterogeneous umbrella group includes among its members: larger emerging economies, least developed countries (LDCs), and small island developing states (SIDS). In addition to its increased membership, the changing international context has seen the G77 and China¹ representing its members in a number of international negotiation fora. This includes the critical negotiations on the post-2015 development agenda (with the MDGs reaching their 2015 conclusion), and the climate change negotiations which aim to reach an agreement on the future climate change regime in Paris 2015. By its very nature the G77 and China faces challenges in presenting a common position; nevertheless its members continue to point to the role of the Group as a key platform to promote the 'voice' of the South. This policy brief unpacks the challenges of coherence for the G77 and China within the context of the climate change negotiations before considering the continued relevance of the Group for its members flowing from its first 50 years.

Global Insight aims to provide members of the policy community with concise but trenchant analyses of topical issues. Comments and suggestions are invited.

A difficult balancing act: the umbrella springs a leak

In 2006, as Chair of the G77, South African Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma noted that 'one of the greatest achievements for the Group of 77 and China has been our ability to maintain solidarity, unity and negotiate as a collective'.² By 2009 this cohesion faced something of a challenge in the context of the negotiations on climate change in Copenhagen.

The climate change negotiations under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) are particularly challenging in their complexity (multiple technical areas) and in finding a political solution between positions that have become increasingly polarised. In 2014 the negotiations will see the meeting of the 20th Conference of the Parties (COP) in Lima, Peru. As parties work towards reaching an agreement for conclusion in 2015, divisions remain between developing and developed countries. This has been particularly apparent in the discussions on the future of the Kyoto Protocol, the only legally binding agreement for emission reductions for developed (Annex 1) countries, and the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities. Developing countries are particularly concerned that developed countries would effectively 'kill Kyoto', reneging on their emission reduction commitments.

Within the climate change negotiations the G77 and China represent the broad position of the geo-political South. Within this collective there are, however, a number of differing positions from other groupings that fall under the G77 and China umbrella. This includes: the BASIC (Brazil, South Africa, India and China) countries; the LDC group; the LLDCs (Land-locked Least developed countries); members of the Africa Group; the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS); and members of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). While there is an emphasis in the rhetoric on equality and partnership, this diverse membership presents something of a challenge to truly horizontal engagement.

That these groups play their own role in the climate change negotiations is evident in the lead up to, and during the fraught 2009 negotiations in Copenhagen (COP15). At the talks in Barcelona ahead of COP15, the Africa

Group staged a successful walk-out as a demonstration of their opposition to efforts to undermine the Kyoto Protocol. Division between the G77 and China and the BASIC is also present on the final 'noted' outcome of the negotiations. The BASIC countries decried efforts by the Danish to impose their own drafted text of the Copenhagen Accord, presenting their own version, a version not embraced by all the other members of the Group including the AOSIS and the LDC states. For example the position of the small island state of Tuvalu highlighted a differentiation within the G77 and China in its call for the emerging economies to be included in setting targets for emission reductions.³

There is also concern that developed countries undermine cohesion within developing country groupings such as the G77 and China through co-opting developing countries in exchange for access to climate projects such as the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM finance).⁴ For its part the Africa Group, with its own common position on climate change, looked towards pursuing the greater role of adaptation, technology transfer and finance, while the oil producing countries of OPEC remained concerned with response measure (or the negative impact on their economies when people stop using fossil fuels).

The Copenhagen negotiations were a step backwards both for the negotiations on climate change, and raised questions surrounding the role of the G77 and China in pursuing an agreement in which the concerns of the South would be central. The results from a survey conducted among participants in the formal climate change negotiations (2008-2010) are revealing in the perceived role of the G77 and China. From 27% identifying a leadership role for the G77 and China at the Poznań (2008) negotiations, by Cancún (2010) this had fallen to 19%.⁵

While the negotiation process recovered somewhat at the 16th Conference of the Parties (COP16) in Cancun, the G77 and China found itself fairly peripheral. The adoption of a BASIC+ approach, which saw the invitation of the Chair of the G77 and China to BASIC meetings in a form of 'outreach' did not do much to support the rhetoric from the emerging economies of the centrality of the G77.⁶ By the time of the South Africa hosted COP17, in Durban in 2011, it was the EU that

pursued a central role (following its marginalisation at Copenhagen) through agreeing to continue with Kyoto commitments to keep the talks on track.

On the question of the value of BASIC linked to the G77 and China, analysis points out that a benefit of the rise of these larger developing countries in the climate change negotiations is that they bring a visibility to concerns of the developing world.⁷ Nevertheless, despite the broad labelling of the BASIC countries as emerging states, they represent diverse economic, social and political context with different interests in the outcomes of climate change agreement. For instance, as evident at COP17, South Africa and Brazil were willing to take greater steps⁸ (subject to finance and technology transfer) in negotiating climate change, while India and China continued to hold reservations around issues such as monitoring and evaluation.

Another position argued is that membership of the G77 and China allows the BASIC countries to legitimise their developing status. As Xi points out in his analysis, 'China continues to benefit by keeping one foot firmly placed in the G-77; maintaining its identity within the G-77 enables Beijing to wear the Mantle of 'developing country'.⁹ As their own emissions grow the BASIC countries are, however, finding themselves under pressure from both developed and developing countries to reduce their emissions.

With the BASIC countries failing to sustain their central position within the climate change negotiations there has been space for re-engagement by the G77 and China. This is evident at the more recent negotiations in Warsaw (Poland – COP19). Here it was the G77 and China that stalled the talks through a walk-out after it emerged that developed countries, including Australia, the US as well as the EU, were pushing to have the question of 'compensation for extreme climate events' deferred until after the 2015 negotiations.¹⁰

The continued relevance of the G77 and China after 50: patching the umbrella

With the G77 and China umbrella springing a leak as plurilateral groups and states within the G77 and China pursue their different interests, this section considers

the relevance of the Group in shaping international negotiations and why it continues to have relevance after 50.

The challenges facing developing countries, which led to the rise of the G77, continue to underpin the relevance of the Group. This includes inequality, poverty, the trade gap, and the need to highlight the plight of developing countries. For member states the value of the G77 and China is in 'solidarity', or the ability to present a collective voice from the South. Today many developing countries remain politically vulnerable as they engage in international negotiations. The G77 and China provides a platform to push areas of importance that these states may not have been able to pursue individually.¹¹ Indeed the numerical strength of the G77 and China, evident at the Warsaw negotiations, has seen issue of concern to developing countries prominent on the climate change agenda. The vast number of states that are members of the G77 and China may be construed as a hindrance, yet it is also significant that as a group they form a significant proportion in the UN General Assembly providing a platform for greater developing country agency (although this can be used more effectively).

There is also value in the G77 and China for smaller countries in terms of resources and capacity support. For example, while developed countries may have extensive negotiating delegations, which include specialists in numerous areas, developing countries do not always have the people to attend all the negotiations or have specialists within the numerous areas that the climate change negotiations cover from finance to the negotiations on reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD).¹²

Shared interests present a further reason for the continuance of the G77 and China. As Dr Dlamini Zuma noted as Chair of the G77 and China, this grouping 'ensure[s] that the interests of developing countries were protected and reflected'.¹³ Despite nuances in positions within the Group, members all agree on the broad principles that underlay developing country positions. Firstly, ensuring the continuance of the multilateral process under the UNFCCC. Secondly, the preservation of the principle of common but differentiated responsibility and respective capabilities with the continued emphasis on the fulfilment of

commitments under the Kyoto Protocol by developed countries. Thirdly, development (and ensuring sufficient carbon space for development) is critical for developing countries as they address their own domestic challenges of inequality and poverty. Finally, access to technology, finance that is new, additional and scaled up, as well as capacity building is seen as critical if developing countries are to achieve their socio-economic priorities while addressing the challenges of climate change (mitigation and adaptation).¹⁴

Policy Recommendations

As the G77 and China marks its half century as a platform for promoting solidarity, equity and justice the following policy recommendations are considered from the context of the climate change negotiations.

For South Africa

- The G77 and China continues to pursue elements that remain central to South Africa's own foreign policy including the importance of multilateralism and addressing the inequality present within the global system of governance. These areas of convergence highlight points that could form a strategic focus in guiding South Africa-G77 and China relations. This should be supported by developing capacity (research and engagement) both within government and wider civil society.

The G77 and China

- With the proliferation of plurilateral groups, both under the umbrella of the G77 and China, and in the wider international context, attention needs to be given to addressing engagement with these groups
- Sustainability of the G77 and China will depend on the strategic value the Group offers to its members. Where this value lies needs to be unpacked by its members and by the Group as a collective, assessing and addressing the strengths and weaknesses across the various platforms in which the Group now engages.

Notes

- 1 So called because China is not a full member but a 'special invitee' and an associated member.
- 2 N. DlaminiZuma. 2006. Statement by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of South Africa, Chair of the Group of 77, to the 30th Annual Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Group of 77. New York, 22 September 2006. Available from http://www.southafrica-newyork.net/speeches_pmun/view_speech.php?speech=5021736 [accessed 14/07/2014]
- 3 L. Masters. 2010. Africa, Climate Change and Copenhagen. *Global Insight Issue 91*/February 2010. Institute for Global Dialogue, p. 4.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 K. A. Hochstetler. 2012. The G77, BASIC, and global climate governance: a new era in multilateral environmental negotiations. *Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional*. 55 (special edition), p. 59.
- 6 L. Masters. 2012. What future for BASIC? The emerging power dimension in the international politics of climate change negotiations. *Global Insight, Issue 95* March 2012, p. 3.
- 7 Hochstetler. 2012., p. 66.
- 8 Ibid
- 9 X. Qi. 2011. From G-77 to BASIC: China in Global Climate Change Negotiations. The Global South and the International politics of Climate Change. *Proceedings Report of the International Workshop: Negotiating Africa and the Global South's Interests in Climate Change*. Compiled by L. Masters. November 2011. Institute for Global Dialogue, Pretoria, p. 22.
- 10 J. Vidal. 2013. Poor countries walk out of UN climate talks as compensation row rumbles on. *The Guardian*. 20 November 2013. Available from: <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2013/nov/20/climate-talks-walk-out-compensation-un-warsaw/print> [accessed 10/07/2014]
- 11 S. Kasa, A. T. Gullberg and G. Heggelund. The Group of 77 in the international climate negotiations: recent developments and future directions. *International Environmental Agreements: Politics, Law and Economics*. June 2008. Vol 8(2), p. 114.
- 12 A. Makina. 2013. Managing Climate Change: The Africa Group in Multilateral Environmental Negotiations. *Journal of International Organizations Studies* Vol 4(1). Available from http://journal-iostudies.org/sites/journal-iostudies.org/files/JIOSfinal_4_2.pdf accessed 10/07/2014
- 13 N. DlaminiZuma. 2006. Statement by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of South Africa, Chair of the Group of 77, to the 30th Annual Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Group of 77. New York, 22 September 2006. Available from http://www.southafrica-newyork.net/speeches_pmun/view_speech.php?speech=5021736

southafrica-newyork.net/speeches_pmun/view_speech.php?speech=5021736 [accessed 14/07/2014]

- 14 J. Ashe sets out the key issue areas for the G77 and China in his statement on behalf of the G77 and China see J. Ashe. 2008. Statement on Behalf of the Group of 77 and

China at the Thematic Debate of the General Assembly on “Addressing Climate Change: The United Nations and the World at Work”. New York 12 February 2008. Available at: <http://www.g77.org/statement/getstatement.php?id=080212> [accessed 10/07/2014]



The IGD is an independent foreign policy think tank dedicated to the analysis of and dialogue on the evolving international political and economic environment, and the role of Africa and South Africa. It advances a balanced, relevant and policy-oriented analysis, debate and documentation of South Africa's role in international relations and diplomacy.

The IGD strives for a prosperous and peaceful Africa in a progressive global order through cutting edge policy research and analysis, catalytic dialogue and stakeholder interface on global dynamics that have an impact on South Africa and Africa.

3rd Floor Robert Sobukwe Building
263 Nana Sita Street
Pretoria, 0003
South Africa

PO Box 14349
The Tramshed, 0126
Pretoria
South Africa

+27123376082
+27862129442
info@igd.org.za
www.igd.org.za

All rights reserved. The material in this publication may not be reproduced, stored or transmitted without the prior permission of the copyright holder. Short extracts may be quoted, provided the source is acknowledged.