

Setting *Priorities*

MARTHINUS VAN SCHALKWYK describes Africa's vulnerability to climate change and identifies key areas for action by both developed and developing countries

It has become abundantly clear over the past decade – based on evolving science, and work of the IPCC – that the potential impacts of climate change may hold a far greater risk than previously believed; that roughly 2°C is the lower range of predicted temperature increase, while 3°C seems increasingly likely from a doubling of pre-industrial carbon dioxide. Recent evidence also suggests that the biosphere may be approaching key physical tipping points – thresholds beyond which the external drivers of change are replaced by self-sustaining internal drivers – points beyond which policy options will become very limited indeed. It is clear that such changes could lead to irreversible damage across Africa, and the rest of the globe.

Adverse effects

In Africa, as in many parts of the world, impacts could include greater and more rapid sea level rise than previously projected, and more frequent coastal storms, threatening the lives and livelihoods of coastal communities; the increased incidence of extreme weather events; substantial reductions in surface water resources leading to accelerated desertification in sensitive arid zones; and greater threats to health (such as malaria), biodiversity (including bleaching of coral species on the east African tropical reef systems) and agricultural production (a predicted decline of 12 per cent in production in Africa by 2080).

African marine and fresh water fisheries already count among the world's most vulnerable. Western and central Africa show particularly high exposure and

dependency and low adaptive capacity in the face of declining or migrating fish stocks resulting from climate change.

Forty per cent of Africa's international borders are demarcated by river channels and basin watersheds, and most major rivers traverse national boundaries. These are sensitive to even moderate reductions in rainfall, as are projected for much of western and southern Africa. Such reductions could lead to an increase in inter-communal and inter-state conflicts over scarce water resources and threaten the sustainability of hydro-electric power generation, if not managed in a proactive manner.

Projected significant reductions of perennial surface water in southern Africa by the end of the century could threaten key ecological and livelihood resources, such as the Okavango Delta in Botswana, and large urban centres, such as greater Cape Town. Aridification and greater extremes of climate, potential extinctions of endemic species and disruption of physical ecosystems – such as the remobilization of Kalahari dune systems – represent only a few of many significant projected impacts on local sustainable livelihoods and ecological resources.

Overall, the projected impacts of unmitigated climate change in Africa are likely to have significant impacts on human livelihoods, health, water resources, agricultural production and food security, as well as nature-based tourism. All would undermine economic prospects across much of the continent. Indeed, most African countries are among those least able effectively to respond to, and cope with, these



adverse effects. The risks are many, the opportunities far less bountiful.

Priority areas

Against this background, we look forward to a productive and constructive two weeks when we meet in Nairobi for the twelfth Conference of the Parties (COP12) if the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Conference of the Parties/Meeting of the Parties (COP/MOP2) of the Kyoto Protocol in November. There are five priority areas that I would like to highlight for this African COP:

1. Keeping the momentum and creative space to strengthen the regime.

Countries have different responsibilities, but we all – developed as well as developing – have a common one to act according to our capabilities and national circumstances. The ideal regime should work for both the developing and the developed world, recognizing that there is no 'one-size-fits-all' solution.



Joerg Boethling/Still Pictures

We believe that an innovative approach of providing positive incentives for actions that promote local sustainable development, and avoid greenhouse gas emissions, will go a long way to framing developing country action under the Convention.

For developed countries the process of agreeing on substantially stricter targets must be finalized expeditiously to ensure that there is no gap between the first and second commitment periods. The Article 9 review mandated in the Kyoto Protocol should also receive high priority in Nairobi.

Given the scale of the challenges ahead and the inter-linkages between the two tracks agreed in Montreal (the Kyoto track and the Convention track), it is very urgent to foster better understanding of the various scenarios for the future architecture of the regime. More specifically, we need to unpack – and in the process debunk the myths and reduce the uncertainties about – possible balanced ‘packages’ that could build a bridge between the two tracks. We will need to find ways both to broaden participation and

to bring about deeper emission reductions under a Kyoto Plus regime. We therefore need to maintain the political momentum and space to innovate.

2. Sustainable development

For developing countries, a future regime should offer incentives for synergies between sustainable development and climate change mitigation, and more fully balance adaptation and mitigation. A register of sustainable development policies and measures (supported through technology and enabled by finance) would seem a preferable vehicle for recognizing and supporting through incentives current and future action by developing countries.

3. Adaptation

Adaptation remains at the forefront of any sustainable development policy agenda. Given the climate change impacts outlined above, we must now move into a new gear on three fronts: implementing concrete adaptation measures, identifying additional vulnerabilities, and ensuring adequate, predictable and sustainable funding of the key financial mechanisms. We trust Nairobi will be the turning point in activating the Adaptation Fund under the Kyoto Protocol, and in finalising the modalities of the five-year programme of work on impacts, vulnerability and adaptation.

4. Carbon markets

Nairobi must kick-start the process of redressing the inequitable and limited geographical distribution of the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM). At the time of writing, the 15 CDM projects in the pipeline in Sub-Saharan Africa accounted for only 1.7 per cent of the total of 850 projects world-wide: ten located in South Africa, two in Nigeria and one each in Côte d'Ivoire, Tanzania and Uganda.

To build faith in the carbon market and to ensure that everyone shares in its benefits, we must address the lack of information and other obstacles

that African countries face in participating effectively in the international climate regime. There is a particular need for technical and institutional capacity building in Africa, and for working together to support the development of CDM projects in African countries.

5. Technology

To succeed in initiating real action on technology transfer, we should seize the opportunity provided by the upcoming review of the mandate of the Expert Group on Technology Transfer at COP12 to seek a broader mandate that would allow it to consolidate the numerous technology-related decisions under the Convention.

Looking beyond Nairobi, we all agree that investment in developing and deploying low-carbon technologies must be scaled up. Successfully deploying privately-owned, climate-friendly technologies in developing countries will also require us to resolve the vexing issue of intellectual property rights. In this context it may be constructive to develop focused programmes for the transfer of technologies in particular sectors – such as cleaner coal or solar thermal electricity – and to broaden the focus of the technology cooperation paradigm to include incentives for South-South cooperation.

The Nairobi meetings must put in place the building blocks to give content to these African priorities. Though success will require political will in both the developing and developed worlds, it is of utmost importance that all developed countries continue to take the lead in global efforts to combat climate change and to assist vulnerable countries to adapt to its devastating impacts. With strong support from our partners, developing countries can play their part in tackling our common responsibilities, albeit in a differentiated way ■

Marthinus van Schalkwyk is Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, South Africa.