

Comment: Dennis Pamlin

Looking for historic shift in talks

The world's climate negotiators will meet in Cancun in early December to discuss the possible ways forward for global efforts to avoid dangerous climate change. Some pessimistic voices have been heard, but it should not be forgotten that much indicates that we will see a historic shift in Cancun, a shift where solution companies and transformative solutions are given a more prominent role.

So far the focus in the negotiations has been how heavy-emitting sectors should reduce their emissions and what countries should force their heavy emitting industry to begin reducing emissions. Three things make Cancun different:

Up until recently, the main focus was on the initial reductions agreed under the Kyoto Protocol, or about 5 percent of reductions. It is now time to focus on transformative solutions that can deliver significant reductions (for example, 30 percent or more by 2020 in the European Union as being discussed by policymakers and then close to a zero-carbon economy by 2050).

It is time to encourage more public-private partnerships and bring in the views of industry and various sectors and companies that can provide solutions to climate change, and not only focus on those with big emissions.

So far much of the focus has been on low-carbon solutions for rich countries. It is now time to focus more on solutions that can be used by both rich and poor. For this to happen, solutions allowing for technological leapfrogging is necessary.

This situation makes it important to focus on transformative solutions and not only incremental improvements in existing systems, such as more energy-efficient coal power plants and cars. Incremental solutions can be important, but only if combined with transformative solutions. If not, these investments will lock us into a high-carbon society that is not able to deliver the necessary reductions.

Still, it is common to discuss the cheapest reductions of incremental reductions without analyzing whether these reductions are the best way



to ensure the reductions that are needed to avoid dangerous climate change.

It is time to focus more on transformative low-carbon solutions that deliver the services in totally new ways, such as teleworking, video-conferencing, zero-emitting buildings, e-books and smart architecture. These solutions often reduce emissions 80 percent or more compared with traditional ways of providing the service. They depend on a low-carbon underlying infrastructure; all countries can use such solutions and they support technological leapfrogging.

The Mexican government has included solutions companies, such as those from the ICT (information and communication technology) sector, in a unique way during the preparations for COP16 (16th Conference of the Parties). This process mirrors the constructive approach that the Chinese government and Chinese companies have promoted together with leading countries and international corporations.

Companies such as China Mobile have together with international companies and experts explored the contribu-

tion and future potential from transformative ICT solutions. The role of ICT to support low-carbon city development has also been strongly supported by many policymakers in China. During the fourth International CEO roundtable of Chinese and foreign multinational corporations, Zheng Wantong, vice-chairman of China's top political consultative body, highlighted that the ICT is a useful tool to make cities more convenient, efficient and safe.

Renewable energy companies such as Trina and Yingli Solar have also initiated dialogue with international companies to explore how they can help reduce global CO2 emissions together and create jobs. Accelerating uptake of solar solutions in China and the rest of the world require intensive international collaboration.

What is encouraging with a solution approach around transformative solutions, such as low-carbon ICT solutions, is that they support and depend on collaboration. Low-carbon ICT solutions that enable a 21st century transport and communication system need electric batteries for both cars and laptops. This requires soft-

ware solutions to control charging of electric cars and secure connections so that people can telework and do other things that different companies must collaborate to deliver.

By looking at required system solutions for low-carbon development, instead of only a few parts, it will become obvious that the world needs collaboration and not protectionism to accelerate the uptake of transformative low-carbon solutions.

Much indicates Cancun could be historic and not only have a number of governments acknowledged the need for a solution approach. A work stream with focus on transformative low-carbon solutions could be launched in Cancun during COP16.

China is well placed as we move into the solution phase of the global climate work and hopefully we will see many concrete examples in Cancun as well as during 2011.

The author is global policy adviser to several leading companies and governments. He is also director of the UN Global Compact project "Low Carbon Leaders for Transformative Solutions".



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