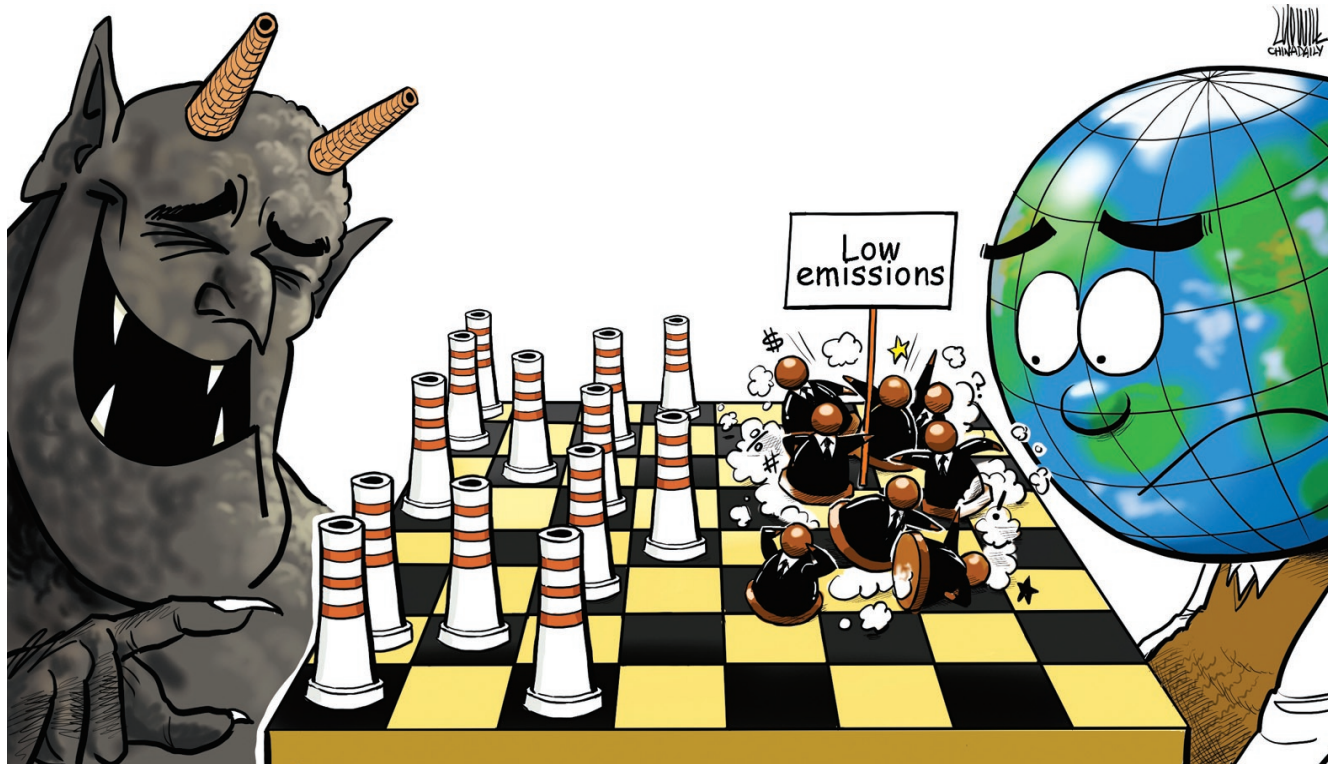


# Comment: Hilario Valenzuela & Jose Maria Valenzuela



## Toward sustainable development together

### MEXICO, LIKE CHINA, CAN HELP LIGHT THE GREEN PATH AHEAD

Mexico, like other members of the global community, is striving to secure improved living conditions for its people under the paradigms of sustainable development. This requires substantial transformations in the economic structures and practices that affect production, transport and even family consumption patterns.

From 1980 to 2008, carbon emissions grew at an average rate of 2 percent a year. In terms of absolute emissions, Mexico was ranked 12th in global rankings in 2008, in between Italy and South Africa. But Mexico's per capita carbon emissions has dropped from 1.2 tons per capita in 1980, stabilizing at about 1.1 tons by the end of the decade.

The Mexican government has pledged a reduction of 30 percent of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent tons below our "business as usual" scenario and a fur-

ther 50 percent reduction by 2050. In the short term, the priority of the Mexican government has been to build capacities inside the federal government and some major research institutions, and it has relied on the leadership of state-owned enterprises that hold monopolies in the oil and power sectors.

Studies conducted by national and international organizations like the National Autonomous University of Mexico, the World Bank and McKinsey & Co have shown that the most cost-effective greenhouse gas mitigation actions are concentrated on energy efficiency, specifically related to public transport and improved management of the traditional inputs of rural development: land and forests.

Today, we have better institutions to understand the climate change phenomenon. But overall, our society has not embedded the idea of low-carbon development; our

universities, local government and social organizations still seem to be away from assuming the challenges of changing the economic structures and practices needed.

There are staggering exceptions, but we need to deepen the social involvement to address the multidimensional factors of climate change and close the gaps among functional segmentation, whether through poverty reduction, environment conservation or other efforts.

This is particularly relevant in the effects of climate change on meteorological phenomena that will hit the more vulnerable. Research on the topic points toward the harsh conditions for the least favored in the economic context. Both mitigation and adaptation policies should be used to solve this inequality of circumstances.

Solutions have to be developed in terms of national characteristics, hence the importance of supporting all

international strategies based on the Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Action. Mexico's rural development, for example, is peculiar due to its particular land regime.

This year, we celebrate the centennial of the revolution that shaped the system and made rural economics one of the axes of development for the 20th century. Social property of land has nurtured a successful collective system of natural capital and biodiversity conservation, based on rural organization and indigenous communities. But we are missing the involvement of both the government and civil society to sustain, replicate and encourage such efforts.

Regional institutions like the Inter-American Development Bank are leading the way in such initiatives, not only in Mexico but also in other countries of the region, primarily to increase investment in communal and public goods in rural areas.

On the one hand, civil society groups have moved positively toward assuming local development priorities, but still have a long way to go to collaborate with a broader type of actors across geographies and subjects.

The government has to support and be part of such a social maturation process. Agriculture-related organizations also need to participate in embracing the agenda of climate change as a fundamental component of more traditional productive roles. On the other hand, local governments have not found the incentives to commit to a broad climate change agenda and the lack of such interest will undermine the broader transformation of economic practices across the country.

Mexico and China have a challenging agenda ahead. In the international forum, as leading industrialized developing countries, Mexico and China share a set of priorities in terms of securing access to technology and financial mechanisms to enable the transformations required for low-carbon development. Our public officials, grass-roots organizations, rural communities, enterprises and consumer associations have much to learn from each other.

The latest surge of technological innovation in China in areas like railway, wind and solar power technologies, as well as Mexico's experience on geothermal power and management of public resources, offer wide opportunities to promote trade, investment and South-South technological cooperation.

In such matters, Mexico and China are in positions to boost a whole set of regional transformations. Many countries, not to mention global mitigation efforts, will be positively affected by the examples defined by them.

As long as the path is green, both countries' leadership will naturally widen the road of collaboration in these and other areas in Cancun, as well as for a long-term perspective for the challenges ahead.

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