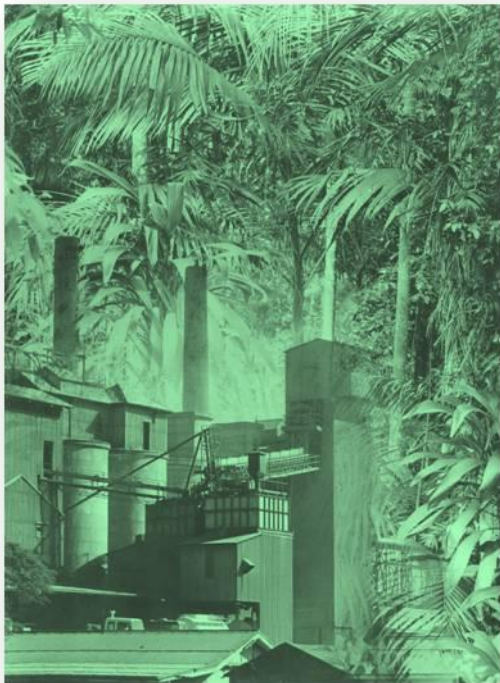


COMMENT: *Climate Change Agreement, Sustainable Development and the G20 Summit Brisbane, Australia* **15-16 November 2014**



By *Dr Ted Christie - 14 November 2014*



1.0 The climate change agreement reached by Chinese President Xi Jinping and U.S. President Barack Obama on 12 November 2014 is a significant step for both countries to take to reduce their GHG emissions over the next two decades.

2.0 Under the agreement, China's intention is for its CO₂ emissions to peak by 2030; China will also aim to get 20% of its energy from renewable

resources by the same year. The intent of the United States is to reduce its 2005 level of CO₂ emissions by 26-28% before 2025.

3.0 A source of controversy within Australia, for many months, reflects concern over climate change being part of the Agenda for the G20 Summit to be held in Brisbane: Whether the G20 Agenda should concentrate on economic growth and not be "cluttered" by discussion on climate change?

4.0 But is such a political view consistent with the historic plan by the United States and China to cut their emissions – to the extent proposed - over the next two decades?

5.0 Equally as important, is whether a G20 Agenda that focusses on economic growth is consistent with UN opinion that sustainable development and climate change are mutually dependent?

6.0 Or, as UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, puts it: *“Sustainable energy is the golden thread that connects economic growth, social equity and a climate and environment that enables the world to thrive.”*

7.0 Economics is only one cornerstone of sustainable development. A sustainable solution does not place an inordinate weight on one objective - such as economics.

8.0 A sustainable solution for climate change is found by balancing competing short-and long-term ecological, economic, social and cultural objectives. *Equity is a key consideration, as a sustainable solution seeks to minimize the extent to which environmental costs and benefits are shared disproportionately between all Parties to the new climate agreement.*

9.0 But, conflict over the future use of coal as an energy source has the potential to be a *“log in the road”* for moving to a low-carbon economy, achieving sustainable development and drafting of the new climate agreement.

10.0 For coal-generated energy to become part of a new global norm for moving to a low-carbon, sustainable future, a global commitment by countries involved in the international trade in coal should now complement the agreement of China and the United States; and for these countries to be seen as influentials by adopting measures to cut CO₂ emissions as outlined in the UN’s *“Deep Decarbonization Pathways Project (July 2014).”*

11.0 A pathway for moving to a low carbon economy, in which coal-generated power remains as part of the global energy mix, could be based on the following framework adopted by the UN for addressing another major global environmental problem: *the conservation of biodiversity*.

12.0 Two linked UN International Treaties, having quite different goals, exist. The Biodiversity Convention (1992) focusses on management measures for the conservation of endangered species whilst allowing for sustainable use of the components of biodiversity. The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (1973) aims to ensure that international trade does not risk the survival of any endangered species.

- i. This framework could be applied for moving to a low carbon economy, if coal-generated power is to remain as part of the future global energy mix;
- ii. But, the existing global response to climate change needs to be strengthened. The new climate agreement requires ***substantially higher carbon dioxide emission reduction targets*** - as clearly demonstrated by China and the United States;
- iii. Also, a new dimension – ***international trade in fossil fuels*** - should be part of the new climate agreement e.g. so that international trade does not pose an unacceptable risk for global warming.
- iv. If the G20 Summit Agenda were to recognize climate change as a significant sustainable development issue, it would provide a platform for drafting the new climate agreement at the “***COP 20 Lima Peru - Sustainable Development Innovation Forum, (December 2014)***” i.e. prior to the binding climate agreement that will be negotiated at COP 21 at Paris, 2015; and

v. *It would also give Australia the opportunity to enhance its prestige, influence and reputation at the global level.*

TAGS: G20; Brisbane; Lima; climate agreement; sustainable development; coal; low carbon economy; Biodiversity Convention; Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species.

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