

Climate change and sustainable development

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Liisa Uimonen

Sustainable Development and Climate Change: Views from Developing Countries

Antto Vihma introduced us the history of global environmental politics and the roles different countries have played in it through forming groups and alliances based on common and diverse interests. The pre-reading article by Mark Williams (2005) created a good basis on understanding the different groups and how they unite to gain more power or even a voice in global negotiations.

For me, the most relevant lesson was the importance of alliances in negotiating and making global policy. Even though the countries in these groups might be very diverse and reaching a common understanding or goal thus very difficult, in global politics these groups are almost crucial for many less developed countries to take part in these global negotiations. The field of global policy and decision making is mostly taken over by the "superpowers" of the West, while of course the rise of e.g. China has led to a new division of political and economic power.

Vihma introduced many alliances formed during the history of the global political negotiations, and the roles these alliances play in global environmental negotiations. They are based on interest regarding development, political power, economics and utilization of natural resources. There are also groups that are based on possibility to appeal on empathy and moral of the developed countries and on normative to "stick together". Of course, all these groups cannot be clearly distinguished vis-à-vis their purpose, and there are many reasons and ways each country uses "the power of many" in global negotiations.

Williams' statement on the institutionalization of Third World was very interesting and clearly reasonable. I think this institutionalization is apparent for many other groups of countries, which are used in political, economical and academic language and discussion. The concepts or terms that are used to describe certain groups of countries are important part in the forming of identities of these countries. Of course, all countries are different and have different national characteristics and needs, but through this institutionalization a sort of group identity is possible to create and utilize when trying to participate in global (environmental) negotiations.

In my personal opinion, on the one hand, it is crucial to form functional groups in order to establish global binding agreements on mitigating or halting climate change (or the whole environmental crisis). This is because there are almost 200 countries in the world now, and negotiating with all of them on a single decision feels kind of impossible. On the other hand, in the current global politics, economical, political and military power is unevenly distributed. It is unfair, that large developed countries have more to say than those with less power and those who will suffer the most, if a binding treaty to halt and mitigate climate change is not achieved in time. Thus forming groups cannot lead to even more power to these countries.

It must be remembered, though, that great political power is not only a bad thing: the EU has managed to use its leverage to forward the climate negotiations, even though only a little. The bad thing is, if the countries are using their power only to serve their personal interests in the expense of the common future.