

Sustainable development and climate change: views from developing countries

Antto Vihma's lecture on the above mentioned topic, overall, gave a holistic understanding of global environmental politics and underlying power struggles that shape and influence the bargaining processes of global environmental and climate deals.

Mr Vihma started with presenting a historical account of the formal as well as informal organizations, institutions and coalitions that brought environment and climate change to a global podium. For instance, he mentioned how the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, for the first time, internationalized the environmental agenda, though the Conference itself was marred by North-South clashes, mutual negations and demonstration of an overt dichotomy.

The lecture primarily focused on how developing countries as a united block had been active in international negotiations and bargains of climate change deals. Arguably, the DC coalition is primarily based on their shared vulnerabilities, though, the dynamics of their coalition has been significantly changing mostly because of their other diverse needs. For instance, during the Durban Climate Change Conference in 2011, South-South clashes on climate change were also witnessed when, reportedly, India and China seemed to be teamed up with the US, while, the LDCs, AOSIS, African states and the EU were pressing for a binding global deal. On the other hand, however, it is equally important to note, 'developing countries since 1972 have insisted on linking environment and development, and developing countries have a shared interest in ensuring that environmental protection is not at the expense of what they perceive as the right to development' (Williams 2005, 56).

Mr Vihma argued that the non-alignment movement has lost its relevance in today's world as the world no-longer exhibits a bipolar division. Williams (2005) argues that 'the doctrine of non-alignment was the collective response of poor, weak states to the bipolar world order,' however, it 'never received universal acceptance and many so-called Third World states were firmly within Western alliance system' (Williams 2005, 51).

In my opinion, it is unrealistic to argue that the non-alignment movement has lost its significant at a time when countries in the Global South are much more strong and independent than before, and possess a realistic potential and an unprecedented capacity of 'non-alignment'. In addition, it is equally unrealistic to argue that political polarization in the world has ceased since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Certainly, the traditional polarization of the First World and the Second World has ceased, but new forms of polarization seem to have occurred in the recent decades.

For instance, after the September 11, 2001 attacks, the then US President sought to divide the world declaring that 'you are either with us or against us'. Initiatives like

non-alignment movements come handy when there is this type of attempt to divide the world in polarized blocs.

Some commentators already see a new world order led by two super powers, one by the US and the other by China. Truth will be seen with time, but amidst all these waves of power shifts, it can be argued that, non-alignment movement still has a historical scope and can function as a great tool of check and balance in the future.

In conclusion, although ‘the search for a static and united Third World is an unrealistic aspiration (Williams, 2005, 66), the developing world as a united bloc can still make its voice heard and concerns addressed in the global arena. It is obvious that some developing nations are part of the coalition for the sake of identify and strength, whereas, the others simply want to avoid exclusion from the group. Whatever the reasons, unless and until the DCs share the common vulnerability and challenges, they don’t seem to be losing the relevance of their coalition, though; at times maintaining the group affinity seem to have been a sheer challenge.

References

Williams, Marc 2005. The Third World and Global Environmental Negotiations: Interests, Institutions and Ideas. *Global Environmental Politics*, Volume 5, Number 3, August 2005. pp. 51,56,66