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Brazil's Position for UN Climate Conference in Copenhagen

by Bartłomiej Znojek

Brazil aspires to a leading role in international negotiations on an agreement to counter climate change. It stipulates that future commitments be based on the principle of common but differentiated responsibility. In Copenhagen it will declare its voluntary emissions reduction target and it will unveil its own national climate policy concept, so as to spur developed countries into making ambitious reductions commitments, contributing more funds, and facilitating the transfer of technology to developed countries. It will attempt to encourage investment by rich states in its own low-emissions projects.

Determinants. Brazil is among the world's top ten greenhouse gas (GHG) emitters. What makes it stand out among the others is that close to 75% of its emissions come from land use and forestry and from agricultural activity. These emissions are connected, first and foremost, with the deforestation of the Amazon and Cerrado—the biogeographical regions which account for nearly two-thirds of the area of Brazil (over 6m km sq) and are crucial to the absorption of CO₂. With nearly half of Brazil's energy produced from renewable sources, energy generation is responsible for barely one-fifth of the country's GHG emissions.

Climate change issues figure prominently in Brazil's policy. In 2008 Brazil adopted a National Plan to Address Climate Change. In November 2009 it established a Climate Fund, and a bill on national climate policy assumptions and objectives is waiting to be voted into law by Parliament. In international climate negotiations Brazil has supported the principle of common but differentiated responsibility, which holds that industrialized states should shoulder the burden of international reductions and related financing commitments.

Key Elements of Negotiating Position. Brazil belongs to a group of developing and newly industrialized states not included in Annex I to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), with no reductions commitments. In order to bolster its negotiating position in Copenhagen, the Brazilian government came up in November 2009 with a proposal of a voluntary reduction of GHG emissions by 36.1% or 38.9% (depending on whether a target GDP growth rate is 4% or 6%) by 2020, from a 2020 "business as usual" level (i.e. from hypothetical 2020 emissions if no action is taken). When compared with historical data, these government targets mean that—depending on assumed GDP growth—by 2020 total GHG emissions will have increased by 6.5% or 1.7% from 1990 and will have dropped, respectively 18% or 21%, from 2005. Save for a pledge to reduce, by 80% and 40% respectively, the deforestation rates for the Amazon and Cerrado, the proposed initiative does not identify concrete means of emissions reduction. In the absence of information on calculation methods and on basic data to be used, the credibility of the government's estimates is difficult to verify. The latest official figures on Brazil's GHG emissions date back to 1994. Updated detailed data for 1990–2000 are scheduled for release by the government only in 2011. These reduction targets remain voluntary and non-binding even though they were written into the National Climate Policy Bill.

What prompted Brazil to unveil these reduction targets were, first, apprehensions that schemes proposed by some European states for the taxation of imports from countries with no reductions commitments could be implemented, and, second, pressures from France, the United Kingdom and from non-governmental organizations. The government of Brazil wants to counter criticism of the

developing countries for their failure to determine their quantitative reductions targets—but this does not mean that it has changed its position that these states should merely attempt to reduce their emissions growth rates. Brazil believes that the historical responsibility for emissions lies at the developed states' door and for this reason they should commit themselves to cutting their GHG emissions by 25%–40% by 2020 and by no less than 80% by 2050, from the 1990 level.

As an initiator of the Clean Development Mechanism, Brazil wants it to remain in place. On the other hand, it expects improvements in the management of the CDM, more flexible criteria for the selection of projects open to investment by developed countries, and proportionately higher aid to poorer countries with less initiatives. It has objected to the financing of forest conservation activities with proceeds of the carbon emissions allowances trade. Even then, in Copenhagen it will be open for talks on REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) mechanisms—but on certain conditions. It believes that since reducing emissions from deforestation and degradation is easy, it could undermine developed countries' motivations for financial involvement in other high-emissions sectors. For this reason it insists that no more than one-tenth of any developed country's emissions reduction commitments can be covered by forest preservation projects and that the same country must invest in parallel in other high-emissions sectors, such as energy. Furthermore, it holds that REDD+ should cover the entire national territory, to prevent deforestation from moving to non-program areas.

The Brazilian government expects the adoption of regulatory measures to facilitate technology transfer and to reduce the costs involved, in particular that part of the costs which results from rich countries' ownership of most patents. It renounces a strictly commercial approach to technology transfer and it recognizes the need to relax the principles of intellectual property protection. Brazil expects the facilitation of technology flows not only from rich to poorer countries, but also in the opposite direction and among the developing countries. It is interested in the transfer of its own expertise in biofuel production and forest areas conservation. It looks to preliminary terms of poorer states' access to technology being agreed in Copenhagen. It advocates the establishment of a public multilateral fund from which to finance the licensing of patent-protected products, processes and equipment.

The government of Brazil believes that the developing countries ought to conduct full research into their national capabilities and needs for investment in preventing climate change, but it points out that, given these countries' need to combine climate activities with economic and social growth, more funds from the affluent states will be required. Brazil supports the idea that developed states should contribute 0.5%–1.0% of their gross domestic products. These payments should be mandatory, separate from official development aid (ODA), and they should be subject to monitoring, reporting and verification. The UNFCCC Secretariat rather than a multilateral institution, such as the World Bank, will be the appropriate manager of these funds. Brazil counts on a financial compensation for arresting the cutting down of forests. It has considered, besides involvement in the REDD+ mechanisms, the setting up of an international fund, financed by government and private-sector contributions, to support projects in the reduction of deforestation rates. The Amazon Fund, which has been in place since 2008, is to be presented during the Copenhagen negotiations as a model of tropical forests preservation financing. A Climate Fund financed with contributions from the state budget and from oil companies will be Brazil's chief instrument for financing the emissions reduction and adaptation measures.

Conclusions. Brazil as an emerging economy and the largest Latin American state aspires to play a leading role in the climate negotiations as an advocate of the developing states' interests—which, ultimately, will bolster its international position. In Copenhagen it will present its own reductions targets and its concepts on preventing climate change, including such instruments as climate policy and climate fund legislation. It is to be doubted that its arguments will persuade the developed countries to undertake far-reaching reductions commitments, increase funding or facilitate technology transfer to the developing countries. Yet it has a chance of encouraging affluent states to increase bilateral cooperation in technology and to invest in projects designed to counter climate change in Brazil, in particular in tropical forests conservation.