

# Call to modernize antiquated climate negotiations

November 18 2012

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The structure and processes of United Nations climate negotiations are "antiquated", unfair and obstruct attempts to reach agreements, according to research published today.

The findings come ahead of the 18th UN [Climate Change Summit](#), which starts in Doha on November 26.

The study, led by Dr Heike Schroeder from the University of East Anglia (UEA) and the Tyndall Centre for [Climate Change](#) Research, argues that the consensus-based decision making used by the [United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change](#) (UNFCCC) stifles progress and contributes to negotiating deadlocks, which ultimately hurts poor [countries](#) more than rich countries.

It shows that delegations from some countries taking part have increased in size over the years, while others have decreased, limiting poor countries' negotiating power and making their participation less effective.

Writing in the journal *Nature Climate Change*, Dr Schroeder, Dr Maxwell Boykoff of the University of Colorado and Laura Spiers of Pricewaterhouse Coopers, argue that changes are long overdue if demands for climate mitigation and adaptation agreements are to be met.

They recommend that countries consider capping delegation numbers at a level that allows broad representation across government departments

and sectors of society, while maintaining a manageable overall size.

Dr Schroeder, of UEA's School of International Development, will be attending COP18. She said: "The UN must recognize that these antiquated structures serve to constrain rather than compel co-operation on international climate policy. The time is long overdue for changes to institutions and structures that do not support decision-making and agreements.

"Poor countries cannot afford to send large delegations and their level of expertise usually remains significantly below that of wealthier countries. This limits [poor countries](#)' negotiating power and makes their participation in each session less effective."

The researchers found that attendance has changed in terms of the number and diversity of representatives. The number of delegates went from 757 representing 170 countries at the first COP in 1995 to 10,591 individuals from 194 countries attending COP15 in 2009 – a 1400 per cent increase. At COP15 there were also 13,500 delegates from 937 non-government Observer organisations.

Small developing countries have down-sized their delegations while G-7 and +5 countries (Brazil, China, India, Mexico, and South Africa) have increased theirs. The exception is the United States, which after withdrawing from the Kyoto Protocol started to send fewer delegates to COPs.

The study, Equity and state representations in [climate negotiations](#), also looked at the make-up of the delegations and found an increase in participation by environmental, campaigning, academic and other non-Governmental organisations.

"Our work shows an increasing trend in the size of delegations on one

side and a change in the intensity, profile and politicization of the negotiations on the other," explained Dr Schroeder. "These variations suggest the climate change issue and its associated interests are framed quite differently across countries. NSAs are well represented on national delegations but clearly the government decides who is included and who is not, and what the official negotiating position of the country and its level of negotiating flexibility are."

Some countries send large representations from business associations (Brazil), local government (Canada) or science and academia (Russia). For small developing countries such as Bhutan and Gabon the majority of government representatives come from environment, forestry and agriculture. The UK has moved from mainly environment, forestry and agriculture to energy and natural resources. The US has shifted from these more conventional areas to an overwhelming representation from the US Congress at COP15.

**More information:** Equity and state representations in climate negotiations, by Heike Schroeder, Maxwell T Boykoff and Laura Spiers, is published online in *Nature Climate Change* (Vol 2, December 2012) on November 18.

Provided by University of East Anglia

Citation: Call to modernize antiquated climate negotiations (2012, November 18) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-11-modernize-antiquated-climate.html>

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