



Policy Brief

## Climate Change and the Environment at the G8 and G20

June 11, 2010

G8 Research Group  
G20 Research Group

Climate change and the environment will be on the agenda of both the G8 Muskoka and G20 Toronto Summits in June, but the leaders will produce relatively little of the “truly global action against global warming” envisaged by Canadian prime minister Stephen Harper two years ago. By January 2010, Harper noted that there would only be “informal discussions” on the environment at the summits.

Environmental protection will be advanced across a broad front at the summits, but there will only be small, steady movement on climate adaptation for vulnerable states (especially in Africa), carbon capture and storage (CCS) demonstration plants, fossil fuel subsidy reductions and the incorporation of environmental security into future economic policy frameworks for green growth. Major moves on issues such as climate financing and a post-Kyoto climate control regime will be left until legislation from the U.S. Congress arrives and the United Nations climate conference takes place in December 2010 in Cancun.

Past G8 performance on the environment has varied. In 1979, the leaders made their first ambitious climate commitment: “We need to expand alternative sources of energy, especially those which will help to prevent further pollution, particularly increases of carbon dioxide and sulphur oxides in the atmosphere.” At the 2009 L’Aquila Summit, the G8 and the members of the expanded Major Economies Forum recognized the “importance of keeping the increase in average global temperature below 2 degrees Celsius.” They pledged to work together “to identify a long-term global goal for substantially reducing global emissions by 2050” before the UN Copenhagen conference in December 2009. However, little was accomplished in Copenhagen and many of the G8 and G20 countries have yet to set greenhouse gas reduction targets that are adequate to keep their 2°C commitment.

On June 19, 2008, Harper identified climate change as one of three key themes for the 2010 G8 summit. In the summer of 2009, he said that the G8 would “provide momentum to the UN climate change negotiations while deepening global collaboration on the development and commercial deployment of clean energy technologies.”

The G20 has also, with great internal difficulty, increasingly addressed climate change. At the Pittsburgh Summit, G20 leaders pledged “to phase out and rationalize over the medium term inefficient fossil fuel subsidies.” They asked their finance ministers to produce climate change financing options. However, the G20 leaders were unable to break the deadlock between developed and emerging economies — the latter led by China and India — to make the Copenhagen conference a success.

Prospects for action at the June summits are modest. The G8 will address climate adaptation in vulnerable countries and will likely advance its 2008 pledge to create 20 CCS plants by the end of 2010. The G20 will advance its 2009 initiative to reduce fossil fuel subsidies on the basis on the International Energy Agency’s analysis and will repeat promises on climate finance. Both summits may induce members to start delivering the “fast start” financing they promised developing countries at Copenhagen. They may also back biodiversity as part of their food security and agriculture agenda. But there will be less action on climate and environmental issues than in the past.

---

Key Contacts: Professor Steven Bernstein, Director, Master of Global Affairs Program  
steven.bernstein@utoronto.ca • 416-946-8927  
Professor Matthew Hoffmann • mjhoff@utsc.utoronto.ca • 416-287-7307  
University of Toronto Media Relations Hotline  
media.relations@utoronto.ca • 416-978-0100

Key Sources: G8 Information Centre • [www.g8.utoronto.ca](http://www.g8.utoronto.ca) • [g8@utoronto.ca](mailto:g8@utoronto.ca)  
G20 Information Centre • [www.g20.utoronto.ca](http://www.g20.utoronto.ca) • [g20@utoronto.ca](mailto:g20@utoronto.ca)