PEOPLE WITH LOW EXPECTATIONS ARE SELDOM DISAPPOINTED

CLIMATE SUMMIT IN CANCÚN DID NOT FAIL, BUT WAS IT SUCCESSFUL ENOUGH?

Frank Priess

It is always difficult to measure results against expectations whose origins are not clearly defined. We know this from international stock markets and the assessments of analysts, and the same can be said of international conferences. It is all too easy for everybody to say that the UN Climate Conference COP16 in Cancún, Mexico, exceeded expectations because almost everybody involved, including the hosts Mexico, took the opportunity in the months leading up to the conference to systematically lower expectations. Brasil's President Ignacio Lula da Silva perhaps made this abundantly clear when he said at the beginning of December: "No big leader is going, only environment ministers at best. We don't even know if foreign ministers are going. So there won't be any progress."

The first thing people gave up on was the hope of cementing some kind of binding climate treaty out there on the Caribbean coast. The necessary preconditions were not in place to achieve this kind of agreement, as a successor to the Kyoto Protocol, according to a statement by Mexico's Foreign Minister Patricia Espinosa in mid-October. In fact this wasn't even really necessary, as the Protocol was set to run until 2012. For Espinosa the conference was now more about discussing a number of measures in the areas of "mitigación, adaptación, financiación y tecnología".

This was a clever strategy, as all the participants in the climate process were still feeling the effects of the comprehensive failure in Copenhagen. The UN had seemed to be



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on the brink of a disaster, the European Union had felt marginalised, the new "superpowers" had flexed their muscles in a negative way, and the USA and China had been pilloried by environmental activists as the bogeymen. A very unsatisfactory experience for everyone concerned, so there was good reason for people to want Cancún to achieve at least something.

And it did achieve something. "Cancún", according to Greenpeace spokesman Wendel Trio, "saved the negotiation process, but not the climate." The main objective of COP16 was to re-establish the trust that had been lost in Copenhagen, and in this respect it was successful. Christiana Figueres, Executive Secretary of the CMNUCC (Convención Marco de las Naciones Unidas sobre el Cambio Climático, in English UNFCCC, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change), went as far as to suggest that the conference had offered a "beacon of hope" and seen a

"We are very pleased that the UN process has been saved." (Connie Hedegaard, EU Commissioner for Climate Action) "historic agreement" take place. "Against all expectations common sense has prevailed" claimed World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) climate expert Regine Günther in *Spiegel* magazine. "We are very pleased that the UN

process has been saved", said EU Climate Commissioner Connie Hedegaard. And German Federal Climate Minister Norbert Röttgen summed up the conference: "I believe that this has been a real success." The international community had shown that it was capable of serious negotiation, he said.

Others were not so complimentary. A reader survey carried out by the international opinion-former *The Economist* suggested that 57 per cent of readers considered the climate summit to have been a failure. "The outcome of Cancún is not going to keep global warming below two degrees", said Hubert Weiger, chairman of the League for the environment and Nature Conservation (BUND), the German Branch of Friends of the Earth. It also did not alter the lip service paid by the government. And the Mayor of Mexico's capital, Marcelo Ebrard, commenting on the outcome of the conference, said: "I believe that the announcements coming out of Cancún are just a repeat of Copenhagen. I'm not saying that no progress was made,

there were some interesting aspects, but in general it didn't achieve what we hoped it would." His city would, however, proceed on its own, as he had agreed with other mayors at a large city conference in the run-up to Cancún.

THE PROBLEM IS THAT NOTHING IS BINDING

The Cancún Agreement, in the tradition of the Copenhagen Accord, did at least specifically recognise, for the first time in an UN document, the necessity of having a so-called "two degree target", signed by China and the USA. This was progress, especially for the USA, where there are still a lot of (even politically influential) people who still have their doubts about man's influence on climate change. Those island nations like Fiji, the Cook Islands, the Maldives and Tuvalu, who have the most to fear from a rise in sea levels, would have liked to have seen an even more ambitious target being set. They had campaigned for a maximum 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels. Nothing binding came out of the Agreement, however, and there were also no long-term reduction goals or even targets for specific energy-intensive sectors such as agriculture, sea and air travel. Negotiations on these issues were deferred and now everybody is pinning their hopes on COP17 in Durban, South Africa, at the end of 2011.

The proposal that by 2020 the industrialised nations should reduce their emissions by 25 to 40 per cent compared to 1990 levels remains just that: a non-binding

proposal, at least for all those countries that **Emerging nations like Brazil, China and** did not sign the Kyoto Protocol. Emerging nations like Brazil, China and India will not be required to reduce their emissions. They are

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only expected to "limit the pace of their emission growth." And yet, China is the world's biggest polluter, and those other emerging nations India and Russia are numbers three and four in the league, ahead of Japan and Germany. In 2014 the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) will announce how much emissions must be reduced by to achieve the "two degree target", and then we will be able to evaluate just how valuable the resolutions made at Cancún really were.

The future progress reports that countries are supposed to give to the UN every two years are also non-binding. Internationally-funded climate actions will be monitored, but all other measures will only be subject to national scrutiny.

The future of the Kyoto Protocol, which expires in December 2012, remains in suspense. Cancún created some breathing space to achieve an extension to Kyoto by the time the conference in South Africa comes around. In Cancún Japan, Russia and Australia were not prepared to agree to an extension to the Protocol. They argue that it makes no sense if the two biggest "polluters", the USA and China, who are together responsible for 42.2 per cent of emissions, are not bound by it.

The Kyoto Protocol is also key to the issue of carbon trading, an important source of income for financing climate change measures, especially in developing nations. In a recent study the World Bank concluded that between 70 and 100 billion dollars will need to change hands every year until 2050 in order to pay for adaptation measures designed to reduce climate change. The poorest developing nations alone would require 26 billion dollars per year. The Protocol provides for such an adaptation fund, paid for by carbon trading (CDM - Clean Development Mechanism), so a failure to extend the Protocol could have direct financial consequences. The World Bank calculates that in 2009 alone certificates for the equivalent of 8.7 billion tonnes of CO₂ were traded. Of a total of 103 billion euros traded on the carbon market, the European Union alone accounted for 89 billion.

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Although the adaptation fund goes back as far as the 2001 Climate Summit held in Marrakesh, it only really started to work after the Bali Summit in 2007. Volumes should

amount to around 360 million dollars by 2012 – Spain, Germany and Sweden have also made additional funds available. In the meantime projects in Senegal, Pakistan and the Solomon Islands have been certified for financing by the fund. 22 million dollars will be made available, a modest start. In developing nations in particular there is still a need to create institutions which can deal effectively

with carbon trading issues. Those private enterprises that are involved need some kind of certainty in the planning process, which they don't really have as things stand at the moment. This is also the case with other aspects of national and international energy policy. If, after the failure of Cancún to secure a binding agreement, a legally binding treaty to replace the Kyoto Protocol is adopted in Durban, then the ratification process among signatory nations could still take years to be completed. The result could be an international patchwork of legal provisions, something particularly feared by business leaders, according to a survey by the consultancy firm Accenture which was published in Spiegel magazine. A possible alternative would be a system of import duties aimed at reducing unfair competition both nationally and regionally.

DIFFERENT INTERESTS

As far as the USA is concerned, hopes that The U.S. President's room for mano-Barack Obama might be able to achieve more on environmental policy than his predecessor and be more open to internationally-binding through the Senate. agreements appear to have been dashed.

euvre at home appears to be limited, despite his good intentions. He failed to get his energy and climate policy bill

The U.S. President's room for manoeuvre at home appears to be limited, despite his good intentions. He failed to get his energy and climate policy bill through the Senate in summer, and the new majority there suggests that this will not change. Cancún chief negotiator Todd Stern did however reiterate Obama's promise from Copenhagen to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases by 17 per cent in comparison to 2005 by the year 2020. On the subject of the main sticking points of the Kyoto Protocol he made it clear that his country did not sign the Protocol and so would not be adopting a position on whether it made sense for it to continue. According to Stern, "That is for the Kyoto signatories to decide." However, in the run-up to COP16 some discreet negotiations aimed at reconciling differences of opinion do appear to have taken place, not least with China. Analysts such as Daniel Weiss from the Center for American Progress doubt, however, that this will lead to a change in approach before the presidential elections in 2012.

The position of developing and emerging nations is clear: they do not want any limitations to be placed on their future growth and argue that it is the industrialized nations which have brought the world's climate to the brink of disaster. This is basically the point Hu Tao of the Policy Research Center for Environment and Economy was making on December 7th, 2010 in the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung: "Why am I only allowed to produce around four tonnes of CO₂ per year while you Europeans can produce over 12 tonnes? And an American 22 tonnes? Why do you have that right and I don't?" He said Europeans were prepared to do more than North Americans - "America should sign the Kyoto Protocol" - but this was by no means enough. They should be more flexible, especially on the issue of technology transfer. However, these arguments fail to recognise that China's CO2 emissions, according to the International Energy Agency, are already above the world average and by 2020 will probably have already reached European levels. China's emission levels are currently twice the size of their share of the world's economy. However it is hoped that China will aim to double its spending on the environment in its current five year plan to 2015 compared to the previous plan. The biggest problems will be the country's inefficient energy production and the reliance on coal.

The Europeans haven't really changed their position since Copenhagen. They are proposing to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions by 20 per cent compared to 1990 by the year 2020. If other important countries or country

Germany is even more ambitious: its aim is a 40 per cent reduction by 2020. By the end of 2009 they had already achieved a 29 per cent reduction.

groupings agree to do the same, then the EU Commission has a mandate to increase this goal to an ambitious 30 per cent, but they were not in a position to exercise this option in Cancún. Germany is even more ambitious:

its aim is a 40 per cent reduction by 2020, as stated in the coalition agreement between the Christian Democrats and the Liberal Party, with the help of an ambitious energy programme. According to Environment Minister Norbert Röttgen they had already achieved a 29 per cent reduction by the end of 2009. The target for 2020 is therefore quite realistic.

However, the EU and its member states have made it clear that there will not be any further unilateral concessions. Industry is already struggling under the burden of high energy prices and a switch to using more renewable energy resources and the necessary legislative changes to ensure that this happens will only make matters worse. Even Germany will only be able to continue down its chosen path if there is a worldwide binding climate treaty in place by 2020, according to energy analysts. There is a danger that, if Germany or the EU should place the burden of costs for low carbon emission technology on the economy, then energy-intensive sectors may choose to move abroad. The head of the Federation of German Industries (BDI), Werner Schnappauf, talking about the outcome of the conference, claimed that "The EU will be able to raise its greenhouse gas reduction target to 30 per cent only if all other industrialised and emerging nations also commit to ambitious reduction targets and emission limits. Otherwise we will lose modern production facilities and jobs in Europe and Germany". Also, if some countries make unilateral concessions, other countries may be tempted not to make as much effort to reduce their own emissions.

WHO PAYS WHAT TO WHOM AND BY WHEN?

Mexico's proposal to establish a "Green Fund" in addition to the funds from the Adaptation Fund incorporated in the Kyoto Protocol had fallen on deaf ears in Copenhagen.

Now the Green Fund turned out to be one of the most concrete outcomes of COP16. 30 Those countries that are most in need billion dollars are to be invested in climate protection in developing nations between 2010 and 2012 and it is planned that there of "historical fairness". will be an annual investment of 100 billion

of investment are the ones that have done the least to contribute to climate change. So for many this is a question

dollars by 2020. The moral behind all this is that it is generally accepted that those countries that are most in need of investment are the ones that have done the least to contribute to climate change. So for many this is a question of "historical fairness", which is not an easy issue to deal with.

What is not clear, however, is from whom and how this money is going to be sourced and exactly how these funds will be administered. The World Bank should at least temporarily take on the role of treasurer for the first three years, with distribution policies being monitored by a committee made up of industrialised and developing nations with equal numbers of votes.

Now, of course, everybody has started to do the maths. Europe's chief negotiator Artur Runge-Metzger pointed out in his interim accounts that the European Union has already paid out 2.2 billion of the 7 billion euros which

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had been earmarked for climate protection for the period 2010 to 2012. Around one billion of this had been invested in measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, 735 million in adaptation measures and 562

million in reforestation programmes, among other things. Environment groups everywhere are afraid that new pledges may be calculated using existing funds, that there may be some simple reclassification of funds within development budgets, not to mention creative book-keeping where private investment is involved.

PROGRESS IN FOREST PROTECTION

Forest protection was another subject for debate in Cancún and here again there were some partial successes. According to UN studies, deforestation is still responsible for 18 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions. Here the buzzword is REDD (reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation). Behind this idea lies the principle that those who protect the tropical rainforest and demonstrably help to reduce the destruction of forests should in future be financially compensated. So forest protection as a service to the environment should also be economically worthwhile.

There are some tricky questions too, such as who exactly should profit and how, and what kind of monitoring system is required. It is also important to ensure that speciesrich primary forest is not simply replaced by monotonous plantation trees. Also, many threatened areas lie in regions which have limited governmental controls. However, some countries, such as Brazil and Mexico, are having some success with this programme and are trying to improve the necessary mechanisms. One very important goal is

to ensure that foreign donors get a guarantee that funds donated will in fact be used for their intended purpose. It may also be possible to establish standards, based on practical examples that can then be incorporated into the binding regulations of the relevant UN mechanisms. Not for nothing did Brazil rank first in the Germanwatch Climate Risk Index, especially in light of recent successes in combating the destruction of the tropical rainforest.

For many environmental protection groups this whole mechanism goes against the grain, for example this was part of Bolivia's argument at Cancún. They are afraid that this will encourage the privatisation of forests and could lead to the illegal acquisition of forest land. In their opinion the biggest sufferers would be the indigenous peoples who live in and from the forests. Their participation in any decision-making process on forest protection and the need for a higher degree of transparency are generally seen as the minimum requirements of REDD policy.

AT THE END IT JUST CAME DOWN TO THE "DISSENTERS"

from the 194 nations had struggled with the wording of the final declaration, something which is guite normal for mega-conferences. The normal negotiating process obviously is

Right up until the very end representatives The normal negotiating process obviously is such that the two weeks of negotiations are merely seen as a lead up to a dramatic showdown. Cancún was no exception to this.

such that the two weeks of negotiations are merely seen as a lead up to a dramatic showdown, while behind the scenes the ever-growing spectre of total failure lurks ominously. Cancún was no exception to this, with an agreement amongst the key players only being reached right at the last minute.

Only Bolivia fought to the very end against the solutions that were finally adopted - too little had been done according to their delegate, Pablo Solón Romo, who had sorely tried the patience of the other delegates. He had even gone as far as to describe the climate policies of the industrialised nations as "genocide". Bolivia saw itself as the mouthpiece of the La Vía Campesina initiative, which was founded in 1993 to represent small and medium-sized agricultural producers and which now coordinates the activities of 148 organisations in 69 countries. As part of the so-called "People's Agreement" in Cochabamba in April Bolivia supported a call for developed countries to agree to a binding reduction of their CO₂ emissions of 50 per cent by 2017. A substantially larger "adaptation fund" should then be administered by COP with significant funds going to developing nations. Forest protection policies like REDD were rejected by La Vía Campesina.

To the surprise of many observers, in the end the Bolivians found themselves in an isolated position with their extreme stance on issues. Even their fellow ALBA members (Allianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de América) from Cuba, Venezuela and Ecuador sided with the rest of the international community, who one by one had given their agreement to the protocol. In the end the conference President glossed over Bolivia's objections. To applause from other delegates Patricia Espinosa declared that "consensus does not necessarily have to mean unanimity". in reaction to Bolivia's attempt to stop an agreement being reached at the conference and to exercise a kind of quasi veto. La Paz had clearly gambled on too strong an end-game. At 3.30 in the morning of December 11 the result of the conference finally became official. The Bolivians, however, immediately announced that they would challenge the validity of the resolutions before the UN court and the outcome is far from certain.

Many people have started to seriously question whether these mega-events with tens of thousands of participants are really the ideal vehicle for making real progress, especially when at the end it comes down to a handful of genuine "negotiators". There were 6,300 national and UN delegates at Cancún, while 15,000 representatives from around 300 national and international non-governmental organisations completed the line-up. While pictures and descriptions of conference dynamics can help to position topics firmly in the media spotlight, many reporters and some media formats failed to grasp the complexity of some of the issues, with the result that we saw the usual narrow focus, black and white portrayals and the search for scapegoats when the political decisions sometimes fell short of expectations, especially when those expectations had been dramatised by NGOs with vested interests.

PRAISE FOR THE HOSTS

Mexico was highly-praised for the way it hosted the event. as was Foreign Minister Patricia Espinosa who acted as conference president. Many participants felt that much of the conference's success was due to Mexico's skilful management of the event, its consistently constructive and confidence-building attitude and the way it did not shy away from the spotlight. UN General Secretary Ban Ki Moon also added his own words of praise. Mexico, with its rather low international profile, was happy to receive this recognition, as the country is still constantly compared to the much more high-profile Brazil. It was good for this country which is so stricken by drug-related violence to finally hit the international headlines for positive reasons.

During his inaugural speech at COP16 on November 29, President Felipe Calderón spoke out against the "false dilemma" of seeing growth and climate protection as opposites. "It is totally possible to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases while not only maintaining economic growth but also generating new forms of productivity, growth and job creation in a wave of green development, green growth and sustainability". Calderón told the representatives of 194 nations that the fight against poverty would be afforded the highest priority. The

President had already written in the Konrad- In Mexico, without climate protection Adenauer-Stiftung's publication Die Politische measures the anticipated cost of envi-Meinung that the cost of doing nothing is higher than the cost of targeted action. In

ronmental damage would be six per cent of GDP.

the case of Mexico, without climate protection measures the anticipated cost of environmental damage would be six per cent of GDP until mid-century, while the ongoing costs of environmental mitigation measures would only reach 0.56 per cent.

The President has declared climate protection to be one of his priorities. He has consistently taken advantage of international summits to remind the international community of their collective responsibilities, most recently at the G20 summit in Toronto, and before that at the summit of African leaders in the Ugandan capital, Kampala and at the opening of the Bonn climate talks in mid-2010, alongside German Chancellor Angela Merkel. In Bonn the President said that the current economic difficulties should not divert the world's attention from a set of problems which it only has one chance at resolving. Foreign Minister Espinosa conducted intensive shuttle diplomacy in order to get agreement on common policies, at least within Latin America. In July she also visited key countries in Asia to discuss their support for Cancún.

THE EXAMPLE OF MEXICO, AN EMERGING NATION

Mexico has consistently placed itself in the middle, on the one hand warning the industrialised nations that they need to redouble their efforts towards reducing greenhouse gases and at the same time speaking out in favour of concrete commitments on the part of the emerging and developing nations. The country took the lead by committing to a 30 per cent reduction in its own greenhouse emissions by 2020. Mexico also continues to advocate international emissions trading and a second phase of the Kyoto Protocol. However, the country is only responsible for 1.6 per cent of worldwide CO₂ emissions – even an ambitious programme with a focus on renewable energies would be no more than a drop in the ocean in world climate terms.

The Mexican government has drawn up a Special Climate Change Programme (PECC) for the period 2009 to 2012, where the country's particular vulnerability is analysed. According to this programme, 15 per cent of the nation's territory and 68.2 per cent of the population are at increased

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risk, while over 70 per cent of GDP could be affected. More than twenty million Mexicans live in areas which are affected by tropical storms. The country's geographic location between two oceans, along with its climatic

and hydrological conditions, means that the long-neglected subject of climate protection has now taken centre-stage. Special "Risk Atlases" will detail vulnerability levels until 2012, and the programme will include the responsibilities of the federal states and launch a Programme of Environmental Reform.

The road ahead is shown by a draft bill proposed by PAN Senator Alberto Cárdenas Jiménez. Central to this is a stable legal framework for innovation in the areas of renewable

energy, energy-saving and CO₂ reduction, and he sets a clear target of reducing CO₂ by 52 million tonnes by the vear 2012. He suggests setting up a Climate Commission with wide-ranging authority in order to implement these measures. Material resources could be streamlined using a kind of national Green Fund which would also accept international contributions. In addition, a national register of emissions should be set up and a market created for emissions trading, with clear sanctions being applied in the case of any violations. Energy efficiency and the efficient use of resources must also be significantly increased for the sake of sustainable development. But at the same time Mexico needs considerable assistance if they are to improve their own monitoring systems.

NATURAL DISASTERS HELP TO RAISE AWARENESS

Extreme climate situations in recent times have helped to focus public opinion in the country on the issue of climate change, and awareness of environmental issues is growing. Every year more than 500 people lose their lives in Mexico as a result of natural disasters, while over a million people lose all their worldly goods, and infrastructure damage runs into the billions. In 2010 hurricane Alex laid waste to the north of the country and the industrial city of Monterrey.

The emergency services have recorded a There have been alternating floods significant increase in such events over the last ten years. Rainfall has become much more irregular and therefore harder to

and widespread droughts with devastating consequences. Scientific studies point to ever more dramatic changes.

predict than before. There have been alternating floods and widespread droughts with devastating consequences for agriculture. Scientific studies point to ever more dramatic changes and suggest that sustained temperature rises will have a significant impact on Mexico's biodiversity and not least on the country's tropical rainforests. A study entitled The Economics of Climate Change in Latin America and the Caribbean, published by the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and The Caribbean (CEPAL) at the end of 2009, estimated the annual costs of natural disasters in the region to have already reached 8.6 billion dollars, and they are growing steadily.

Awareness of environmental issues in the country is still not that widespread. Mexican car buyers can tell you exactly how powerful a car's engine is, but they can't tell you anything about environmental standards. Subsidised, cheap petrol has done a lot to ensure that the well-to-do classes in the county opt for prestigious cars whose average consumption is above 15 litres. Supermarkets give away mountains of plastic carrier bags free of charge, while Mexicans would only choose to make even the shortest journey on foot in exceptional cases.

In residential areas of the capital, around 40 per cent of the water doesn't even reach the 22 million inhabitants. Moreover, only a fraction of used water is repurified.

Water wastage is legendary: in residential areas of the capital, which increasingly have to put up with restricted water supplies during dry spells, around 40 per cent of the

water doesn't even reach the 22 million inhabitants. It has to be pumped over long distances, and much of it is simply lost along the way. Decision-makers see no political benefit in investing in the country's ailing infrastructure. Only a fraction of used water is repurified. Massive subsidies on water prices, as with electricity, do nothing to help to encourage people to use this precious commodity sparingly. Having your car washed every morning by one of the household staff is still the norm in Mexico's "better" areas, as is hosing down the pavements.

A SOMEWHAT QUIET PROTAGONIST

At the same time Mexico, with its still substantial but quickly declining reserves of non-renewable energy resources, especially oil, is particularly interested in the development and use of renewable energy and is open to ideas on the subject of energy conversion. The urgency of the debate is also due to the fact that Mexico still derives 40 per cent of budget revenue from the sale of oil. This is also its biggest source of foreign currency revenue, far more than the amount sent home by Mexicans living abroad or income from tourism. This is without taking income from the activities of organised crime into account.

As a result of various taboos in connection with the state-run energy concern PEMEX, the Calderón government's first attempt at energy reform right at the beginning of its six-year term, has achieved far less than

is needed and is crying out for a reform of the reform. This debate has taken on new immediacy following BP's oil disaster in the Gulf of Mexico and the sinking of the Deepwater Horizon platform. Mexico's shallow oil deposits, such as those of its most important oilfield Cantarell, can be extracted cheaply but are starting to run drastically low. To develop new oilfields they would need to use exactly that deep sea drilling technology which is now attracting so much criticism.

According to experts, Mexico has huge potential to exploit water and wind power as well as bio-fuels. Especially the south of the country and the state of Oaxaca, with its high levels of thermal activity on the narrow strip between the Pacific and the Caribbean, seem to offer the guarantee of excellent results. The north of the country, with its huge areas of desert and semi-desert, has huge potential for generating solar energy, and Wind energy and solar installations Mexican politicians are already investigating this technology in the USA and Europe. Wind energy and solar installations have nected to the national grid.

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supply smaller communities directly without the need to be connected to the national grid, and there are a lot of these communities. In trying to achieve a sensible balance of energy supplies Mexico does not want to discount nuclear power as an option, and the Laguna Verde power station currently makes a significant contribution to the country's energy security. The picture is completed by the substantial uranium deposits, which however require significant levels of investment to extract.

On the other hand they are a bit more reticent about producing bio-fuels, as there is a fear that traditional food production, especially maize, could be threatened, which would have a significant impact on the poorest sections of the population. While agriculture only produces four per cent of the country's GDP, it provides 15 per cent of the active population with jobs. Climate-sensitive maize is grown on 50 per cent of Mexico's agricultural land. A recent report by the World Bank concluded: "The climate expectations for Mexico in 2020 suggest a moderate reduction in the area of land on which maize can be cultivated and a growth in those areas where it cannot."

Mexico's problems and the potential solutions are not untypical of many developing nations. Its readiness to play a constructive part internationally, to recognize and accept its own responsibilities and to act as a mediator between developed and developing nations was clear for all to see in Cancún. Mexico's belief in multilateralism and the UN has existed for decades. In spite of its size, with 112 million inhabitants and a GDP that almost places it amongst the top ten countries in the world, Mexico does not always see the need to be at the forefront. This is seen as a good thing by many observers on the international stage. Climate protection is a good example here of how a "quiet protagonist" can still achieve success.