

Kigali climate change

Lisa Friedman reports on federal climate and environmental policy from Washington. She has broken multiple stories about the Trump administration's efforts to repeal climate change regulations and limit the use of science in policymaking. More about Lisa Friedman

Coral Davenport covers energy and environmental policy for the climate desk from Washington. She was part of a Times team that was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize for distinguished public service journalism in 2020, and part of a Times team that received Columbia University's John B. Oakes award for distinguished environmental journalism in 2018. More about Coral Davenport

Nairobi, December 2016- For many people across the world, the 15th of October, 2016 was just another normal day going about their usual business to accomplish their to-do lists for the day. Perhaps unknown to many outside the world of "environment" and all its jargon, something extremely significant was happening in Africa, in the beautiful Rwanda. Delegates from all over the world had convened in the capital, Kigali from October 10-15, for the 28th Meeting of the Parties to the Montreal Protocol.

The Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer was designed to reduce the production and consumption of ozone depleting substances in order to reduce their abundance in the atmosphere, and thereby protect the earth's fragile ozone Layer. The protocol was agreed on September 16th in 1987 and entered into force on January 1st in 1989.

A unique feature of the protocol is an adjustment provision that enables the Parties to the Protocol to respond quickly to new scientific information, in a bid to accelerate the reductions required on chemicals already covered by the Protocol. These adjustments are then automatically applicable to all countries that ratified the Protocol. Developing countries are given more time to comply with the phase out decisions, and also they receive funding from the Multilateral Fund to facilitate compliance with the Protocol's provisions.

The 2015 Africa Adaptation Gap Report observes that for a below 20C global warming scenario the agriculture sector will be hit by up to 40% yield declines, and result in a 25 - 90% increase in incidences of undernourishment putting 50% of Africa's population under risk of undernourishment, not to mention massive economic losses given that the sector employs up to 64 per cent labor and contributes up to 34 per cent to GDP on average.

"Africa is a continent that is deeply vulnerable to climate change. We are witnessing disastrous droughts -- our people are losing lives. We need to address climate change if we are to address poverty," said Vincent Biruta, Rwanda's Minister of Natural Resources.

Environmental experts note that the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete

the Ozone Layer could be the single largest real contribution the world has made so far towards keeping the global temperature rise "well below" 2 degrees Celsius, a target agreed at the Paris climate conference last year; this amendment is a huge step forward to achieving that target.

The talks in Kigali may not have attracted as much attention as the Paris event last year, but the outcome from the meeting is expected to have even greater impact on Parties' efforts to slow down climate change.

The new deal includes specific targets and timetables to replace HFCs with more planet-friendly alternatives, provisions to prohibit or restrict countries that have ratified the protocol or its amendments from trading in controlled substances with states that are yet to ratify it, and an agreement by rich countries to help finance the transition of poor countries to alternative safer products. Notably, African countries opted to phase down the chemicals faster than required, citing the grave threats the region faces due to climate change.

Top officials from the chemical industry, including producers of the chemicals, manufacturers of equipment that use HFCs were also in Kigali; a demonstration that companies throughout the HFCs supply chain support strong global action on these harmful substances.

The final deal divided the world economies into three groups, each with a target phasedown date. The richest countries, including the United States and those in the European Union, will reduce the production and consumption of HFCs from 2019. Much of the rest of the world, including China, Brazil and all of Africa, will freeze the use of HFCs by 2024. A small group of the world's hottest countries such as Bahrain, India, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates have the most lenient schedule and will freeze HFCs use by 2028.

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