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## G20 Leaders Agree, Broadly, on Climate Change

By Bryan Walsh

Environmental groups hoping for concrete action on climate change were left disappointed by talks at the Group of 20 summit on Friday. Although world leaders managed to forge some agreement on global warming — despite news of Iran's secret nuclear facility eclipsing most of the discussion at the Pittsburgh summit — greens said little of substance was actually achieved. "They haven't really produced anything that is relevant in terms of active progress," says Kim Carstensen, head of the World Wildlife Fund's Global Climate Initiative. "I'm not that impressed."

The main climate question for the G20 was how to finance global carbon emission reductions, and how to help developing nations that stand to lose the most from climate change adapt to a warmer world. That latter issue is a chief sticking point for the ongoing U.N. climate negotiations, in which governments are working to produce a successor to the Kyoto Protocol at the Copenhagen summit in December. While poor nations have demanded funds to help them develop sustainably and prepare for warming, rich nations have so far been slow to promise money. "Climate financing is going to be absolutely key if we're going to have a deal in Copenhagen," says Bill McKibben, an environmentalist and author who heads the climate advocacy group [350.org](http://350.org). ([See pictures of the world's most polluted places.](#))

But G20 leaders put no specific numbers on the table, just a vague statement of intention that did little to clarify murky global climate negotiations: "Public and private financial resources to support mitigation and adaptation in developing countries need to be scaled up urgently and substantially," the statement said. Negotiators also eliminated a section of the agreement that would have specified that funding for climate adaptation had to come in addition to existing levels of foreign aid. Instead, the G20 leaders directed their finance ministers to return to the issue later in the year — with just three months to go before Copenhagen. "You do want your finance ministries working on this," says Jake Schmidt, international climate policy director for the Natural Resources Defense Council. "But they need to be on the hook for this, or they will lose the option to carry it into Copenhagen."

Still, the summit wasn't a total loss for greens. President Barack Obama introduced the idea of phasing out fossil fuel subsidies over time, to help improve energy efficiency and "transition to a 21st-century clean energy economy." Phasing out subsidies for fossil fuels would save money — the Environmental Law Institute estimated that the U.S. paid out \$72 billion in subsidies between 2002 and 2008 — and

correct a market that has been warped against low-carbon alternatives precisely at a time when nations are supposed to be cutting carbon. But again, specifics of a concrete plan were wanting in Obama's speech. There was no mention of a timetable, and the proposal itself has little to do with the ongoing climate negotiations. "It's a welcome initiative, but no one will underestimate the challenge that countries from the U.S. to India will face actually doing this," says Alden Meyer, director of strategy and policy for the Union of Concerned Scientists. ([See pictures of the effects of global warming.](#))

The G20 summit ended a whirlwind week for climate news that began on Sept. 22 with a high-level U.N. summit on warming. Before "Climate Week" began, the U.S. Senate made intimations that it would not likely vote on a carbon cap-and-trade bill before the year was up, dimming the chances for a global deal at Copenhagen. But, then, China pledged to improve energy efficiency, while progress was made toward crafting a way to use global carbon markets to slow tropical deforestation. That gave environmentalists some hope. "Overall, I still feel better than I did a week ago," said Carstensen. "We had 100 leaders in the U.N. in New York come together and they actually talked about climate change in a significantly committed way. We have the door open."

The question is whether world leaders will walk through it in time. In the U.S. and elsewhere, more is being done to grapple with global warming than ever before. Tighter energy efficiency standards are being passed, nations like Japan are pledging deep emission cuts and hundreds of billions of dollars are being spent on green stimulus for recovering economies. But the world is late — and time is short. "Our political method has so far failed to grapple with reality," says McKibben. "We have to understand that the negotiations aren't just between the U.S., the E.U. and China. We're trying to negotiate with chemistry and physics — and they don't negotiate."

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