



David Cameron's welcome pledge to step up cuts in carbon emissions boosts his government's green credentials, but its actions at home and abroad tell a different story. As David Cameron finally aims to put some muscle behind his supposed green credentials, by backing more ambitious domestic cuts in CO₂ over the coming years, it's worth noting that there's still a fair amount of two-faced behaviour from his government.

In particular, the UK's performance internationally has been more in the spirit of good old British neo-colonialism, that is: "Do as we say, not as we do."

While this week's commitment to achieve significant cuts by 2030 is to be praised, let's not forget that the UK has failed to meet previous pledges to cut emissions. In April, it was revealed that in fact the UK's CO₂ emissions did not fall by 28 million tonnes between 1990 and 2008, as the official record indicates, but rose by a substantial 100 million tonnes.

The UK has been a leading advocate for highly flawed carbon markets to offset the disparities between rich and poor country emissions. We've already been experimenting with carbon trading through what's known as the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM). Yet the CDM has come under extensive criticism for structural flaws that keep carbon prices low, and effectively provide a "get out of jail free" mechanism for high-emissions nations like the UK. A 2008

working paper by two Stanford University academics concluded that "between one and two-thirds of all the total CDM offsets do not represent actual emission cuts".

Meanwhile, the CDM has enabled polluting industries to buy cheap carbon credits to meet their emissions commitments and avoid shifting to more costly low carbon technologies, and has been slammed for backing projects that have had devastating impacts on local communities.

Nonetheless, the Department for Energy and Climate Change recently announced it is providing £7m to a new global scheme administered by the World Bank, designed to enable countries to set up their own carbon trading schemes.

The UK has also failed to live up to financial commitments to help developing countries deal with the effects of climate change. Since the industrial revolution, the UK has contributed disproportionately to the excessive build up of greenhouse gas emissions in the atmosphere, and (for better or for worse) constrained the ability of the world's poorest countries to develop along similar lines. Even if we were to discount our historical track record, the fact remains that we emit more than 9 tonnes of CO₂ per capita every year, compared, for example, with just 0.3 tonnes for the average Bangladeshi.

For this reason, the UK government does acknowledge that we must shoulder the lion's share of responsibility for paying to help poor countries cope with the impacts of climate change. It pledged £1.5bn at the UN climate summit in Copenhagen in December 2009, to be paid in 2010-2012.

So one would assume this money would be forthcoming in the form of grants to developing countries. But the UK's contribution for climate adaption has been made solely through a World Bank fund, the pilot programme for climate resilience, which in turn makes loans to developing countries. In other words, the UK is piling further debt onto poor countries, so that they can pay for the damage wrought by our own profligate use of CO₂.

Meanwhile, the UN Adaptation Fund, the source by which poor countries can most easily access grants for projects to help them cope with the devastating impacts of climate change, has yet to receive a single penny from the UK, despite significant public pressure.

So where does this take us? In keeping with its surprise push to rapidly reduce its emissions, will the UK now take progressive steps internationally? One of the few positives from the UN talks in Cancún last December was the decision to "mobilise" \$100bn for a new Green Climate Fund which developing countries can access to help meet the costs of adapting to climate change and pursuing low carbon growth. Just how this works in practice is still very much up for grabs, and this is where the concern lies.

Understandably, the main beneficiaries, developing countries, want the fund to be governed democratically and backed by guaranteed public money from rich nations, so that they can't escape their pledges when times are tough. They want the fund to be flexible, and accessible for investments that won't necessarily see returns, such as sea-wall defences, as well as those with income-generating potential such as renewable energy projects.

But Britain seems to prefer the traditional World Bank model – donor-controlled, top-down, relying on private sources of funding, with income-generating potential alone.

This two-faced approach to climate change, both domestically and internationally, risks entrenching the British government firmly within the camp of the world's worst climate rogues. With the prospect for an international climate agreement already hanging in the balance at the UN summit in Durban later this year, we can ill afford the UK tipping us into a political abyss of foot-dragging, false solutions, and fake financial pledges.