

# Briefing

## Climate change

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## Policy pointers

**Successful climate diplomacy begins at home.** For a nation's efforts in climate diplomacy to be successful, climate change must be a core national interest, with buy in from senior government officials.

**National and global perspectives must be linked.** Once climate diplomats acquire the capacity to manage political trade-offs and balance conflicting development goals, they can act to link national and global perspectives.

**Climate change should be mainstreamed into development planning.** Mainstreaming increases the implementation of domestic climate change policies and officials' ability to gain a comprehensive knowledge of climate change as a core national interest, thus enhancing the performance of climate diplomats.

**Engaging the media is vital for effective climate diplomacy.** Climate diplomats require appropriate communication skills to engage effectively with the media.

## Engaging effectively in climate diplomacy: policy pointers from the Gambia

In 2013, the Gambia appointed the first special climate envoy from a least developed country (LDC). While such appointments have become commonplace in developed countries, LDC diplomats have previously lacked the influence and capacity to engage in climate diplomacy successfully. Gambian officials have identified several best practices for successful engagement, including establishing climate change as a core national interest, mainstreaming climate change into development planning and engaging with the media. With a view to help build the political conditions for the next global climate agreement in 2015, and to facilitate international coordination and cooperation beyond the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), this brief outlines four policy pointers to help other LDC governments improve their officials' abilities to have an impact on this diplomatic arena.

Over the past two decades, governments have struggled to craft a comprehensive regulatory system for managing climate change. Their efforts have produced a complex of tangentially connected regimes, including institutions such as the World Bank; legal regimes and agreements such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC); expert assessments such as those developed by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC); and various bilateral and unilateral initiatives.<sup>1</sup>

To engage effectively with this complex system of climate forums, governments must go beyond established, more reactive forms of diplomacy to take an approach that merges climate and foreign policy in creative and proactive ways. Proponents of this approach have termed the practice 'climate diplomacy'.<sup>2</sup>

As a mix of climate and foreign policy, climate diplomacy serves as the interface between national interest debates and international cooperation on climate change. It strives to generate an accurate assessment of other countries' interests and intentions while finding space for agreement.<sup>3</sup> In UNFCCC negotiations, nations will commit to the next global climate agreement in 2015, which will come into effect in 2020. At present, the ultimate goal of climate diplomacy is to build the political conditions for this international agreement and to facilitate international coordination and cooperation beyond the UNFCCC.<sup>4</sup>

### Climate diplomacy in practice

Developed nations and their negotiation blocs have long practised climate diplomacy in an effort to shape international negotiations to deliver outcomes that are consistent with their priorities.

## *For climate diplomacy to succeed, climate change must become a core national interest*

In contrast, developing country groups, such as the LDCs, have often lacked sufficient capacity to engage actively in climate diplomacy. Consequently, they have had limited influence in shaping negotiations.

As the Gambia's special climate envoy, Pa Ousman Jarju will engage in climate diplomacy on behalf of the country and the LDC group. Mr Jarju will conduct diplomatic missions to establish consensus and understanding with senior government officials and other actors. His goal is to build a comprehensive climate regime that inspires

stronger ambition for emission reductions and greater cooperation on adaptation and other issues of importance to the LDCs. Gambian officials have identified several best practices for successful engagement in climate diplomacy, which can help other LDC governments to engage in climate diplomacy effectively.

### **Successful climate diplomacy begins at home**

Governments must thoroughly understand how the issue of climate change sits within its national interest debate. For climate diplomacy to succeed, climate change must become a core national interest in political and diplomatic channels, with the engagement of senior ministers and government officials. The most effective climate diplomacy takes a holistic approach to inclusiveness and has the power to involve all state and non-state actors.

Mobilising capacity and strategic focus for effective engagement requires reform of internal strategic decision-making systems, significant reallocation of human and funding resources,

#### **Box 1. Mainstreaming climate change in the Gambia**

The Gambia has successfully integrated climate change issues and risks as a cross-cutting theme into its medium-term development plan, Programme for Accelerated Growth and Employment (PAGE 2012–2015). To carry forward the actions mandated by this exercise, the Gambia has also developed and presented a Climate Change Priority Action Programme (CCPAP). Among other things, the CCPAP will work to develop a national low-carbon strategy, to integrate climate change into the basic and higher education curriculum, and to address the country's climate data needs.

training and coordination of generalist diplomats and a strong central capacity to provide support and timely content for influencing.<sup>3</sup> Enhancing diplomatic capacity needs to go beyond the current norm of building technical knowledge on climate change and environmental law and policy. Capacity building needs to reach the highest level to coordinate and manage political trade-offs while also balancing conflicting economic, energy, climate change and diplomatic goals.

Gaining domestic constituencies that see climate action as a core national interest builds the authority for government ministers to act as effective climate diplomats in two ways. First, domestic engagement assures diplomats that they are articulating national sentiments internationally. Second, strong action at home gives diplomats external credibility, as they 'practice what they preach'. Rooting climate action firmly in the national interest debate can also be enhanced by the practice of mainstreaming.

### **Linking national and global perspectives through climate diplomacy**

Once climate diplomats acquire the capacity to manage political trade-offs and balance conflicting development goals, they can act to link national and global perspectives. Effective climate diplomats possess a rich understanding of their own national interest debate and can therefore ensure their national priorities are reflected and understood in the arena of international climate change negotiations. Climate diplomacy is essential for making the links between domestic, foreign and international climate policy.

Global actions in human rights, environment, trade and gender have always involved a degree of reciprocity between global, regional and national activity and leadership.<sup>5</sup> In the context of the UNFCCC, creating a new international climate regime, which combines top-down direction and bottom-up contributions can only work if it rests on strong national climate change programmes.<sup>5</sup> These in turn must be rooted in domestic political consensus and national development processes. Progress at all levels will provide positive synergies and encourage greater ambition.

There is no inherent tension between bottom-up and top-down approaches. But if one is proposed as a substitute for the other, merging the two approaches could be challenging. There are several measures that countries — especially LDCs — can take to navigate these complex interfaces, namely through climate diplomacy. To date, the majority of efforts regarding climate diplomacy have predominately focused on

technical support and capacity building to create a more enabling environment for UNFCCC negotiators. There is, however, considerable potential to engage strategically with the broader international climate regime, and involve the wider diplomatic community to help integrate climate change more deeply into the core national interest.

### **Mainstreaming climate change into development planning**

Generally speaking, mainstreaming is the informed integration of a relevant value, theme or concern into the decision-making processes of institutions that drive national, local and sectoral development policy, rules, plans, investment and action.<sup>6</sup> These institutions include all sectors — finance, planning, health, agriculture and environment — at national and sub-national levels.<sup>7</sup> In the climate change context, mainstreaming refers to the incorporation of climate change considerations into established or ongoing development programmes, policies or management strategies, rather than the separate development of adaptation and mitigation initiatives.<sup>8</sup> For climate change adaptation and mitigation actions to be sustainable and applicable on a wide scale, governments must incorporate, integrate or mainstream them into their policy apparatus.

Mainstreaming climate change into national development policies ensures consistency between the needs of climate change responses, poverty eradication and economic development. If a nation addresses these three aims separately, climate change mitigation and adaptation policies could inadvertently conflict with development and poverty policies. Alternatively, development policies could increase vulnerability to climatic factors, resulting in maladaptation. Effective mainstreaming and integration of climate change into policy and development frameworks is critical to successful poverty eradication, and should therefore be placed at the core of national development policy, planning and practice.<sup>9</sup>

At the national level, mainstreaming shifts responsibility for climate change from a single ministry or agency to all sectors of government, civil society and the private sector. Thus, mainstreaming climate change into development helps address issues of institutional architecture at the national level. The mainstreaming process should define which ministry or department is the nation's lead agency while simultaneously distributing responsibility across sectors, encouraging dialogue, emphasising effective coordination and promoting systematic knowledge sharing. By efficiently and effectively implementing climate change policies, measures and activities, mainstreaming directly supports climate diplomacy. (See Box 1.)

### **Box 2. Climate change media coverage in Africa**

Although it is responsible for less than four per cent of global carbon emissions, climate experts are unanimous that Africa's limited resource capacity makes it most vulnerable to the negative effects of climate change.<sup>13</sup> Yet there is little coverage of climate change issues: the African media is seemingly bogged down by the fear of factual and narrative challenges, inadequate comprehension of climate terminology, the unmistakable absence of editorial support and obsolete media tools and resources.<sup>14</sup> As a result, the African media seems to have left climate change reporting in the hands of international media corporations. But is the international media interested in pushing the African climate justice agenda? While most African countries do not have clear policies on environmental sustainability and management, experts believe there is more to African climate change discourse. What about the causality story and developed countries' reluctance to commit to emission cuts? Developing countries argue that this is a major dimension of the climate change narrative.

Recently, African journalists and communication officers on climate change unanimously agreed on the need for a strong network of environment and climate change media that will inform on environmental issues from an African perspective. The resulting Pan-African Media Alliance for Climate Change (PAMACC) aspires to tell the African climate story in a refreshingly lucid, communally engaging and technically robust manner.<sup>14</sup>

The media needs to probe beneath the surface for news and dig deeper to find the intricacies behind current environmental events and problems. More investigatory reporting by the media would inform all stakeholders, including the public, while also putting pressure on governments to tackle the emerging challenges of climate change.<sup>15</sup> Governments at all levels must recognise and partner with the media to drive home mitigation and adaptation measures and set the agenda for climate justice for Africa at international negotiation tables. Attracting true partners within the media sector and beyond will help governments address climate change issues and develop practical solutions to overcome the systemic public apathy towards climate science and climate change journalism on the continent.

Mainstreaming increases the implementation of domestic climate change policies and officials' comprehensive knowledge of climate change as a core national interest. This helps enhance the performance of climate diplomats, who are better able to form strategic alliances in negotiations, identify what foreign policy concessions can be made, articulate priorities and ultimately decide on compromise packages.<sup>4</sup> With this expertise and the support of ministers responsible for climate change, climate diplomats can engage heads of state and other high-level foreign policy officials on climate change at influential international meetings, such as the United Nations Secretary-General's Summit on Climate Change.

### **Engaging with the media for effective climate diplomacy**

Researchers have conducted many studies concerning the representation of climate change in the media. Specifically, using the mass media for scientists' and policymakers' climate change communications to the general public has been a

subject of major interest because of the implications for creating national variation in public understanding of a global environmental issue.<sup>10</sup> Public understanding and opinion are highly significant in defining national action, particularly when shaping government policy.

To date, almost all research on climate change communications has focused on Western social contexts and norms. There has been little consideration of how the issue is being framed in countries with different macro-scale normalising values in the public sphere. When media framing confuses rather than clarifies scientific understanding of anthropogenic climate change, it can allow policy actors to defray responsibility and delay action.<sup>11</sup> Thus, news media coverage plays a significant role in shaping possibilities for future climate policy implementation (see Box 2).

Climate diplomats therefore require appropriate communications skills to engage effectively with the media. Appropriate and effective communication is a prerequisite to diplomacy — and climate diplomacy in particular. It reduces the risk of confused messages, allows for announcements to be spaced out for maximum impact, and can ensure that messages are timed to coincide with audience interest and receptiveness. Diplomats must interact honestly with the public via the media, to explain the importance of their work and make it relevant. Although engaging with the media has its risks, the greatest risk is to be absent from the conversation.<sup>12</sup>

## Conclusions

Countries will always meet challenges and barriers to climate diplomacy and must make all efforts to lift them. Diplomats from developing countries — particularly from LDCs — often struggle to engage effectively in national debates

and international negotiations. They may lack the capacity to marshal technical and strategic information or the negotiation skills to influence national and international diplomatic agendas, often as a result of limited resources and their position in the existing geopolitical landscape.<sup>4</sup>

Although building these capabilities seems straightforward on the surface, delivering them requires significant institutional changes to governmental and non-governmental systems. In many countries climate change is housed in more than one ministry, resulting in conflicting mandates and sporadic policy implementation. Most countries have yet to embed climate change sufficiently into their decision-making machinery to deliver an effective climate diplomacy strategy. This is beyond the capacity of any single organisation, ministry or department, no matter how powerful they are.<sup>3</sup>

While LDCs will continue to face barriers when engaging in climate diplomacy, working to implement some of the policy pointers outlined in this brief can help governments ensure that their climate diplomats are as effective as possible. Furthermore, mainstreaming climate change can enable the acquisition of resources and capacity for implementing climate change, which would lift one of the major constraints to climate diplomacy. Marshalling technical and strategic support to develop the diplomatic skills necessary to engage effectively in international relations will go a long way towards enabling LDC governments to actively participate in climate diplomacy.

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## Knowledge Products

The International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) promotes sustainable development, linking local priorities to global challenges. We support some of the world's most vulnerable people to strengthen their voice in decision making.

The Gambia's Department of Water Resources oversees the National Meteorological Service, which is responsible for tracking climate data and acting as the focal point for climate change issues, including interacting with the IPCC and UNFCCC.

The Climate and Development Knowledge Network (CDKN) supports decision makers in designing and delivering climate compatible development.

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## Notes

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