



Learning paper

The impacts of COVID-19 on climate diplomacy

Perspectives from the Least Developed Countries

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Introductory bullets

- Billed as a ‘super year’ for climate diplomacy, international efforts to address the climate crisis in 2020 were among the myriad processes affected by COVID-19. Amid worldwide travel restrictions and lockdown measures, climate diplomacy moved to virtual mode.
- The 46 Least Developed Countries (LDCs) are proactive, progressive climate actors. Despite challenges connecting, the chair led the LDC Group through a virtual strategy process in 2020 and directly supported delegates in their efforts to engage. In December, Bhutan – the current chair of the LDC Group in the UN climate negotiations – virtually hosted the first climate summit convened by an LDC.
- Although some LDCs were able to engage through virtual meetings, the frequency and intensity of climate diplomacy declined, and there were delays in processes to form nationally determined contributions and national adaptation plans.
- COVID-19 impacted LDCs’ access to funding for climate priorities, and there is concern that developed countries might redirect their climate finance budgets towards COVID-19 recovery packages.
- LDC Group members face several challenges when engaging in virtual meetings, including poor quality internet connection, inadequate equipment, a lack of IT infrastructure and simultaneous translation services, all of which is compounded by different time zones.
- Virtual meetings relevant to climate diplomacy focused on sharing information, with most decision making postponed. With COVID-19 restrictions continuing, virtual meetings are likely to continue being the norm, at least during the first half of 2021.
- Policymakers must carefully consider how to make international decisions in a manner that is both inclusive and fair to facilitate timely action to address the climate crisis. Given that work will continue virtually, there must be a concerted effort to overcome barriers to access.
- We recommend that policymakers at all levels enable progressive leadership, facilitate consensus-based decisions and support access to virtual spaces.

Introduction

In 2020, international efforts to address the climate crisis were among the myriad of processes affected by COVID-19, the disease caused by the new coronavirus. With crises breaking on two fronts, we sought to understand how the poorest countries' ability to engage in climate diplomacy has changed and how to best support their efforts as international discussions begin in 2021.

The World Health Organization first became aware of the virus in December 2019. Following its rapid transmission to people in nearly every country, COVID-19 was declared a pandemic in March 2020.¹ The tragic outbreak struck during what had been billed as a 'super year' for climate diplomacy. As the Paris Agreement – adopted in 2015 – entered its implementation phase, countries were due to announce their enhanced nationally determined contributions (NDCs) to achieve its goals. Under the United Kingdom's presidency, the United Nations (UN) climate negotiations were expected to agree key decisions, culminating in the Glasgow Climate Summit in November 2020.

Success would have required a tremendous amount of diplomatic engagement. The activities involved in climate diplomacy are wide ranging. Countries coordinate national priorities, plans and strategies to assist with the global effort, and work with other nations to form group-wide approaches and positions. They work with others to implement their visions, and negotiate to reach bilateral, regional and global decisions both within and outside the UN climate change negotiations. Diplomats use strategic messaging and interactions with the media to reach publics across countries. This is climate diplomacy in practice; and it is crucial for an effective international response to climate change.

The 46 Least Developed Countries (LDCs) are classified by the UN as the world's poorest.² Heavily exposed to climate impacts, they work together in the UN climate negotiations and during other climate-related diplomatic forums. Committed to securing robust international climate action, the LDCs submit plans to reduce emissions, increase adaptation capacity and advance progress towards sustainable development, leading by example to show high-emitting countries that enhanced ambition is possible. However, the burden should not rest with them.

Understanding how the pandemic impacts the LDCs' ability to engage in climate diplomacy is paramount to ensuring an inclusive decision-making process as international discussions resume in 2021. This learning paper begins by providing a theoretical framework for how LDCs influenced climate diplomacy before the pandemic. We then delve into LDC experiences of climate diplomacy during COVID-19 by means of a survey. We conclude with recommendations for how policymakers from the United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Change (UNFCCC), the international community and the LDC Group might support LDCs to effectively engage in the new format of virtual climate diplomacy and address some of the challenges caused by the pandemic.

Methods and approaches

To understand how the pandemic has impacted the LDCs' ability to engage in climate diplomacy, we started by reviewing the literature and summarising the work already published on climate diplomacy during COVID-19. We then surveyed LDC climate negotiators about their experiences during 2020.

We grounded our understanding of climate diplomacy on a theory of change – an approach to thinking about how change occurs. Beginning in 2016, we worked with LDC negotiators to develop a theory of change that maps actions the world's poorest countries could take to influence climate diplomacy.³ The theory, which draws on our experience and a series of publications co-authored with climate diplomats from The Gambia, Ethiopia and Bhutan, speaks to four 'spheres of influence', postulating that actions taken within these spheres culminate in an increased impact on international climate change decision making. Defining these areas and the actions taken within them, thinking through the results chains these actions build, and interrogating the assumptions underlying each link in these chains helped us understand what climate diplomacy looks like in practice and which activities and interactions lead to impact, particularly for the LDCs. The theory of change is the framework we used to analyse the impact of COVID-19 on climate diplomacy.

Survey

When we designed our research plan in mid-2020, we hoped to conduct in-person interviews with LDC delegates. Several meetings remained on the calendar, including an autumn negotiating session and the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) in Glasgow, which would bring together government representatives. In-person interviews would allow us to ask open-ended and tailored questions, overcome the challenges of time zones, tenuous connections, language barriers (we planned to conduct interviews in English and French) and busy schedules. When it became clear that international meetings would not resume in 2020, we had to change our approach.

To solicit the experiences of LDC delegates, we designed a web-based survey and sent out invitations for virtual interviews. We hoped this parallel approach would allow us to efficiently gather as much information as possible.

We designed the survey to overcome the challenges outlined above. At ten questions, which required no more than 20 minutes to complete, the survey was short and manageable for a government official to complete. We translated it into French and housed both the English and French versions on the SurveyMonkey platform. We asked climate negotiators whether and how COVID-19 impacted aspects of their work and about their experiences with virtual meetings related to climate diplomacy. Five of the questions allowed for additional comments or reflections, as did an open-ended question about the biggest impact of COVID-19.

We sent the survey to the UNFCCC national focal points of the 47 LDCs,⁴ contacting every email listed on the UNFCCC website.⁵ This opened up the possibility of receiving multiple responses per country, and there were two respondents from Chad. As well as sending links to the web-based surveys, we attached a Word version, should the recipients have limited internet access.

We received 25 responses from participants in 24 countries.⁶ At over half the LDC Group, this provides a comprehensive cross-section from which to draw observations. Of the 46 LDCs, 24 are Anglophone, 18 Francophone and 4 Lusophone. Our survey respondents reflect this spread: our 25 respondents were from 12 English-speaking, 10 French-speaking and 2 Portuguese-speaking countries. Sixteen surveys were completed in English; nine in French. For the purposes of conducting a holistic analysis, we translated these into English before review. Most surveys were submitted through the web-based link, and four used the Word version. Although not all respondents answered every question, the online survey had a 100% completion rate. This means every respondent clicked through to the final question.

To gather further insight, we planned to conduct a series of virtual interviews with key climate negotiators from the LDC Group. We sent out several invitations, but we were only able to connect with Ziaul Haque (Bangladesh), lead coordinator on mitigation issues in the UN climate negotiations, and Cecilia Silva Bernardo (Angola), lead coordinator on adaptation issues and co-chair of the Adaptation Committee. We were interested in their experiences representing both their nations and the broader LDC Group. These interviews, which took place via Zoom video conference in December 2020, added context to our survey findings and provided important insights on virtual climate diplomacy. Given the prominence Ms Bernardo's and Mr Haque's views would take in the paper, we shared our initial findings

with them and asked if they would like to work together to develop conclusions and recommendation. By publishing as a team, we are able to best use the data gathered from the LDC Group and the thinking of two of its key members.

The figures outlined in this learning paper are based on the survey's results. The information gleaned from the literature review supplements the discussion, while the theory of change gives context to the nature of pre- and post-pandemic climate diplomacy interactions. We summarise our findings in the conclusion and end the paper with recommendations for further study and action by policymakers.

LDC climate diplomacy: actions and influence

The changes brought about by the pandemic have driven home that climate diplomacy is a complex, multifaceted and dynamic issue. It is therefore beyond the capacity of any linear, static model to fully represent its scope. And while each national context is different and there is no set path to influence, their similar economic classifications and positions toward climate change have enabled us to extrapolate parallels between LDCs' approaches to climate diplomacy into a useful overarching theory of change, which we have updated over time.⁷ This is the framework we used to analyse COVID-19's impact on climate diplomacy.

In this section, we outline the four spheres of influence defined in our theory of change and the primary actions involved in each. These actions set forward an approach to climate diplomacy that would increase LDC influence in the pre-pandemic world.

Sphere 1: Diplomatic forums and alliances

The first sphere relates to engaging government representatives in climate diplomacy forums and the alliances they form while making international decisions. The actions described here are most readily ascribed to climate diplomacy and are often considered the most beneficial to increasing influence.

Countries reach formal global decisions and treaties on climate change, like the Paris Agreement, under the auspices of the UNFCCC. Because of this, many of the actions in this area relate to their representation at the negotiations, by sending delegates, diplomats and high-level officials to UNFCCC sessions. Within the UNFCCC, smaller countries band together to increase their influence. They form alliances and negotiating blocs, like the LDC Group. Defining a collective strategy and coordinating positions across the 46 countries that make up the LDC Group requires leadership and proactive member engagement. Once formed, coordinated positions carry more weight in the UNFCCC's consensus-based decision-making process than those held by individual countries. Reaching

consensus across the 197 members is a complex process, and requires a series of formal and informal meetings, discussions and huddles over consecutive negotiating sessions that last weeks at a time. Each year, the UNFCCC's Conference of the Parties (COP) culminates with the adoption of a series of UN decisions directing the international effort to address the climate crisis.

As such, officials also form coalitions spanning regions and negotiating groups where positions align, further increasing the weight of their positions. An alliance between the LDC Group, the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) and the European Union helped create middle ground and break deadlock during the stalled climate negotiations several times — particularly in 2011 and 2013. Similarly, the High Ambition Coalition, an alliance formed by the Republic of the Marshall Islands, involved about 100 countries in 2015, including LDC members, and is cited as a key component for delivering the Paris Agreement.⁸

Although building technical and diplomatic representation in the official UNFCCC process is critically important, climate diplomacy extends beyond the negotiations. Other multilateral bodies like the UN General Assembly also convene important discussions, and minilaterals — such as the Petersberg Climate Dialogue, the Cartagena Dialogue, the Climate Vulnerable Forum and the Japan-Brazil Dialogue — are also significant. These minilaterals are smaller, club-like compositions of government representatives that discuss and negotiate climate change.⁹ Although outside the UNFCCC, their agreed conclusions can influence negotiations and decisions. The LDC group actively participates in these discussions and dialogues.

Diplomatic forums also serve as a background for bilateral meetings — state-to-state conversations to better understand each other's positions and discuss work undertaken together. Dialogues bring officials from across the globe to the same place at the same time. For LDCs, who often lack the means to undertake diplomatic missions to foreign capitals, these opportunities to strengthen bilateral relationships with

influential countries form an important part of their engagement in diplomatic forums.

Actively engaging in the UNFCCC negotiations and other diplomatic forums — and concentrating efforts on alliance building while there — are critical components of increasing influence. For LDCs, engaging in these spaces goes hand-in-hand with raising ambition as they present the primary opportunity for influencing high-emitting countries to commit to action, and leveraging their support for national and regional efforts to address climate change.

Sphere 2: Cross-government coordination

Our theory of change sets out that influential climate diplomacy requires strong coordination across government ministries and departments. No matter how persuasive any individual diplomat or negotiator, the ability of government officials from foreign affairs to finance ministries to highlight climate change concerns in all possible forums — trade, security, health, development, and others — is much more impactful.

Actions in this sphere relate to shoring up domestic infrastructures that support diplomatic engagement, beginning with coordinating and prioritising climate change. Cross-government coordination, which draws on a nation's strengths across departments, is crucial for delivering effective climate diplomacy.¹⁰ One action governments take in this area is convening regular meetings between concerned officials in all ministries to strategise, report back, share documents and agree on common messaging. Balancing conflicting economic, energy, climate change and diplomatic goals requires policy coordination at the highest level.¹¹

Sending the best delegations to diplomatic forums and appointing designated climate diplomats — for example, a special climate envoy or climate ambassador — reflects a government that has identified climate change as a national priority. This is an enabling condition of our theory of change. Cross-government coordination is crucial to ensuring a country can speak with one, compelling voice. This ability increases countries' influence because it enables multiple actors to push for ambition in the many forums where climate change is discussed.

Sphere 3: Integrating climate change across policies

The third sphere relates to developing strategies, policies and plans that integrate climate change and support action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to its negative consequences. This is the foundation of successful climate diplomacy, which in turn is based on a strong and consistent messaging and approach to climate change at home.¹²

For example, countries would ideally adopt a low-carbon, climate-resilient development strategy or have an overarching sustainable development framework to inform their NDC and national adaptation plan (NAP) and thus facilitate their achievement of the Paris Agreement goals. Forming effective strategies requires comprehensive consultations and stakeholder engagement. For LDCs, implementing a low-carbon, climate-resilient development strategy means attracting and securing financial and technological support.

The four spheres are interlinked and forming strong national climate policies draws on cross-government coordination. This gives LDCs even more means to hold high-emitting countries to account for not doing enough. When engaging in climate diplomacy, speaking to strong domestic policies adds to the LDCs' moral authority to confront those not doing their fair share of the global effort.

Sphere 4: Strategic public diplomacy

The last sphere relates to using public events and the media as platforms to deliver strategic messaging about climate change. The media — and increasingly, social media — are primary vehicles for reaching, informing and influencing the public and thus the focus of efforts to increase public diplomacy.

The media play an important role in fostering the national interest debate — the dialogue through which countries define and set their goals and ambitions. One of the goals of climate diplomacy is to shape the conversation about climate change at home and abroad through interactions with national and international media outlets.

An effective media strategy is a crucial component of public diplomacy, as it reduces the risk of confusing messages, allows for announcements to be spaced out for maximum impact and can ensure that messages

are timed to coincide with audience interest. Ensuring climate diplomats regularly interact with the international media – giving interviews, appearing on television and radio programmes, publishing opinion pieces, and so on – also amplifies climate messages, builds credibility and draws on wider support. Such actions can build political capital and increase a countries' ability to leverage ambition and support.

Using this framework, we examined the impact of COVID-19 on climate diplomacy by surveying LDC negotiators. Our survey questions shed light on the domestic work inherent to climate diplomacy, from actions relating to cross-government coordination to integrating climate change across policies. Our survey respondents also reflected on how the pandemic has affected their engagement in diplomatic forums and alliances.

LDC perspectives: impacts of COVID-19

During 2020, countries had critical decisions to make as the Paris Agreement entered its implementation phase in conjunction with the major climate summit planned for Glasgow in November. As well as submitting their enhanced NDCs, they were meant to finalise the remaining outstanding elements of the rules governing the Paris Agreement. The original deadline for adopting this ruleset was 2018 at COP24 in Katowice, following three years of intensive post-Paris negotiations. However, several issues – such as market mechanisms and methodological issues under the Enhanced Transparency Framework – remain unresolved. At the start of 2020, we expected intense negotiations would be necessary to complete this work and had planned for three – rather than two – formal UNFCCC sessions.

But by February 2020, travel restrictions put in place to limit the spread of COVID-19 meant that in-person meetings were being replaced with conversations via web conferencing. As the extent of the pandemic became clear, the UNFCCC negotiations were postponed. Minilaterals like the Japan-Brazil Dialogue convened in early 2020, but as the year progressed, meetings – particularly those that brought international participants together – were cancelled or took place virtually. This trend continued for the rest of the year. In place of the formal UNFCCC negotiations, two web-based climate dialogues were held beginning in June and November.

In November, we surveyed LDC negotiators, asking how the pandemic had impacted their plans for climate diplomacy, the challenges and opportunities virtual meetings presented, and long-term changes they foresaw COVID-19 inspiring. Ms Bernardo and Mr Haque added further insights during their interviews and as contributors to this paper.

The pandemic's impact on LDC plans

Our survey began by asking LDC respondents whether COVID-19 had changed their plans for 2020. Only one respondent indicated that COVID-19 had not affected their plans; 96% (24 of 25) indicated that the pandemic had changed their plans. Of these, 17 (68%) had changed them significantly and seven (28%) partially (Figure 1).

We then asked respondents to indicate how many in-person meetings relevant to climate diplomacy they had planned to attend in 2020 and how many they did attend (Figure 2). Most respondents – 18 of 25 (72%) – reported attending fewer meetings than planned. Four marked unsure for either or both questions. Two indicated no change and one attended more meetings.

Throughout the survey, respondents could write additional comments to expand on their responses. One comment from a respondent in Chad highlighted

Figure 1 Impact of COVID-19 on LDC plans for 2020

Responses to survey question: "Did COVID-19 change your plans for 2020?"

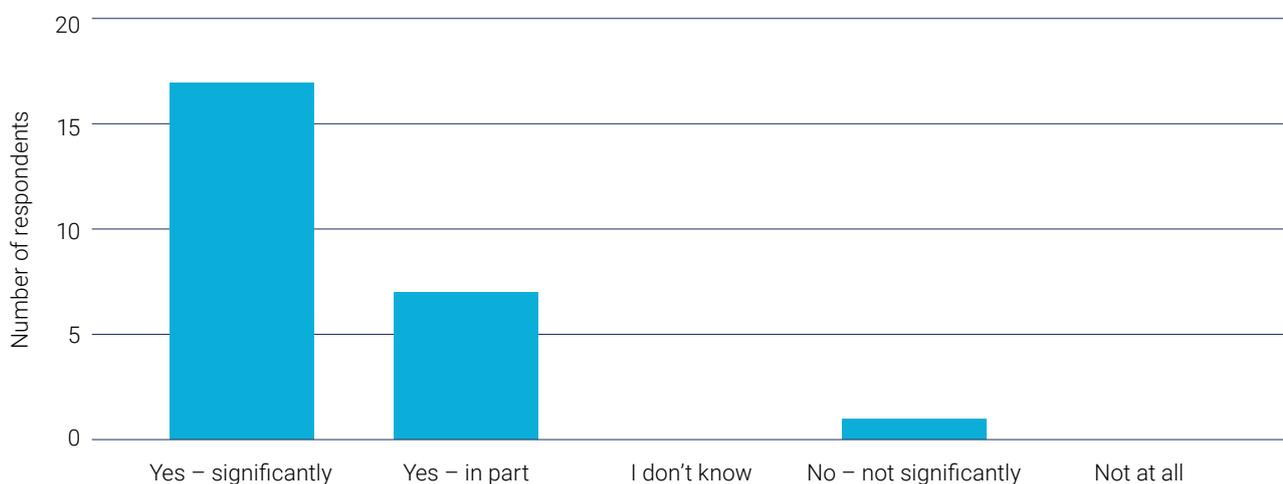
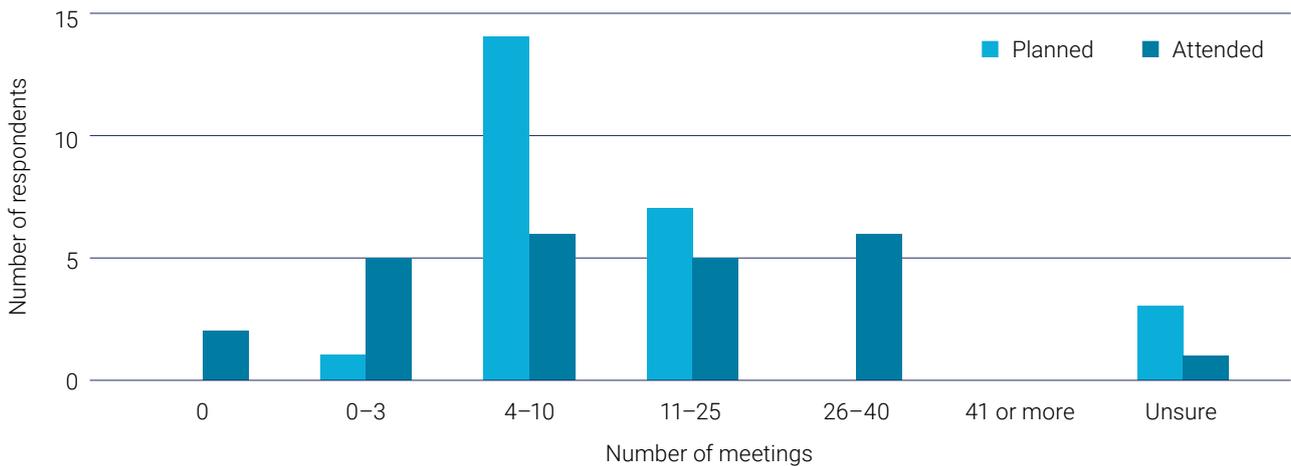


Figure 2 Planned and actual number of in-person meetings related to climate change



the pandemic’s significant impact on LDC negotiators’ plans and the decreased number of meetings relevant to climate diplomacy: “The government’s priority as well as all its partners is directed towards the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. All planned activities for 2020 are entirely impacted.”

National climate strategies and positions

The survey went on to ask about COVID-19’s impact on various facets of climate diplomacy, from designing national climate change strategies to coordinating positions.

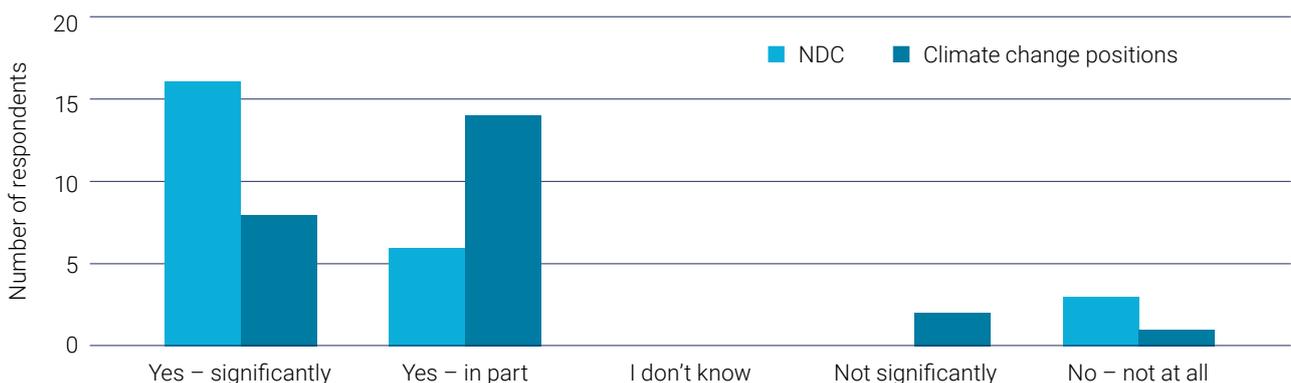
Most respondents – 19 of 25 (79%) – indicated that designing national climate strategies was significantly (6) or partly (13) impacted by COVID-19. Two (8%) reported that it did not have a significant impact on this activity, while the other three (13%) indicated no impact at all. One left the question blank.

An even greater number of respondents – 22 of 25 – indicated that COVID-19 had impacted the submission of their country’s enhanced NDC. Of these, 16 (64%) said the impact was significant; 6 (24%) stated it had been partial (Figure 3). Respondents from Burundi, Rwanda and Timor Leste (12%) indicated that COVID-19 had no impact on their NDC submission. In fact, Rwanda was the first LDC to submit its enhanced NDC with ambitious updates under both mitigation and adaptation.¹³ Rwanda was also the only respondent to indicate that COVID-19 had not changed their plans for 2020.

When asked if COVID-19 impacted the coordination of national climate change positions, 22 respondents reported that it had. Of these, 8 (32%) indicated that the impact was significant and 14 (56%) that it was partial. Two (8%) stated that the impact was not significant and the respondent from Rwanda (4%) continued to indicate that COVID-19 had no impact at all (Figure 3).

Figure 3 Impact of COVID-19 on enhanced NDCs and national climate change positions

Responses to survey questions “Has COVID-19 impacted submitting an enhanced NDC?” and “Has COVID-19 impacted coordinating climate change positions?”



The responses make clear that the pandemic impacted most LDC efforts to design and coordinate national climate strategies, at least in part. Eight respondents entered additional comments stating that their submission of an enhanced NDC had been impacted; three expanded on the impacts to the NAP process.

As the Bhutan respondent explained, national coordination and stakeholder consultation are key to effectively preparing NDCs, NAPs and long-term strategies. However, COVID-19 restrictions delayed all consultation meetings. Bhutan tried to continue the process virtually but found it ineffective as people were not used to speaking on video conference and did not take it as seriously. The respondent remarked that, "There could be a huge compromise on the quality of the documents prepared."

The Togo respondent reported that COVID-19 impacted the revision of their NDC and the elaboration of their fourth national communication and second biennial update report. The pandemic meant the country was unable to organise various national consultation meetings on time, which delayed these processes.

Comments from Bangladesh, Eritrea, The Gambia, Tanzania, Burkina Faso and Chad also noted that the pandemic had hampered, delayed, postponed and seriously affected the revision of their NDCs. The Gambia and Eritrea mentioned delays to their NAP process, and Bangladesh remarked that it had not been able to undertake capacity building activities relating to the Capacity-building Initiative for Transparency and the biennial update report.

In her interview, Ms Bernardo reflected on her country's experience in climate diplomacy engagement during the pandemic. She stated that Angola was able to ratify the Doha Amendment to the Kyoto Protocol in October and the Paris Agreement in November. Having ratified the Paris Agreement, the country had until the end of the year to submit its NDC, which it was still working to enhance. She also indicated that the NAP process was moving slowly. However, this is a reflection on internal national-level challenges rather than the pandemic.

Accessing climate finance

Under the UNFCCC, developed countries agreed in 2009 to mobilise US\$100 billion of climate finance every year by 2020. But governments are far from reaching this goal.¹⁴ Although some LDCs are developing their enhanced NDCs, others have not yet begun as they are still looking for funding to undertake the process.¹⁵

Twenty-one respondents stated that accessing funding for climate priorities was significantly (9) or partially (12) impacted by COVID-19. The other three respondents reported that COVID-19 had no significant impact; one said they did not know.

In the additional comments, the Angola respondent indicated that, with the slowing of the climate change process brought about by COVID-19, funding for climate and disaster resilience may also be reduced, making it more difficult to meet the goals of the Paris Agreement. A few respondents reported delays in project implementation, as was the case with a Global Environment Facility-funded project in Djibouti. The Tanzania respondent pointed out that in some cases, ongoing project monitoring was put on hold.

Ms Bernardo indicated that in Angola, some project activities were put on hold because people could not travel, even internally. She added that the country has developed project proposals to the Green Climate Fund and that interactions with the fund continued virtually during the pandemic.

In conjunction with the survey responses that the pandemic has impacted access to climate finance, there is concern that developed countries could cut climate budgets previously reserved for developing nations.¹⁵ It is important to consider that climate action within the LDCs largely depends on this support.

International dialogues and positions

For over 25 years, the UNFCCC has convened in-person negotiating sessions at least twice a year. In the week before these sessions, the LDC Group and other negotiating blocs came together for a series of in-person preparatory meetings to form their positions. The various UNFCCC-constituted bodies would also hold other meetings throughout the year. All these efforts culminate with an in-person COP that adopts a series of UN decisions.

The pandemic forced the UNFCCC to convene two web-based climate dialogues during 2020 in place of the usual negotiations. Described as dialogues and discussions rather than negotiations, these were billed as conversations to keep the discussions going. They were not forums in which countries took decisions on directing the international effort to address the climate crisis.

When asked whether COVID-19 had impacted their ability to engage in the UNFCCC dialogues and technical

discussions, all survey respondents reported that it had. Fourteen stated that COVID-19 significantly impacted their ability to engage, and 11 said that it had in part.

Twenty-two respondents reported that COVID-19 had impacted the coordination of climate change positions among negotiating blocs or regional groups. For 18 respondents, the impact was significant while four said it was partial. One indicated that COVID-19 had no significant impact, and two reported that it had no impact.

During their interviews, Ms Bernardo and Mr Haque gave further insights into how COVID-19 has impacted the UNFCCC processes. Ms Bernardo explained that the UNFCCC negotiations are more complex and demanding than other conventions. Climate negotiations are typically undertaken within dozens of different workstreams, often taking place at the same time. As such, moving the meetings online is rather complicated and there is a risk that the process would not be as fair as hosting an in-person meeting.

Mr Haque highlighted that, while negotiations at in-person meetings take place during the formal settings under the contact groups, they also happen informally between meetings, during breaks, at lunch, and so on. Virtual meetings do not allow for informal spaces, so those small windows of opportunity are lost. Some delegates also prefer to take negotiations behind closed doors; this is not feasible in virtual meetings, knowing that they can easily be recorded.¹⁶ Other aspects missing from virtual meetings – such as the ability to assess the mood of the room, body language and spontaneity

in discussion – can also impact the outcomes of negotiations.¹⁷

Meetings with international partners

The pandemic also had a significant impact on meetings with international partners. Twenty-two respondents stated that COVID-19 had impacted their ability to meet with international partners either significantly (17) or partly (5). One left the question blank and two said that COVID-19 had not significantly impacted their ability to meet with international partners.

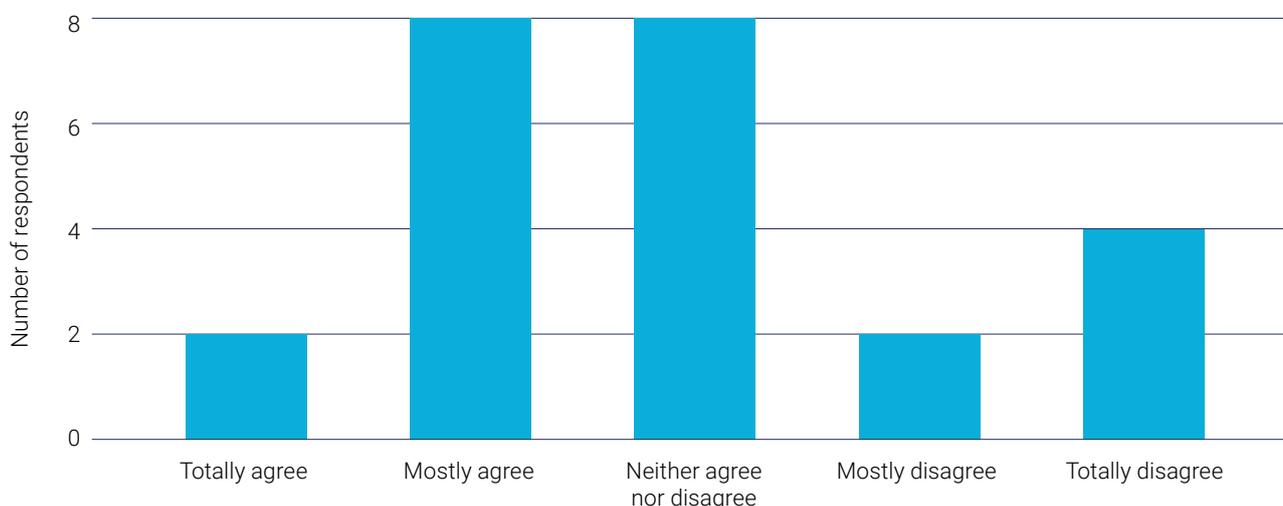
These numbers correspond to those of another survey question, which asked if virtual meetings had allowed respondents to regularly interact with international partners. Only two respondents totally agreed that virtual meetings had allowed for regular interaction, and eight mostly agreed. Most respondents were unsure or disagreed (Figure 4). One left the question blank.

Most respondents agreed that COVID-19 had significantly impacted their relationships with international partners and found that they could not regularly interact, even via virtual means. In the comments, 11 respondents mentioned the lack of direct contact with partners as a major challenge during the pandemic.

The respondent from Eritrea mentioned that the lack of in-person meetings also affected training opportunities, which in turn, made effective participation in climate diplomacy difficult. Mr Haque reiterated this point, giving

Figure 4 Virtual meetings and regular interaction with international partners

Responses to survey statement: “Virtual meetings have allowed me to regularly interact with international partners”



the example that last year, there were two technical meetings (with technical assistance provided by IIED and Climate Analytics); and that LDCs missed out on these opportunities in 2020. Other international organisations – such as the NDC Partnership and the Global Green Growth Institute, which support developing countries in designing and delivering their climate plans – have also postponed in-country engagement activities.¹⁵

Virtual meetings

Due to the difficulties of holding in-person meetings, virtual communication took on a prominent role. When asked how many virtual meetings relevant to climate diplomacy they had engaged in during 2020, 22 out of 25 (88%) said they attended at least one. The respondents from Eritrea and São Tomé and Príncipe

(8%) reported that they did not attend any virtual meetings. One (4%) was unsure. The other responses painted a balanced distribution across the number of virtual meetings attended (Figure 5).

When asked whether virtual meetings had allowed them to regularly engage in discussions relevant to climate diplomacy, ten respondents (40%) agreed and nine (36%) disagreed. The remaining six (24%) neither agreed nor disagreed (Figure 6).

The survey results show that there is no clear trend on whether virtual meetings allowed LDCs to regularly engage in climate diplomacy during the pandemic. Although some respondents encountered challenges that we discuss in later sections, others may have benefited from conditions that allowed them to engage in a high number of climate diplomacy-related meetings.

Figure 5 Virtual meetings relevant to climate diplomacy attended in 2020

Responses to survey question: "In 2020, how many virtual meetings relevant to climate diplomacy have you engaged in?"

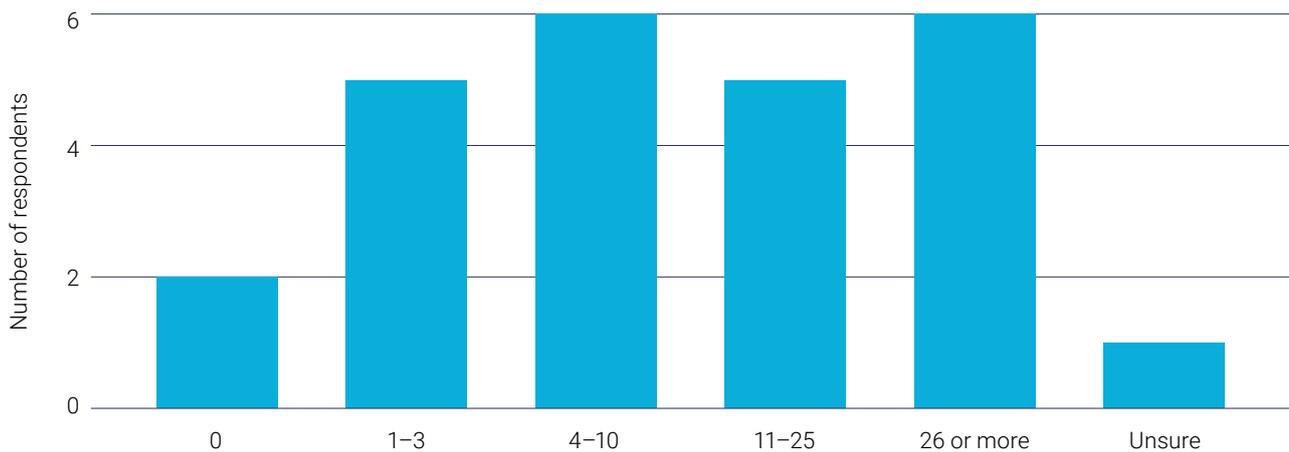
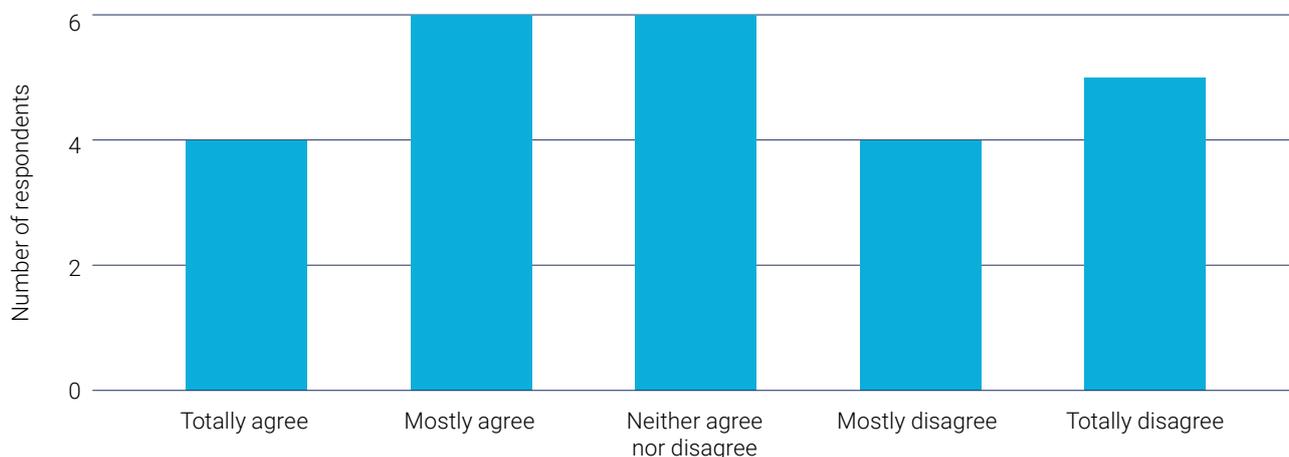


Figure 6 Virtual meetings and engagement in discussions relevant to climate diplomacy

Responses to survey statement: "Virtual meetings have allowed me to regularly engage in discussions relevant to climate diplomacy"



Online platforms used

As we can observe in Figure 7, Zoom was the most used platform for virtual meetings. Almost all respondents – 19 out of 21 (90%) – reported that they used the platform frequently to engage in meetings relevant to climate diplomacy. The second-most used platform was Microsoft Teams, followed by WhatsApp and Cisco WebEx. They hardly ever used FaceTime, Skype for Business or GoToMeeting, and only occasionally or rarely used Skype, Google Meet and Facebook Messenger. Other platforms mentioned included Google Duo, GoToWebinar, Houseparty and Kudo.

Internet accessibility and quality

Though virtual meetings represent a way to continue engaging in climate diplomacy, respondents reported many challenges. The survey asked whether poor internet accessibility had affected their ability to

participate in virtual meetings relevant to climate diplomacy, giving the example of no signal being available in their location. The overwhelming majority – 23 of 25 respondents – agreed with this statement; 18 totally agreed and 5 mostly agreed. Only the respondent Bangladesh disagreed, and one did not answer the question (Figure 8).

The same number also agreed that poor internet quality affected their ability to participate in virtual meetings. Examples of the sound not working well and needing to turn off the video function to ensure better connection were given to illustrate the meaning. Of the 23 who agreed with the statement, 19 totally agreed and 4 mostly agreed. The respondent from Bangladesh neither agreed nor disagreed and one left the question blank (Figure 8).

According to Mr Haque, these technical challenges create a communication gap because, when it is difficult to hear what participants say, their arguments get lost. The respondent from Haiti noted that,

Figure 7 Use of online conferencing platforms to engage in meetings relevant to climate diplomacy in 2020

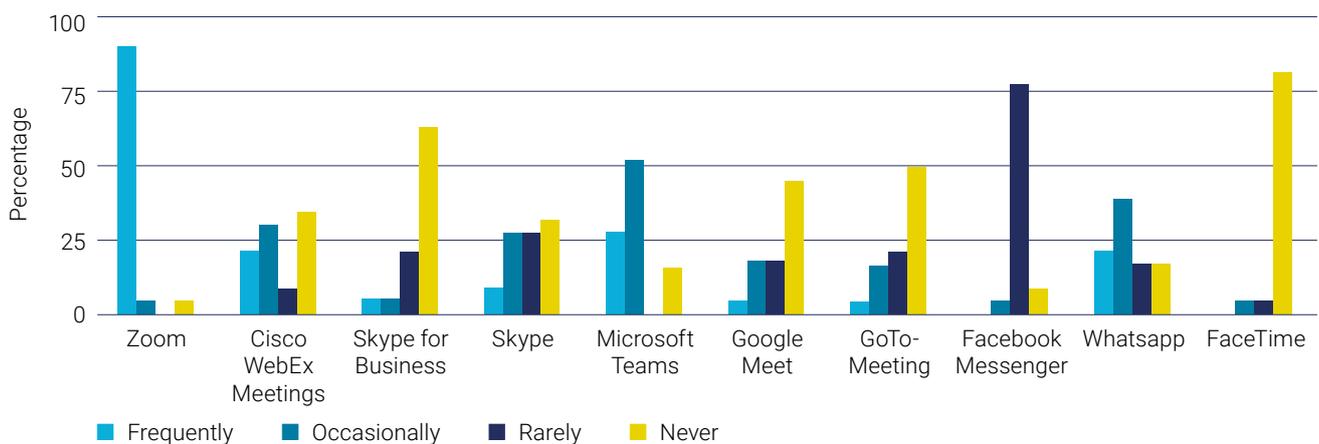
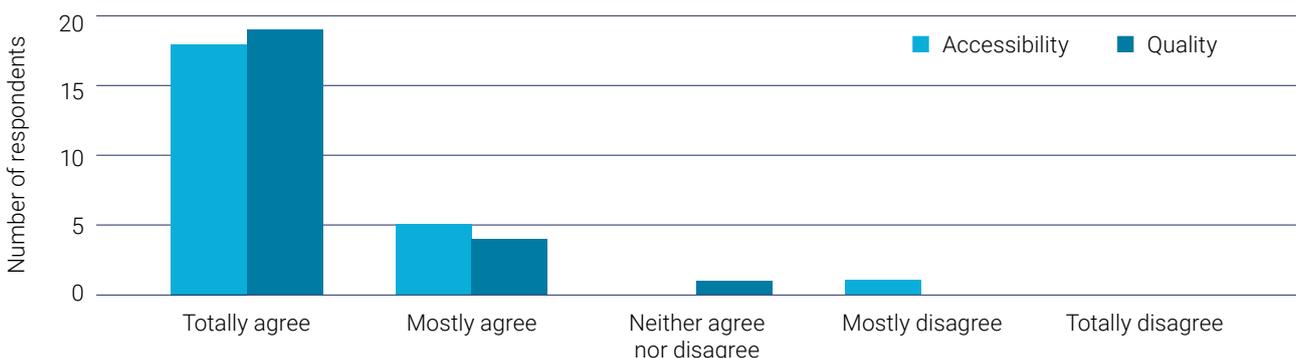


Figure 8 Impact of poor internet accessibility and quality on respondents' ability to participate in virtual meetings

Responses to survey statements: "Poor internet accessibility has affected my ability to participate in virtual meetings" and "Poor internet quality has affected my ability to participate in virtual meetings"



even if participants can secure a reliable internet connection, they may not have the equipment they need to participate effectively – for example, they may lack a computer or experience power cuts on certain days in their location. As the respondent from Lesotho also pointed out, this hampers effective virtual communication.

Several examples illustrate these challenges. One respondent from Chad shared his experience of a mediocre internet connection that made it almost impossible for him to complete any virtual meetings without interruption. As a result, he had to withdraw from the Advisory Board of the Climate Technology Centre and Network, where he had represented the LDCs. Ms Bernardo mentioned that her participation in several important meetings, such as the Adaptation Committee where she represents the LDCs, is sometimes affected. She emphasised that the committee always offers support options, but unfortunately cannot always resolve the situation immediately. In its first report, the Paris Agreement Implementation and Compliance Committee noted that, although it has done its best to overcome the challenges of virtual meeting, its work would be achieved more effectively in person. It cited information technology and time zones as particular challenges for virtual meeting before expressing the hope of meeting in person in 2021.¹⁸

Ms Bernardo also pointed out that, for some people, a lack of home internet access meant having to relocate to another facility. This has important implications for the efficiency of their participation in virtual meetings. For example, some people had to connect to meetings from their office, an internet café or a hotel. When virtual meetings continued late into the night, these people often had to leave before the meeting ended because they lived far away, and it was not safe for them to be out late. As such, they missed parts of the meetings.

Another challenge related to the access and quality of the internet is the additional costs incurred. Some people had to invest their personal money to secure home internet access. For example, Ms Bernardo had to buy mobile phone data to ensure she had an internet connection. She also mentioned seeing emails related to a virtual LDC meeting on the topic of agriculture in which some participants were requesting reimbursement of internet costs. The chair of the LDC Group had to take care of these to make the meeting happen.

Other sources also discuss the lack of adequate equipment and technical difficulties that have made the efficient participation of LDC members in online

meetings more challenging. For example, one article reports that low bandwidth prevented a representative from Sudan from participating in a virtual meeting of the Warsaw International Mechanism meeting and quotes a negotiator from Guinea as saying that “in some countries, the internet is still an expensive luxury”.¹⁶ With so many developing countries facing technical difficulties such as the unavailability of fibre-optic cables and low bandwidth, participation in virtual meetings is often difficult.

Primary purposes of virtual meetings

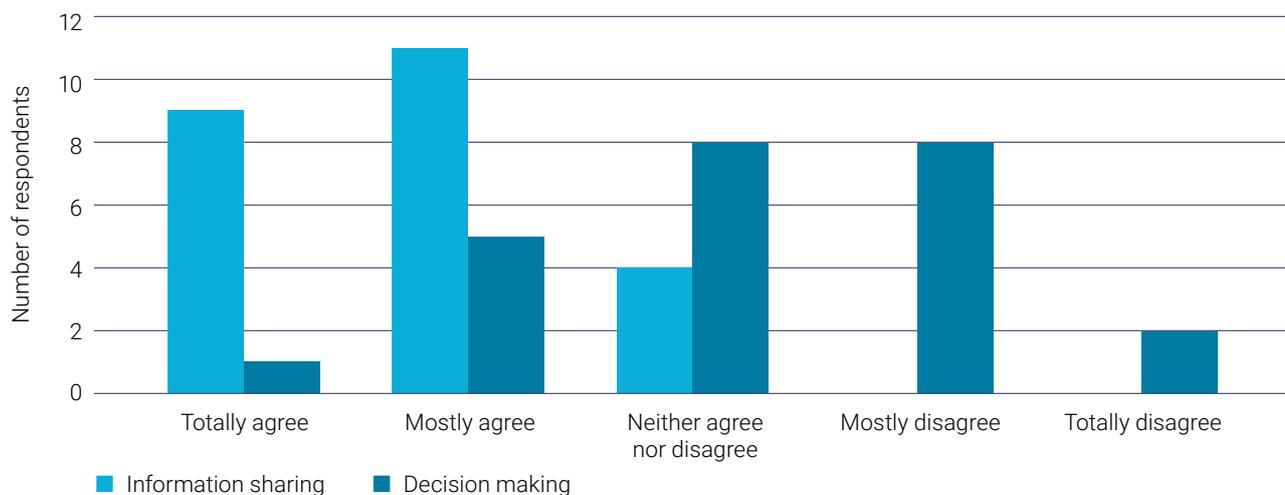
As illustrated in Figure 9, 20 of the 25 respondents (84%) agreed that the primary purpose of most virtual meetings was sharing information. Four neither agreed nor disagreed and one did not answer the question. Only six agreed that the primary purpose of most virtual meetings was decision making. Ten (66%) disagreed with this statement, eight neither agreed nor disagreed and one left the question blank. From this, it appears that virtual meetings in 2020 were primarily used for sharing information rather than making decisions.

The Bhutan respondent wrote that virtual meetings are good for wider information dissemination but not for negotiations. The Eritrean respondent observed that virtual meeting reports often note that parties struggled to fully engage and develop a common understanding and tangible outcomes. The Bangladesh respondent stated that the inability to take decisions under the UNFCCC might have critical implications for next year’s discussions in subsidiary bodies (SBs) as well as the COP. The Rwanda respondent also noted impacts on the negotiation process, which needs to conclude the negotiation of Article 6 (market and non-market mechanisms) of the Paris Agreement.

This may explain Ms Bernardo’s and Mr Haque’s comments that, while virtual meetings might work for smaller expert groups or constituted bodies, whose meetings are primarily for discussing specifically mandated issues and sharing information, they are more challenging when it comes to UNFCCC negotiations where decisions are made. Ms Bernardo also expressed concern that LDC participants have difficulties participating in virtual meetings, which could lead to decisions being taken in their absence. Mr Haque concluded that, without the participation of all, there is no effective decision making. He considers it fundamental for LDCs – whose role in finding the middle ground, taking the process forward and reaching an agreement makes them one of the UNFCCC’s more

Figure 9 Primary purposes of virtual meetings: information sharing v decision making

Responses to survey statements: “The primary purpose of most virtual meetings has been information sharing” and “The primary purpose of most virtual meetings has been decision making”



progressive groups – to be included in the negotiations and decision making. The respondent from Nepal also shared his doubts about the ownership of decisions made through virtual meetings.

LDCs have expressed clear concerns about making international climate decisions virtually. Although virtual meetings may bring benefits in terms of disseminating information or advancing technical discussions, overall, UNFCCC decision making has been postponed in the hope of resuming in-person meetings.

Challenges and opportunities of virtual meetings

As COVID-19 moved meetings to a virtual mode, organisations and individuals made efforts to adapt to the new way of engaging in climate diplomacy. But when asked about their experiences with virtual meetings related to climate diplomacy, only two respondents totally agreed that they were able to prioritise attending them, and ten mostly agreed. Six totally disagreed with the statement and another two mostly disagreed. The remaining four neither agreed nor disagreed, and one respondent did not answer this question.

In the comments section, four respondents mentioned that too many virtual meetings took place at the same time. The Gambia respondent wrote, “Frequency of virtual meeting at times is high, leading to coincidence and overlapping. One has to miss some.” The Tanzania

respondent added, “There are so many meetings that are being conducted within a short time and sometimes overlap each other making it very difficult to participate or perform other office duties at my workstation.” Another five mentioned the struggle to balance regular office duties with attending virtual meetings, with the Mali respondent stating, “Virtual meetings coincide with our day-to-day activities, which prevents us from participating.” Others called for better planning of virtual meetings, indicating that several meetings relevant to climate diplomacy were often scheduled on the same day.

Sixteen respondents agreed that the length of virtual meetings made it difficult to maintain attention throughout. Of these, half agreed totally and half agreed mostly. Five mostly disagreed with the statement, three neither agreed nor disagreed and one left the question blank. Because long virtual meetings are less efficient, the meetings are often shortened. As a result, the allocated time is not enough to discuss everything that is deemed important.

The survey asked respondents whether virtual meetings are often scheduled at times that are inconvenient to them, using as an illustration that virtual meetings often take place at times convenient to Central European Time (CET). Seventeen respondents agreed with the statement; of these, 12 agreed completely and five mostly. Four mostly disagreed, two neither agreed nor disagreed and two did not answer the question.

Three respondents mentioned difficulties with time differences in the additional comments. Many virtual meetings relevant to climate diplomacy are scheduled during a two-hour window in the middle of the day (CET), identified to accommodate the greatest time zone span.¹⁶ This places meetings during daytime in Africa and Europe, evening in Asia and early morning in the Americas. However, it does not benefit LDCs in the Pacific, where the meetings take place in the middle of the night.

Eleven respondents also indicated that the lack of simultaneous translation has affected their ability to participate in virtual meetings, with eight totally agreeing with the statement and three mostly agreeing. Six did not find that the lack of simultaneous translation affected them. The remaining six neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. This may be explained by the fact that most meetings related to climate diplomacy are held in English.

Respondents also mentioned that they are not used to speaking through video conferences. The respondent from Burkina Faso indicated, for example, that some people do not know how to operate Zoom calls and forget to express their views or comment when using virtual platforms. Mr Haque noted that it is difficult for co-facilitators to facilitate formal virtual meetings, which can make constructive discussions difficult.

Virtual meetings do, however, also have some advantages over in-person ones. The Bhutan respondent, for example, highlighted that virtual meetings get things done without any cost and offer wider information dissemination. The shift to virtual convening enabled Bhutan – chair of the LDC Group in the UN climate negotiations – to host the Thimphu Ambition Summit in December.¹⁹ This was the first climate summit convened by an LDC. Ms Bernardo also mentioned the advantage of the reduced costs, as participants do not have to pay for travel and other logistics. This is especially relevant for LDCs, because insufficient funds are often cited as a barrier to delegates attending international meetings. Another advantage of travelling less is the reduction of carbon emissions – although aviation accounts for only about 2.5 percent of global emissions.²⁰

Ms Bernardo and Mr Haque both pointed out that, despite the challenges encountered, they have tried to continue with their work and push the process forward

as best they could. They said that virtual meetings have allowed for more productivity than in-person meetings to some extent – for example, the LDC Group was able to develop technical papers through their virtual strategy process. This was the first time that technical papers and briefing notes detailing the LDC Group's positions on issues like adaptation, transparency and mitigation were produced without in-person meetings. They noted that organisations involved in the climate change process are also trying to continue their work, hosting events, trainings, and so on in a virtual mode rather than in person. Finally, they stated that we should not give the impression that virtual meetings are entirely ineffective, because they are being held in the best possible manner.

Long-term impacts of the pandemic

Nearly all the survey's respondents – 24 of 25 – imagined that COVID-19 would have lasting impacts on the way they engage in climate diplomacy (Figure 10). Only the respondent from Sierra Leone thought there would be no significant lasting impact.

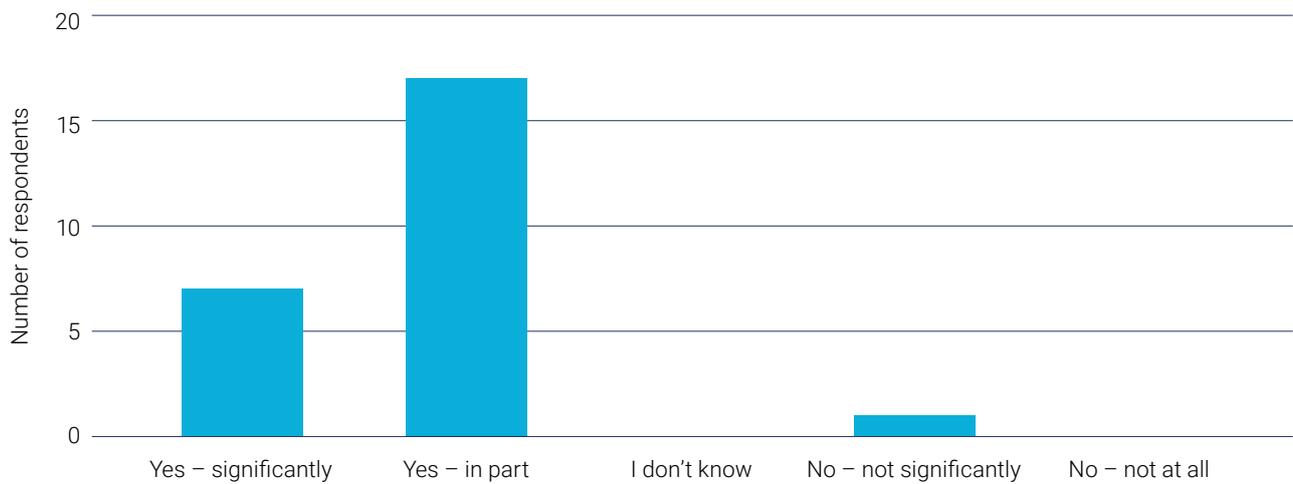
As long as COVID-19 restrictions remain, it is likely that virtual meetings will continue to be the main route for engaging in climate diplomacy. Some respondents believe this will negatively affect LDC participation, as they face more difficulties than their peers from developing and developed countries.

Mr Haque and one of the Chad respondents both expect that in-person meetings gathering hundreds or thousands of people are unlikely to be authorised in the first half of 2021, so there will be a continued reliance on virtual meetings. Ms Bernardo indicated that even for smaller meetings, travel restrictions and guidelines – such as having to quarantine up to 14 days upon arrival in some countries – may make some people reluctant to travel.

Mr Haque said that, although formal in-person multilateral meetings are expected to take place in July 2021, there is still uncertainty because we do not know if people will be able to travel without restrictions by then. Some respondents also expressed concern about the postponement of meetings to prepare for SBs or bigger events like the COP. According to Ms Bernardo, it would be unacceptable to go straight to the COP without previously discussing important aspects of the UNFCCC negotiations in SB meetings.

Figure 10 Long-term impacts of COVID-19 on how respondents engage in climate diplomacy

Responses to survey question: “Do you imagine COVID-19 will have lasting impacts on how you engage in climate diplomacy?”



Considering the possibility that these meetings might not be feasible in person this year, both Ms Bernardo and Mr Haque indicated the need for a plan B. Parties must start thinking about how to prepare without postponing more meetings to ensure the process does not collapse. This will necessitate reaching a consensus on the decision to take formal meetings into a virtual mode. Mr. Haque believes it is imperative to have formal SB meetings either in person or virtually with standard procedures of the UNFCCC. Without it, decision

making will be difficult, and parties will not come to an agreement on how to move forward with implementing the Paris Agreement. However, Carlos Fuller from Belize – a lead negotiator for AOSIS – has questioned whether online meetings could feasibly be extended to the 200-odd countries involved in the climate diplomacy process.¹⁶ Whichever way forward is decided on, it must be communicated well in advance to give everyone enough time to organise and prepare.

Conclusions

This paper establishes that COVID-19 did impact LDC engagement in climate diplomacy, changing their plans and reducing the frequency of their interactions. The survey responses indicate where LDC efforts and the practice of climate diplomacy were most impacted, and what needs to be better understood. We frame our conclusions around the four spheres of influence from our theory of change.

Diplomatic forums and alliances

The impact of the pandemic is perhaps most visible when we look at changes to the engagement of LDC representatives in climate diplomacy forums and the alliances they form while making international decisions.

Although the UNFCCC held two virtual climate dialogues in place of the formal negotiations in 2020, 100% of our survey respondents stated that COVID-19 had impacted their ability to engage in UNFCCC dialogues and technical discussions. They also reported that their alliances were impacted, with 88% indicating that COVID-19 had impacted the coordination of climate change positions among negotiating blocs or regional groups. Nevertheless, work continued. The LDC Group drew up positions and priorities through a series of virtual interactions. The process culminated in a two-part Zoom meeting convened by the LDC chair. Despite the challenges that hamper their effective participation in virtual climate diplomacy, the LDC Group also produced technical papers and policy briefs throughout 2020.

Minilateral discussions – such as the Thimphu Ambition Summit¹⁹ and the Petersberg Climate Dialogue²¹ – were convened virtually in 2020. Our survey indicates that, while some LDCs were able to continue interacting with international partners through virtual meetings, most could not. Many mentioned the lack of direct contact with partners as a major challenge during the pandemic. In future research, it would be interesting to break down which interactions with international partners have been most impacted: meetings with alliance partners, bilateral meetings or, as one respondent commented,

interactions with international nongovernmental organisations that offer technical and capacity building support. It would also be interesting to explore whether postponing decision making under the UNFCCC has decreased the pressure to form alliances and have bilateral discussions, or if the means to convene these conversations was simply not there without an in-person summit to gather diplomats and focus their time and attention on climate change.

There were mixed responses on whether virtual meetings allowed LDCs to regularly engage in meetings that are relevant to climate diplomacy. The challenges are clear: 90% agreed that poor internet accessibility – including having no internet or signal – affected their ability to participate in virtual meetings that were relevant to climate diplomacy. The same number agreed that poor internet quality – for example, sound not working well during calls, needing to turn off video to ensure better connection or the connection dropping out – affected their ability to participate in virtual meetings. Some respondents were not able to attend any virtual meetings relevant to climate diplomacy in 2020, while some LDC representatives to UNFCCC committees had to withdraw from these positions due to their inability to access virtual discussions. These connection issues present fundamental challenges to the way climate-vulnerable countries engage in virtual dialogues.

The frequency and length of meetings, different time zones and lack of simultaneous translation services compounded these challenges. Having to juggle regular duties while attending virtual meetings and a lack of experience with virtual platforms also prevented people from engaging.

Despite these challenges, 88% of respondents were able to participate in at least one virtual meeting relevant to climate diplomacy in 2020. Virtual convening does reduce costs and travel emissions. The survey results, however, largely highlight the challenges the pandemic poses to LDC engagement in diplomatic forums and alliances.

Cross-government coordination

Our theory sets out that influential climate diplomacy requires strong coordination across government ministries and departments. While the survey did not explicitly ask about cross-government coordination, some of the responses shed light on potential COVID-19 impacts.

When asked if the pandemic impacted the coordination of national climate change positions, 90% of respondents reported that it has been hampered, delayed and postponed.

The responses on attending virtual meetings also offer interesting insights. The survey results show that there is no clear trend on whether virtual meetings allowed LDCs to regularly engage in climate diplomacy during the pandemic. Some respondents reported that they did not attend any virtual meetings, but perhaps their national contexts allowed them to continue meeting and coordinating on climate change as usual during the pandemic. But it is important to note that each national context is different and that the survey gives only high-level feedback. Further study could explore in more depth the pandemic's impacts on coordinating and developing national climate policies in the LDCs. It would also be useful to understand if and how COVID-19 has impacted the appointment of LDC climate diplomats and whether the lack of in-person events and other traditional diplomatic functions has resulted in a changed approach.

Integrating climate change across policies

COVID-19 has also impacted LDCs' ability to develop strategies, policies and plans that support actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate change. Survey respondents reported challenges in designing national climate strategies, particularly NDCs. The pandemic 'hampered', 'delayed', 'postponed' and 'seriously affected' the national coordination and stakeholder consultations that are key to effectively preparing NDCs, NAPs and long-term strategies. Respondents said that convening these consultations virtually was ineffective and potentially compromising to the quality of the documents. In countries working to slow the spread of COVID-19, stakeholders did not get the usual support to travel to capitals for consultations.

To implement a low-carbon, climate-resilient development strategy, LDCs must attract and secure financial and technological support. Eighty percent of respondents stated that the pandemic impacted their access to funding, with some citing this as another delay to developing and implementing climate policies. Work did continue, however, with LDCs using available virtual and hybrid ways of working where in-person meetings were permitted.

Strategic public diplomacy

The survey did not look at how the pandemic has changed diplomats' abilities to shape the conversations about climate change both at home and abroad and respondents did not comment on activities within this sphere.

However, as interactions with national and international media outlets are by their nature public, it is possible to draw some conclusions about the impact of COVID-19. For example, the LDC Group would usually hold press conferences and media briefings at UN climate negotiations.²² In the past, it has also hosted public events in the margins of diplomatic forums like the UN Climate Action Summit and the COPs, and during gatherings like London Climate Action Week and New York Climate Week. Prominent officials and the LDC chair are often quoted in news articles reviewing the state of the climate and the international effort.

While in-person press conferences did not take place in 2020, the LDC Group continued to issue press releases on its website. And virtual convening opened up the possibility of wider attendance, allowing more people to engage in the process than can usually attend climate-focused events in person, albeit only those with internet access. Prominent officials and the LDC chair continue to be quoted in articles reviewing the state of the climate and the international effort, and the chair's Twitter account remained active.

Further study could explore how LDCs have adapted their own media strategies in light of COVID-19. For example, how have their interactions changed with national and international presses or social media? Do virtual forums attract more participants and wider readership, even if this increase is mostly in countries with strong internet connections? Are there virtual spaces that replicate in-person press conferences or facilitate better interactions/access to media?

Recommendations

All but one of the survey's respondents imagines that the pandemic will have lasting impacts on the way they engage in climate diplomacy. As of May 2021, travel restrictions remain in place and hosting in-person meetings is widely inadvisable. In reference to climate diplomacy, perhaps the biggest question facing the international community is how to make UNFCCC decisions given the prevailing threat of COVID-19.

The findings of this paper shed light on how to ensure transparency and ownership. To this end, we make the following recommendations for supporting access to virtual spaces, facilitating consensus-based decisions and enabling progressive leadership.

Supporting access to virtual spaces

Three prominent scenarios exist for UNFCCC discussions in 2021: continuing to convene delegates virtually, pursuing a hybrid approach – which combines hosting a limited number of delegates in person while others join virtually – and resuming larger in-person sessions when it is safe to do so. With each scenario, it is logical to assume that some virtual convening will continue, even if only to continue the discussion before in-person delegations meet to take decisions. The UNFCCC recently articulated a process for moving the work of the SBs forward virtually in June 2021.

Given that work will continue virtually, there must be a concerted effort to overcome the barriers to access we have highlighted in this paper. In many cases, participants can be supported with better access and better quality connections, but the assumption that every country starts from the same baseline in a virtual world is incorrect.

To facilitate access, the UNFCCC Secretariat has offered to redirect the participant travel budget to cover the costs of booking hotel rooms that are close to the homes of delegates with internet connection issues. Where possible, UN offices could offer delegates use of their space and the equipment they need to effectively engage in virtual meetings.¹⁶ These are welcome developments, but in some cases, booking small conference rooms with technical conditions

where delegates can meet and participate as a team attending UNFCCC dialogues would be a better and less expensive option. In some contexts, grants to buy data bundles may address connection issues. In others, computers with good operating systems, good wireless connectivity, and a working camera and microphone are necessary.

Our findings indicate that, as well as facilitating access, it is important to invest in environmental factors that enable effective participation in climate diplomacy. Managing time zone differences, using simultaneous translation services and making quiet rooms available for delegates to participate without distractions all enhance engagement.

LDC governments can help by reflecting on the kind of support they need to address the technical and organisational challenges they face when engaging in virtual meetings. They can ensure that delegates are empowered to take entire days away from their everyday work to fully dedicate their time to virtual sessions. And, more broadly, they can take steps to equip officials to work from home. Individual delegates tasked with participation can proactively engage with the UNFCCC Secretariat to ensure they explore all equipment and connection options ahead of meetings.

Because each national context is different, there must be a concerted effort to work with LDC officials to define nationally appropriate solutions, and to understand and address barriers to uptake. The UNFCCC Secretariat is perhaps best placed to continue working with LDCs to identify options that facilitate national participation. The international community may also need to provide financial support to implement these options, should they prove more costly than unused travel funds.

Prioritising access is in the interest of the international community, as all UN decisions for the foreseeable future will hang on overcoming these barriers. Diplomacy efforts during the pandemic and recovery must reflect this. We must avoid widening the digital gap between developed and least developed countries and creating additional sources of power asymmetry within the UNFCCC process.²³

Facilitating consensus-based decisions

Given that virtual engagement will continue, countries should consider which activities facilitate consensus building and how they might transfer these to the web. Reaching consensus across 197 members is a complex process that requires formal and informal spaces, as well as discussions among and between both groups and individuals.

The process begins with coordination. Typically, national coordination builds to the coordination of regions and negotiating groups, which coalesces into multi-bloc alliances that identify landing zones all parties can agree to. Most of this would usually take place in person, alongside bilateral conversations between key actors. If the process is virtual, what informal spaces would we need to create and when, given time zone differences and holidays that are typically overcome by gathering? Could structured dialogues incorporate time for bilateral and corridor conversations? Could private discussions bring together like-minded groups before and after public forums to help facilitate alliance building? Climate-vulnerable blocs like the LDCs would need region-specific support. Identifying landing zones would likely take longer if countries worked asynchronously.

Facilitating consensus building is an important part of moving technical and informal discussions forward. The closer to consensus these processes reach, the better placed delegates will be to take decisions once in-person negotiations can resume.

Enabling progressive leadership

LDCs are proactive, progressive climate actors. Despite the challenges that hamper engagement, the chair led the LDC Group through a virtual strategy process in 2020, directly supporting delegates in their efforts to connect by reimbursing expenses.

At year's end, Bhutan convened the Thimphu Ambition Summit. This high-level event featured the prime ministers of Bhutan and Bangladesh and brought together representatives from the COP25 and COP26 presidencies with the UN Secretary General and UNFCCC executive secretary. This would not have happened in person, as bringing together and securing world leaders would have been prohibitively expensive. Both AOSIS and the LDC Group convened high-level climate summits in 2020. This ability to host climate summits allowed climate-vulnerable countries to shape the agenda, giving space to discussions around raising ambition, Paris-compatible green economic recovery and mobilising support for the most vulnerable.

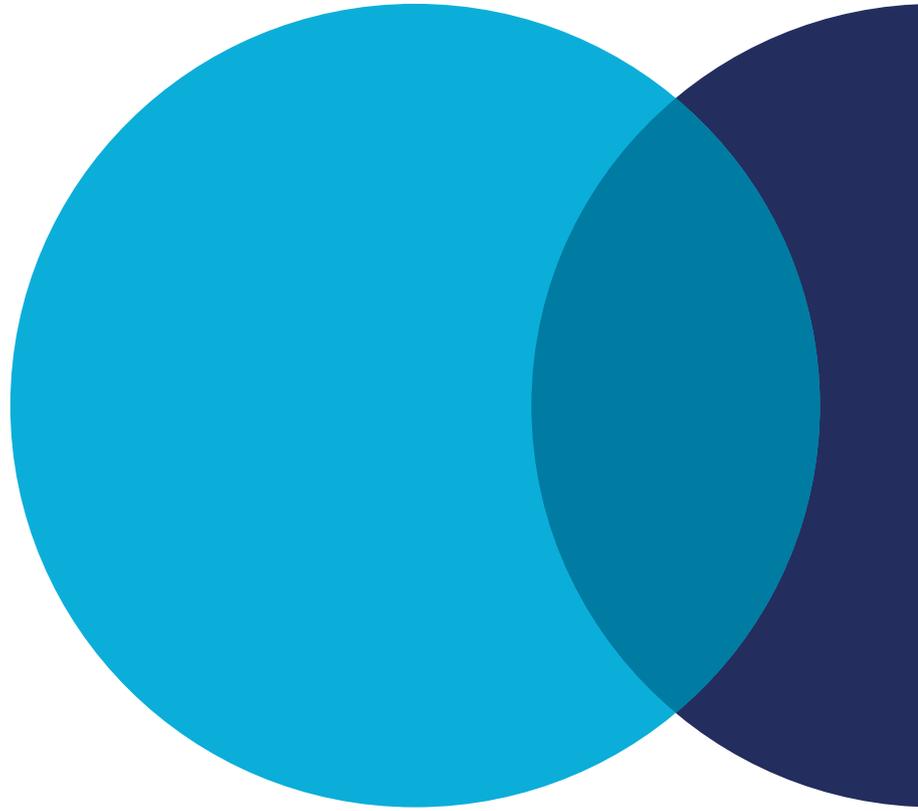
Ensuring progressive countries can engage in the full range of climate diplomacy will further the goals of the Paris Agreement. Supporting LDC and AOSIS climate leadership during and after the pandemic remains paramount, for theirs is the ambition that drives the international debate.

Acronyms

AOSIS	Alliance of Small Island States
CET	Central European Time
COP	Conference of the Parties
COP26	26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties
IIED	International Institute of Environment and Development
LDC	Least Developed Country
NAP	national adaptation plan
NDC	nationally determined contribution
SB	subsidiary body
UN	United Nations
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Change

Endnotes

- 1 World Health Organization (2020) Timeline: WHO's COVID-19 response. See <https://tinyurl.com/y9jvvt dx>
- 2 The LDCs include: Afghanistan, Angola, Bangladesh, Benin, Bhutan, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, The Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Kiribati, Lao People's Democratic, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Niger, Rwanda, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Solomon Island, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, Timor Leste, Togo, Tuvalu, Uganda, Yemen and Zambia. See www.un.org/ohrls/content/profiles-ldcs
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- 5 See <https://unfccc.int/process/parties-non-party-stakeholders/parties-national-focal-point>
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