

Keywords:

Climate diplomacy, Ethiopia, Least Developed Countries (LDCs), UNFCCC, Paris Agreement

Policy pointers

Effective engagement requires strong political will and leadership at the highest level – national leaders are uniquely placed to push climate to the top of the agenda.

Strong regional climate diplomacy is needed to forge common positions in broader international negotiations and integrate climate concerns into strategic development planning.

Ambitious planning and domestic targets give climate diplomats the moral high ground they need to successfully lobby their peers to make bigger commitments.

Generating evidence to support climate advocacy provides diplomats with a firmer foundation for influencing international negotiations.

Ethiopia's effective climate diplomacy: lessons for other nations

Despite its Least Developed Country status, Ethiopia has played a leading role in climate diplomacy. This briefing explores the factors behind Ethiopia's success in order to draw lessons for other nations. Meles Zenawi, the late former prime minister, has left a legacy of strong political will and leadership that has enabled Ethiopia to integrate climate into its development strategy, set ambitious national targets and successfully coordinate climate action across ministries. Ethiopian climate diplomats have also engaged effectively with their neighbours and the broader international community to mobilise support for stronger goals, supported by a growing evidence base gathered by the state. As nations – LDCs and others – work together to ratify and fully implement the Paris Agreement, the diplomatic efforts of proactive countries like Ethiopia will remain fundamental to the effort.

The run-up to the adoption of the Paris Agreement was marked by an unprecedented flurry of climate diplomacy that made a truly universal agreement possible for the first time. While undeniably historic, the adoption of the Paris Agreement is by no means the final hurdle in the global effort to combat climate change. The focus of climate diplomacy has now shifted to sustaining the political momentum that forged the agreement in order to ensure its goals are realised.

Ethiopia's rich history of engagement in climate diplomacy reflects the significant threat that climate change poses to the country through drought-induced shortages of food, water and energy. To confront this threat, the nation's political leadership has integrated climate concerns within its foreign and domestic policies, earning Ethiopia a strong voice in international climate discussions. This briefing highlights five factors that form the foundation for Ethiopia's success, and distils them into policy pointers for other nations seeking to increase the influence of their climate diplomacy.

1. Strong political will and leadership

Strong political will and leadership provided by Meles Zenawi, Ethiopia's late former prime minister, from 2009 laid the foundation for the country's effective climate diplomacy. As the leader of a nation with plenty of experience of the effects of climate variability and change, Meles had a clear incentive to identify the climate as a national priority. Meles went further, however, by becoming an internationally renowned advocate for climate action.

Before his death in office in August 2012, Meles took on leadership roles in international climate discussions and acted as Ethiopia's principle climate diplomat. For example, Meles led the Conference of African Heads of State on Climate Change for two terms, beginning with COP15 in Copenhagen and ending at COP17 in Durban. During COP15, he was among the advocates who helped to secure a pledge of US\$100 billion per

Ethiopia's political leadership has integrated climate concerns within its policies

year in climate finance by 2020. He co-chaired the high-level advisory group on climate financing with Norwegian prime minister Jens Stoltenberg to find ways to meet this pledge. Negotiating solutions to address climate change was clearly an issue of great personal importance to Meles, and yielded domestic and international results.

Domestically, Meles worked to further the understanding of climate change and its relationship with diplomacy among high-level decision makers. His leadership was also pivotal in the adoption and implementation of ambitious climate policies and strategies (see 'Ambitious planning and domestic targets'). Furthermore, Meles personally oversaw the implementation of policy by placing responsibility for the coordination of climate action across ministries in the Prime Minister's office (see 'Strong national coordination').

Internationally, Meles played a leadership role by encouraging other governments to take steps to address climate change, including through regional initiatives such as the Conference of African Heads of State on Climate Change and other acts of regional diplomacy (see below). Meles' legacy has continued under his successor, Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn.

Ethiopia has demonstrated how personal dedication to climate action by a head of government provides an unparalleled means of raising the profile of the issue both at home and abroad, providing a foundation for more effective diplomatic engagement.

2. Regional diplomacy

Ethiopia has a rich history of regional diplomacy and Meles' leadership on climate change has since inspired action by heads of state and government throughout the region. Pan-continental efforts to tackle climate change took a step forward in 2009 when the African Union's Assembly of Heads of State and Government established the Conference of African Heads of State on Climate Change (CAHOSCC). With Meles at the helm, Ethiopia became one of the ten original member states of CAHOSCC, along with Algeria, the Republic of Congo, Kenya, Libya, Mauritius, Mozambique, Nigeria, Uganda and South Africa.

The original purpose of CAHOSCC was to give political guidance to the technical negotiators and develop common positions across the African continent in preparation for COP15 in Copenhagen. By uniting with other nations with

similar goals for international climate action, Ethiopia worked to increase the region's influence in the international decision-making process of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). CAHOSCC continues to serve as the high-level segment for the African Union's climate change negotiators and led the formulation of the group's positions ahead of the Paris Agreement.

Ethiopia also addresses climate change planning at the regional level through the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). This organisation is comprised of Ethiopia and neighbouring Eritrea, Djibouti, Somalia, Kenya, South Sudan and Sudan. Through IGAD, these nations have begun preparing a regional climate change strategy for the period 2016 to 2030 to harmonize national efforts to adhere to low-carbon, climate-resilient sustainable development.¹ (Ethiopia's contribution to reducing greenhouse gas emissions has regional implications since the country exports energy generated from hydropower to Sudan, Djibouti and Kenya, and plans to export to additional nations).

Factoring climate change into regional development planning can also address national security issues at the heart of diplomacy. There is a risk, for example, that climate change could exacerbate regional instability by causing more frequent droughts, with associated costs in terms of food insecurity, access to water and lost assets. For example, a significant number of refugees enter Ethiopia from neighbouring Somalia, South Sudan and Eritrea, where they settle temporarily in the lowland escarpment near forested areas. The resulting increase in demand for fuelwood, charcoal and other forest products can lead to rapid deforestation. Adopting an integrated regional approach to such issues can help address the underlying causes of instability.

3. Ambitious planning and domestic targets

Another key component of Ethiopia's climate diplomacy is the ambitious goals it has adopted in its development strategies and national commitments. These targets make it easier for Ethiopian diplomats to lobby peers to take similarly far-reaching steps.

The Ethiopian government steers development through a series of five-year plans. The 2011–2015 Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP I) enshrined the country's goal of building a climate-resilient, green economy by 2030.² While implementing this plan, the government also formulated an overarching framework

known as the Climate Resilient Green Economy (CRGE) strategy, which aims to reach net zero emissions and lift Ethiopia from LDC to middle-income status by 2025.³

The CRGE vision recognises that Ethiopia needs to develop climate resilience if it wants to achieve sustainable green growth, while minimising the potential negative impacts and maximising the potential benefits of climate variability and change. The green economy portion of the strategy sets out a vision for a low-carbon, sustainable model of economic development. The climate resilience section aims to boost the resilience of the agriculture, forestry, water and energy sectors through the second Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP II). The 2016–2020 GTP II is currently being implemented and has integrated the CRGE strategy.

Ethiopia's stance allowed it to commit to the Paris Agreement with a timely and ambitious Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC), which put pressure on other nations to respond in kind. Ethiopia was the twelfth nation to submit an INDC and the first LDC to do so. Ethiopia's INDC pledges a net greenhouse gas emissions reduction of 64 per cent from business as usual by 2030.⁴ These mitigation targets, as well as adaptation needs, were generated from the CRGE strategy, and Ethiopia's INDC was praised as a model of ambition in the international negotiations.

In addition to fostering ambitious mitigation goals, Ethiopia's development strategies and targets have helped its diplomats to successfully lobby for international support to implement the CRGE strategy. Since its launch in 2011, governments including the United Kingdom, Norway, Germany, France, Denmark, Sweden, the European Union and the United States have joined a partnership agreement called the Lima Declaration in which they have pledged to support the CRGE.⁵

Through this partnership, Ethiopia also pushed for an ambitious and comprehensive agreement to be adopted in Paris.

4. Strong national coordination

Climate change has been given tremendous prominence in Ethiopia's governmental structure. In October 2015, Hailemariam established a ministry dedicated to coordinating the climate change agenda — the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MEFCC). MEFCC acts as the National Focal Point to the UNFCCC, and has a mandate to spearhead and coordinate environment, forestry and climate change issues. The ministry also coordinates the implementation of the CRGE strategy across sectors, and carries out capacity-building activities for sectoral and regional bodies.

The Prime Minister's office chairs the CRGE ministerial steering committee and oversees a national financial mechanism known as the CRGE Facility.⁶ In addition to the MEFCC, the CRGE ministerial steering committee brings together the Ministry of Finance and Economic Cooperation; the Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources; the Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries; the Ministry of Industry; the Ministry of Water, Irrigation and Electricity; and the Ministry of Transport, all of which will play a role in implementing the strategy. This committee meets regularly to receive updates on the status of the CRGE's implementation and integration across sectors.

The CRGE Facility was established to ensure Ethiopia can benefit from different forms of finance available now or in the future to fund climate-related projects. By ensuring compliance with international standards and requirements, in particular accreditation by the Adaptation Fund and Green Climate Fund (GCF), the facility has allowed Ethiopia to receive contributions from bilateral partners.⁷ By establishing this high level of oversight and national coordination, the Prime Minister's office has managed to ensure that new national initiatives and infrastructure projects can readily qualify for support from international climate initiatives.

5. Generating evidence to support advocacy

Finally, the government has gathered a wealth of data to support the integration of climate change into its foreign policy. The measures include the creation of an Ethiopian Panel on Climate Change (EPCC) to conduct scientific studies and the holding of a series of 'climate hearings' to gather anecdotal evidence from communities. Ethiopia has used the findings from these and other initiatives to support its diplomatic engagement.

The EPCC was set up to help address the need for more peer-reviewed research on the impact of climate change. A dearth of data and scientific studies in developing countries, particularly LDCs, had long been a concern in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which relies on reviews of scientific, technical and socio-economic research to make its assessments. The EPCC is hosted by the Ethiopian Academy of Sciences in Addis Ababa and its structure mirrors that of the IPCC.

The EPCC serves as a national knowledge-sharing platform on climate-related issues and consists of more than 70 authors, reviewers and gender experts from universities, research centres, government offices and individuals working in the field. When preparing the EPCC's First Assessment Report, these experts

Box 1. Climate hearings in Assela

The city of Assela, birthplace of many of Ethiopia's internationally renowned athletes such as Haile Gebreselassie and Derartu Tulu, was among the communities that hosted the climate hearings that began in 2009. More than 10,000 people participated in the event, discussing climate change and the local impacts they experience. The climate hearing began with reflections from Gebreselassie and Tulu on the current weather changes and the effects being felt by the Assela community. Tulu said: "We used to be able to practice running at all hours of the day — the weather in Assela was perfect for running. But now, even this morning, at 10am, it was already getting too hot, making the three kilometre opening running event more difficult than it should have been." Gebreselassie added: "This is an issue affecting all of us. I won't stop making my voice heard until I see some change, even if Copenhagen does not make a difference I won't stop."

Elders talked about the substantial decrease in crop production and the difficulty of accessing water both for agricultural and domestic use, which is causing considerable difficulties, especially for women. Jemila Mergo, a farmer and mother of five, gave her observations and priorities for action at the local level: "We used to have many streams, but these days most of them have dried out. Now we have to walk a long distance to get water, making it difficult to take care of our children at home. We have to protect our trees and be more responsible in protecting our natural resources."¹⁰

considered peer-reviewed research, workshop findings and policy briefs — the first time an LDC had produced an assessment using IPCC methodology. The report provided rigorous scientific input for both the Ethiopian government and future IPCC reports.⁸

Beginning with the preparation for COP15 in 2009, a series of 'climate hearings' have been held across Ethiopia to raise public awareness of climate change and gather evidence of its impact. The first series began on 14 September 2009 and covered the most vulnerable parts of the country over a two-month period (see Box 1). The evidence collected from these hearings underscored the climate variability and change experienced by Ethiopian communities, primarily through more frequent droughts and floods, and summaries were disseminated to a global audience via YouTube.⁹

Conclusion

Ethiopia's strong presence in international climate negotiations holds a number of lessons for other countries seeking to project greater

influence in global climate politics. A legacy of strong leadership at the highest level has given climate change a unique position of importance in both the nation's foreign and domestic policy. This political will has allowed Ethiopia to integrate climate within its development planning and strategy, set ambitious national targets (including those outlined in its INDC) and effectively coordinate climate action across ministries. Led by the efforts of successive prime ministers, Ethiopia has engaged in diplomacy with its neighbours and the broader international community to effectively lobby for greater international ambition to tackle climate change and support for mitigating its impacts. As nations work together to ratify and fully implement the Paris Agreement, the diplomatic efforts of proactive nations like Ethiopia will remain of critical importance in ensuring that all parties live up to their commitments.

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Notes

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This research was funded by UK aid from the UK Government, however the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the views of the UK Government.

