

JULY 2011

OVERVIEW

IIED Climate Change Group

Project name:

Supporting least developed country negotiators in the UNFCCC negotiations

Project leader:

Achala Chandani Abeysinghe

Time frame:

March 2009–March 2011

Cost:

£580,000

Objective:

To strengthen the negotiating capacity of the least developed countries, leading to more equitable outcomes at UN climate negotiations.

PROJECT SUMMARY

Least developed countries (LDCs) at UN climate meetings need larger, better-prepared delegations supported by informed national policymakers. We helped strengthen the capacity of negotiating teams from less developed African and Asian nations through bursaries for additional delegates who would not otherwise have attended; background papers providing evidence-based technical support on key topics; pre-conference workshops where delegates prepared for negotiating sessions; and regional workshops where they discussed their negotiating strategies and built relationships with parliamentarians and government officials in finance, planning and foreign affairs.

THEORY OF CHANGE

The global nature of the climate change problem requires all nations to negotiate a collective solution. The most effective platform for this is the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). To agree strong multilateral decisions for tackling climate change to adequately address the needs of the most vulnerable countries, effective participation by every LDC in the UN negotiations is essential. Indeed, the LDCs have often made it clear that the UN

Helping UN negotiators protect the poorest

Negotiators from low-income countries need support to shape global solutions to climate change.

UN climate change negotiations are beehives of intense activity. Parallel negotiating sessions, contact groups, drafting sessions and side events all contribute to the complexity. During high-stake conferences like the one held in Copenhagen in 2009, negotiators labour through deadlocked all-night meetings. Adaptation, mitigation, technology transfer and finance are just a few of the controversial and technically challenging issues on the table. The UNFCCC process itself imposes an additional labyrinth that participants must learn.

To meet these demands and participate in the negotiations effectively, countries need talented teams of negotiators and expert advisors. The most powerful countries send dozens of delegates: Japan's team has 114 members, and the United States has 155. But Gambia, which leads the 48 countries in the least developed countries (LDC) group, has only four. For the poorest countries, the UN provides funds to support just two delegates.

IIED saw an urgent need to strengthen the negotiating teams from the LDCs. Even in a system with one vote per country, the vast gaps in negotiating teams, along with uneven knowledge and technical support for LDC delegations, lead to unfair outcomes that hurt the most vulnerable. For example, the Copenhagen meeting created a US\$30 billion fund with 'balanced allocation' between climate change adaptation and mitigation in developing

countries over 2010–2012. But countries desperate for adaptation support were unable to lock away funds for that purpose. Of the money disbursed so far, only around one tenth has been allocated for adaptation. Much mitigation funding has gone to rapidly growing economies such as China. Left behind are nations that face grave threats from climate change but scarcely contribute to the problem.

To address such inequity, IIED as part of the European Capacity Building Initiative (ecbi) introduced bursaries to support more delegates from poor countries. This programme allowed bursary holders to participate in negotiations over several years, as well as in regional workshops where they met with other decision makers and discussed strategies for upcoming UNFCCC conferences in an informal, friendly setting.

The meetings helped strengthen understanding and connections among policymakers and assisted countries' efforts to build national expertise on technical aspects of the negotiations, funding mechanisms and adaptation plans. We also gathered LDC negotiators together with their leaders – the chairs of the Africa group and LDC group, for instance – immediately before UNFCCC meetings, to discuss key topics and plan their negotiating positions. We found that the continuity of the workshops, which since 2007 have drawn more than 300 participants, was crucial to their

is the only global forum where they feel their interests could be adequately addressed. But UNFCCC delegations from LDC countries are very small, with limited expertise and technical support, putting them at a considerable disadvantage. This project helped delegates from LDCs strengthen their capacity to negotiate for equitable solutions under the global climate regime.

KEY LESSONS LEARNT & INNOVATIONS

- LDCs need not just more delegates, but specialist negotiators with the capacity to follow specific subjects in the UN climate negotiations. This allows delegates to negotiate more powerfully on a wide range of issues.
- Regional workshops, involving not only climate negotiators but parliamentarians and representatives from governmental agencies, produced unprecedented consensus on the need to act in concert and translate international policy into national action.
- Informal meetings outside formal UN fora can go far to build relationships and knowledge among LDC leaders. But they should be continued over a period of years: a single gathering is likely to raise awareness, but not strengthen capacity.

PARTNERS' VIEW

The LDCs used to rely on the bigger regional groupings such as the Africa group to represent their interests, as the LDCs were not very strong. Following the capacity-building work done by IIED, the group is much stronger and more proactive. Nobody can take a decision without the agreement of the LDC group.

Sumaya Zakeldin
Bursary holder from Sudan

IIED CLIMATE CHANGE GROUP

Working in collaboration with partner organisations and individuals in developing countries, the Climate Change Group has been leading the field on adaptation to climate change issues.



Workshops in the lead up to UNFCCC meetings give LDC negotiators a chance to plan their positions and build relationships.

success. Generally, one workshop was sufficient to raise awareness, but it took multiple meetings to see knowledge develop and relationships blossom.

Creating in-country experts

IIED commissioned 25 briefing papers for the workshops, covering contentious issues as well as important negotiation processes, players and tactics. Initially, we planned to rely on Northern authors with abundant resources and technical knowledge. But we soon realised that the writing process offered another opportunity to strengthen Southern capacity and ownership of outcomes. We therefore partnered Southern and Northern authors on each paper. In effect, this created more knowledgeable, specialised experts within low-income countries.

In many LDC negotiation teams, each individual covers not only the multifaceted climate debate, but other UN environmental conventions such as those on ozone and biodiversity. The bursary programme served to create additional subject specialists. In 2010, bursaries funded eight delegates to climate conferences from Ethiopia, Gambia, Lesotho, Mali, Nepal, Sudan and Tanzania, who otherwise would not have been able to attend. Each chose a specific topic to follow in the negotiations. One bursary recipient who focused on technology transfer became the new coordinator in that area for the LDC group; others were instrumental in shaping LDC negotiating positions. The new delegates credited the bursaries and workshops, in part, for a marked rise in the group's influence.

The programme's impact spread further at regional workshops, where UN delegates held discussions with policymakers and government officials about translating international policy to national and local levels, and vice versa. A meeting in Senegal produced the Dakar Resolution, an unprecedented agreement between parliamentarians from West African countries recognising the importance of regional cooperation on climate change and calling for consultations among experts, ministers, heads of state and others to develop shared negotiating positions aimed at a fair international solution.

In the project's next phase, we will put greater emphasis on workshops linking national and international policymaking. We are seeking funds to continue and expand the bursary programme, so that bursary-holders who have grown into seasoned experts can mentor a new cohort of junior delegates. And we will follow up on emerging issues, such as the Green Climate Fund established after the 2010 conference in Cancun, with briefings and other technical support to the LDC group. The influence of these delegations is higher now than in 2007 or even 2009, and with ongoing support, poor countries struggling with climate change can keep pressing hard to get their needs met in the UN.

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