



**THE LONG  
ROAD TO  
PARIS**

Report 2015/16

# THE LONG ROAD TO PARIS

On 12 December 2015, the Paris Agreement on climate change was agreed, setting out what countries need to do to address the shared global problem of climate change under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). It was an emotional moment for IIED's team in Paris, who had provided advice and support for the Least Developed Countries (LDC) Group in the negotiations leading to the talks over the last five years, working closely with three consecutive chairs of the LDC Group — the Gambia, Nepal and Angola.

Here we report on IIED's contribution to the final stretch of the long road, through 2015 and 2016.

In 2015, IIED's team working on global climate law, policy and governance worked very closely with the LDC Group. The team leader is Dr Achala Abeysinghe, principal researcher in IIED's Climate Change Group who serves as legal, technical and strategic advisor to the Chair of the LDC Group, Mr Giza Gaspar-Martins of Angola, and to the group's Special Climate Envoy, the Gambian Minister Pa Ousman Jarju. She is supported by Brianna Craft, Janna Tenzing and Marika Weinhardt.

The Paris Agreement was a major achievement for the 48 poorest countries in the world who make up the LDC Group. Ensuring that the specific needs and special situations of the LDCs were fully recognised took many hours of negotiations, diplomacy, persuasion and sheer hard work.





## Just a few of the key milestones from the 12 months leading to the Paris Agreement:

**February 2015:** The IIED team is in Geneva to support the Least Developed Countries Group at the first negotiating session of the year. An early draft of the Paris Agreement takes shape.

**March 2015:** Pa Ousman Jarju, the Gambia's Special Climate Envoy travels to China seeking to raise ambition in the climate process, in the first ever LDC climate diplomatic mission to China.

**June 2015:** Negotiations on the Paris Agreement text re-open in Bonn, and the LDC Group continues to push for greater ambition taking part in 'bilateral' meetings with the US delegation as well as meeting with the European Union (EU), Nordic countries, the UK delegation, a progressive group of Latin American countries and the Executive Secretary of the UNFCCC, Christiana Figueres.

**July 2015:** Minister Jarju attends a conference in Rome marking Pope Francis' encyclical letter *Laudato si'*, which calls for action on climate change.

**August 2015:** Negotiations resume in Bonn, with many of the LDC Group's crucial issues (recognition of specific needs and special situations of LDCs, 1.5°C temperature goal, long-term pathway to net zero emissions, and recognition of the links between mitigation, adaptation and loss and damage) not confirmed in the text. Commitments by individual countries, submitted ahead of the Paris talks in the form of Intended Nationally Determined Contributions, show a lack of ambition. Behind the scenes, countries with similar ambitions are seeking a coalition to push for their collective ambition in the Paris deal.

The Gambia hosts the 16th Meeting of the Cartagena Dialogue for Progressive Action with 28 countries discussing priority issues for the 2015 agreement.

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*"The IIED and Legal Response Initiative support team in general and Achala Abeysinghe through her indefatigable work as legal advisor of the Chair, in particular, have been an invaluable asset to LDC Group during the negotiations."*

Pa Ousman Jarju  
Special Climate Envoy, the Gambia

**Image:** Envoy Pa Ousman Jarju addresses a COP21 audience



**September 2015:** Minister Jarju and Dr Abeyasinghe travel to New York for the Major Economies Forum. They meet with the US Special Climate Envoy Todd Stern and join an informal ministerial gathering hosted by the Marshall Islands, one of the key instigators behind the 'High Ambition Coalition' that emerges in Paris.

**October 2015:** Negotiations resume in Bonn for the last session before COP21. Under mounting pressure, a draft agreement text is hammered out. Also in Bonn, Minister Jarju is briefed by IIED ahead of an informal High Level Meeting between LDCs and the EU. Back in London, Giza Gaspar-Martins continues to push for a stronger deal at the Chatham House Climate Change Conference in London, supported by Dr Abeyasinghe, and meets with the UK delegation.

**November 2015:** Giza Gaspar-Martins and LDC Group ministers, supported by Dr Abeyasinghe, attend the Pre-COP Ministerial meeting in Paris where they discuss strategy ahead of the climate summit. There are bilateral talks with the EU and UNFCCC Secretary General to emphasise the importance of the 1.5°C goal. The US Secretary of State John Kerry announces the US will not sign a legally-binding deal in Paris.

Dr Abeyasinghe writes an open letter to Secretary John Kerry explaining why a legally binding agreement in Paris is important and necessary.

Dr Abeyasinghe is recognised as one of the top 15 women acting on climate, worldwide, and is featured as one of *Vogue's* Climate Warriors.

At the end of November, COP21 opens in Paris.



**December 2015:** IIED supports the LDC Group Chair and negotiators throughout the talks, working through several nights. Minister Jarju plays a key role, facilitating discussions at the request of the COP President Laurent Fabius. The LDC Chair keeps pushing for the 1.5° target and the need to recognise the LDCs' specific needs and special situations. Supported by IIED's communications team, he appears in various media channels including CNN. The High Ambition Coalition adds momentum to calls for a stronger deal, with the LDC Group Chair and Minister Jarju speaking out.

Agreement is finally reached on Saturday evening. The Preamble to the Agreement notes the specific needs and special situations of the LDCs. Article 2 sets out a long term temperature goal to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C. Crucial references to finance for adaptation, loss and damage and increasing ambition are also in the text.



**Background image:** Giza Gaspar-Martins and Achala Abeyasinghe in discussion  
**Left image:** COP21 president Laurent Fabius addresses the evening plenary  
**Right image:** Giza Gaspar-Martins being interviewed

# THE BATTLE FOR 1.5 DEGREES

A long-term temperature goal of 1.5°C was a make-or-break issue for the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) at the Paris talks. But even as COP21 got underway, some of the world's richest countries still saw limiting temperature rise to less than 2°C as an impossible task. IIED was there to support the LDCs in achieving this vital target.

Some years ago, it had been widely accepted that a long-term temperature goal of 2°C above pre-industrial levels was enough to prevent dangerous human-induced climate change. But there was increasing scientific evidence that 2°C of warming was too much for some parts of the world.

IIED senior fellow Dr Saleemul Huq looked at the evidence and recognised what this meant for the world's most vulnerable countries. As early as 2009, in his role as an advisor to the LDCs in the climate talks, he warned negotiators that there was a need to challenge the long-term goal.

*"Even if it is extremely difficult, it is not impossible."*

Dr Saleemul Huq

"Negotiators agreed that we needed to push for 1.5°C," Dr Huq explained, "but we lacked political leadership."

## **Climate Vulnerable Forum**

Among the countries most at risk were low-lying small island states, such as the Maldives. Dr Huq approached the newly-elected President, Mohamed Nasheed. He asked for more details and, recognising the need to act, invited other affected countries to get involved. In November 2009 the Climate Vulnerable Forum, representing 15 countries, was born.

Their campaign for 1.5°C met with initial resistance: rich countries rejected the call at the 2009 climate talks in Copenhagen. But there was a glimmer of hope for the future, as President Nasheed did succeed in securing a commitment to review the long-term temperature goal.

*"A 2°C goal is effectively saying that we'll protect ourselves, we'll protect our economies, we won't protect you."*

Dr Saleemul Huq

## **Protecting all countries**

In June 2015 the review of the long-term temperature goal was published. It found that while a 2°C long-term temperature goal would be sufficient for most countries and most ecosystems, protecting all countries and ecosystems required a 1.5°C goal. This put the issue back on the agenda at the 2015 Paris climate talks — unlike Copenhagen, this offered the opportunity for an ambitious long-term goal in a binding multilateral agreement.

In the meantime, the Climate Vulnerable Forum had continued to meet, attracting new members, representing an ever-growing share of the world's population. Civil society campaigners had also adopted the 1.5°C campaign — this vision of a fairer future was taking hold.

"There was still a lot of push back from the big developed countries, from the US, Europe," Dr Huq said. "China and India were saying, 'It's just too difficult'. Our argument was that it was not impossible and it was the right thing to do."

Despite the growing momentum for a 1.5°C goal in the run up to Paris, rich countries continued to object even as the talks got underway. But gradually, as the negotiations moved into the second week and with the firm support of the Least Developed Countries, more and more rich nations came on board.

## **A major victory**

Six years after 1.5°C was first put to the international community, lobbying in Paris delivered results. The final wording of the Paris Agreement calls on countries to pursue efforts to achieve a 1.5°C goal, setting the bar for countries to increase ambition going forward. Secretary Emmanuel M. de Guzman, the Philippine head of delegation at COP21, said:

"We may be vulnerable but we are also capable when we work together. Paris is the victory of our intensified collaboration: this historic agreement tells the world that human rights will be upheld, that the big and powerful have stood up for the small, the poor and the vulnerable, and that the world is determined to rise to this great challenge."



# Our work continues

## Building skills for the future

While all countries in theory have an equal voice in the UN climate negotiations, they do not all enjoy the same resources, training or support. That is why IIED runs the **European Capacity Building Initiative (ecbi)** in partnership with **Oxford Climate Policy**, providing training and support for new negotiators from vulnerable developing countries. Regional workshops equip these negotiators to participate more effectively in the global process, ensuring more equitable outcomes for the countries they represent.

In Paris, IIED provided legal and technical support for negotiators in partnership with the **Legal Response Initiative**, while ecbi hosted the first of a five-year programme of workshops for junior negotiators ahead of the talks. In 2016, ecbi has produced a pocket guide to the Paris Agreement and held the first of three regional training sessions in Bangladesh. Future workshops are planned in Senegal and Tanzania, with a session before COP22 in Marrakech in November 2016.

Find out more: [www.iied.org/ecbi](http://www.iied.org/ecbi)

## Raising ambition

The Agreement signed in Paris in December 2015 marks the start of a new chapter in global climate governance. Under this new agreement, countries will submit plans for the actions they commit to take to reduce emissions and increase resilience, building on the plans submitted before COP21. They have also committed to a global stocktake every five years, when they will review progress and ambition.

Before the Agreement comes into force, it must be signed and ratified by at least 55 countries representing at least 55 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions. This process got underway at a ceremony at the United Nations in New York in April 2016. In late June 2016, 178 Parties had signed the Agreement and 19 states had ratified. In the meantime, negotiations will be held to establish the modalities, guidelines and procedures for the Agreement. IIED continues to support the LDC Group in these negotiations.



For a complete picture of IIED's achievements at COP21, visit [www.iied.org/cop21](http://www.iied.org/cop21)

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