
Framework for design of ICT solutions for climate negotiators

Report to CDKN

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Project: ICT solutions to support climate negotiators and delegates (Stage 3)

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Project Supplier: OneWorld UK

Contact: www.oneworld.org

bill.gunyon@oneworld.net

CAN Mezzanine,
32-36 Loman Street,
London,
SE1 0EH

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Acronyms

AOSIS: Alliance of Small Island States

COP: Conference of the Parties

DFID: UK Department for International Development

ICTs: Information and Communications Technologies

IIED: International Institute for Environment and Development

LDCs: Least Developed Countries

ODI: Overseas Development Institute

PMV: Poorest and Most Vulnerable

UNFCCC: UN Framework Convention on Climate Change

WTO: World Trade Organization

Executive Summary

This document is an abridged version of OneWorld's Recommendations Report to CDKN. It draws on the research conducted at COP18, to outline a framework for the conceptual design and delivery of ICT solutions for climate negotiators.

A tipping point at the UN Climate Talks

As the first 'paperless' climate conference, COP18 marks a tipping point for working practices at the UNFCCC. Implementation of the UN's 'PaperSmart' initiative means the process is now facilitated almost entirely via digital communications.

This shift in the day-to-day conduct of the Climate Talks reflects broader trends and is highly unlikely to be reversed. It represents a **significant threat and an unprecedented opportunity** for negotiators from PMV countries.

A striking feature of this research has been the extent to which PMV negotiators already suffer as a result of poor ICT capacity. The vast majority cannot turn to the advanced devices, tools and infrastructure used by rich country counterparts. If left unsupported PMV delegates will struggle to overcome an imbalance that cuts across every facet of the process, reducing their (relative) speed and effectiveness, group coherence, even undermining their ability to follow events.

Simultaneously, digital working practices open the door to virtual collaboration at a scale and depth that has never before been possible. Official documents are now published online as soon as they are made available in the conference centre. This represents an unprecedented opportunity to enable real-time collaboration between delegates and outside experts, and to tackle some of the most persistent challenges faced by PMV negotiators at multilateral negotiations.

Framework for implementation

A co-design process – working closely with negotiators and outside providers of technical and legal expertise – will be essential to ensure effective integration with existing and planned negotiator support services as well as continued sensitivity to PMV delegates' unique context, resources and capacity.

Introduction

Background to the Project

In September 2011, the UK government's Department for International Development established a new Advocacy Fund which aims to rebalance international trade and climate negotiations.

In its announcement launching the new Fund, the Department observed that: "during the Copenhagen climate meetings, some of the poorest countries could only afford to send one or two delegates, as some rich nations sent more than fifty."

"We must create a level playing field by giving the poorest a voice at crucial talks," said the then minister, Andrew Mitchell.

CDKN was appointed to manage the climate window of the Advocacy Fund. This project is one of a number that have been commissioned under CDKN's priority theme known as Negotiations Support.

The Aims of the Project

The overall purpose of this work is to identify ICT solutions for negotiators and delegates to access the knowledge and information they need for UNFCCC and other climate change related negotiations. New innovative and sustainable ways need to be put forward now to deliver support to negotiators and delegates, especially those from PMV countries.

One of the key objectives of this project is to enhance negotiators' and delegates' technical, legal and finance knowledge and build their confidence to intervene and influence climate negotiations.

About OneWorld

OneWorld pioneers internet and mobile phone applications that the world's poorest people can use to improve their life chances, and that help people everywhere understand global problems - and do something about them. Founded in 1995 at the dawn of the internet, OneWorld has been a driving force behind many of the key innovations that mark the history of information and communication technologies for development. As an organization, we specialize in deploying ICTs in complex and

resource constrained environments, working in countries such as Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Mali and Egypt. For example, our recently developed real-time monitoring software, has enabled election monitors in Senegal and Sierra Leone to collect and analyze live data from polling stations. Hillary Clinton described the Senegal operation as “perhaps the most sophisticated monitoring programme ever deployed in Africa or anywhere else” (see www.SaloneVote.com). OneWorld’s team in the UK has considerable experience of working at the UN climate negotiations, particularly from the perspective of the world’s most vulnerable countries. We have deployed media and technological innovations inside COPs and intersessionals since COP13 in 2007.

The project team is:

- Peter Armstrong –Technology and Innovations Director
- Bill Gunyon – Research Analyst and Project Manager
- Adam Groves – Needs and Requirements Analyst

Structure of Project

Under way since the end of October 2012, the project has progressed through three successive work-streams, to the delivery of this final recommendations report.

Stage 1: Analysis of current ICT solutions available to support negotiators and delegates. Completed in November 2012, our report evaluates ICT solutions presently available to negotiators. This will ensure that any new innovations complement the current technology ecosystem. It also represents an invaluable opportunity to learn lessons from existing products.

Stage 2: Stakeholder engagement: Understanding the needs and requirements of negotiators and delegates. Understanding the needs of negotiators and delegates is the key to identifying practical ICT solutions to the challenges that they face. The UNFCCC COP18 in Doha in Nov/Dec 2012 was the core opportunity to advance this investigation. This stage was completed in December 2012.

Stage 3: Recommendation of possible ICT solutions. Research completed in Stages 1 and 2 has informed a series of options and recommendations concerning ICT solutions to help poor countries to influence the climate negotiations. OneWorld’s

Software team and Board have been engaged to ensure the feasibility and quality of the recommendations.

Structure of this report

We begin this report by looking at a 'day in a life of a PMV negotiator', drawing into focus the everyday challenges that PMV delegates face at the UN Climate Talks. Building on OneWorld's expertise in deploying ICTs in resource constrained environments, and on six years' experience working at the UNFCCC, we then highlight some of the core principles used to inform the selection and conceptual design of solutions for climate negotiators.

A day in the life of a PMV negotiator

During the interviews we conducted at COP18, PMV negotiators generously shared hundreds of examples of the day to day challenges they face at the Climate Talks. The nature of these challenges can be clearly understood when seen through the lens of a PMV negotiator's day. The following is based entirely on actual cases reported by interviewees.

It's Monday - week 1 of the UN Climate Talks. Ibrahim has spent the past 6 days in last-minute coordination meetings conducted by the LDC, Africa and G77 groups. He's already tired. The Africa Group meeting in particular was chaotic as few negotiators had had time to prepare; several of his colleagues have confided they have 'no clue' what's going on. Ibrahim's has some idea of what lies ahead of him as this will be his second COP - although he hasn't been able to follow the process at all since last year because his department can't afford to send him to interim meetings. He thinks he can remember most of the acronyms though. As one of only 3 government delegates in his party, Ibrahim's been told he'll have to negotiate.

Ibrahim's domestic office doesn't have broadband internet and the whole city was without power on the day he'd set aside for research, so he was only able to download a few short articles onto his laptop before travelling to COP18. Sitting in his first negotiating session that morning, he wishes he'd had time to read them properly. The Chinese delegate has just proposed a change to the second clause of the tabled text: substituting the word "outcome" for the word "result" and adding a reference to Text FCCC/SB/2011/INF.6/Corr.1 – the "Report on the joint workshop on matters

relating to Article 2, paragraph 3, and Article 3, paragraph 14, of the Kyoto Protocol". Ibrahim has no idea what this document is, or what the legal difference is between 'outcome' and 'result'. What should he do? He can see the EU negotiator using Skype chat to check a few details with her adaptation expert. One of the US negotiator's assistants leaves the room, calling Washington on his blackberry. Ibrahim doesn't have access to any experts- and even if he did, his old computer crashes when he tries to use programmes like Skype, and he couldn't just leave the room, as who would participate? He tries to find the document on the UNFCCC website, but realizes he won't have enough time to read it now. He wishes his boss was here. He's a senior negotiator in the LDC group with 10 years' experience – but he's too busy to offer much support. Ibrahim raises his hand to call for the text to be bracketed. He can't allow something to pass if he doesn't understand it. Several other negotiators complain that he is stalling the process on a simple issue – they say it was discussed last month in Bangkok and everyone agreed. They press Ibrahim to let it pass, but he holds his nerve and instructs that it should be bracketed. He writes a note about the clause in a word document, so that he can ask an LDC coordinator when they meet later that day.

The rest of the session is a blur. In truth, Ibrahim doesn't understand the legal implications of a lot of the text – but he can't bracket every single clause. He hopes that the AOSIS delegate was more knowledgeable than him, as he followed her lead on several decisions. Aside from not understanding the technical language, Ibrahim isn't really sure what his strategy should be. He envies the EU negotiators, who have been meeting to strategize every month over the past year. Apparently they work full time on this issue; no wonder they seem to know the documents inside-out.

As the session ends, Ibrahim's laptop battery dies. He thanks God it didn't run out in the middle of the meeting and resolves to arrive early at the next session so that he can find a seat near a plug. He'll just grab a coffee first.

Standing in the queue for his coffee, Ibrahim realizes that he doesn't know which room the next meeting is in. There are no paper copies of the Daily Programmes available, so he sets off in search of a free UN computer station. It takes 10 minutes of crisscrossing back and forth across the vast convention centre before Ibrahim manages to find a free computer. He starts it up and, after a bit of searching, finds the online Daily Programme. Room 5a. He's running late now,

When Ibrahim arrives the room is full. There is nowhere for him to plug in his laptop, meaning he can't follow the negotiating text under discussion... or look up previous texts... or get online to check new document releases... or see the daily programme. Ibrahim sits with a pad of paper and takes notes on the discussion as best he can to share with his colleagues later. At least he speaks the language though; he notices the young negotiator from Mali next to him, grappling to understand the English, never-mind the technical, scientific and political nuances in the text.

The afternoon's meetings are better. Ibrahim finds a plug for his computer, and is able to sit with his boss who is more confident. Even so, they have to bracket several clauses that neither of them understands.

It's only that evening, during the LDC coordination meeting that Ibrahim learns he made a terrible mistake in his first meeting. His boss has read the draft text that's been circulated and there's an unacceptable clause which he let pass. Ibrahim is instructed to re-open the clause for negotiation the following day. He knows the other delegates are going to accuse him of causing more delays again. It turns out the clause he did bracket was agreed in Bangkok after all. Just his luck. On the 10pm bus home, Ibrahim slumps in his chair, exhausted and worried about tomorrow. Day 1 down, 11 more to go.

Framework for Design

Upon completion and review of the Needs Assessment we identified a number of principles to guide our recommendations for new ICT solutions. This 'framework for design' captures findings that relate to the broader context of PMV negotiator's work – ranging from observations on their trust networks to the question of utilizing mainstream ICT products.

Leveraging existing mainstream products and tools

The interviews confirmed that some better resourced PMV negotiators are already attempting to use and adapt mainstream ICT tools in an effort to meet their needs. Examples include the use of:

- Skype and 'Facebook chat' to communicate in real-time;
- MS Word's 'track changes' function to annotate negotiating texts;
- Photos of negotiating texts taken with smart-phones in order to share information and solicit advice.

Beyond illustrating the clear need and desire for this type of ICT functionality, the examples point towards the types of mainstream tools that some negotiators are comfortable using.

Principle 1:

Negotiators' familiarity with mainstream tools, as well as security and sustainability considerations, lead us to recommend that – where possible – new ICT solutions should complement mainstream products and integrate with existing workflows and habits. It may also be desirable to follow the design and usability conventions of products that are familiar to PMV negotiators.

Working within existing trust and social networks

Negotiators emphasized that effective collaboration is dependent on trust and mutual respect. The trust networks that exist between negotiators and other parties are complex and personal; they cannot be easily generalized, mapped or mediated by outsiders. Delegates also emphasized that (almost) all expert advice is political and that it is likely to be contested. Individual negotiators, delegations and groups have their own preferred sources of expertise.

Principle 2:

Rather than restricting collaborative tools to function with specific 'providers' of expertise, new solutions should enable individual negotiators to select, incorporate and build their own personal trust networks.

Multi-lingual

Language barriers are the biggest single challenge faced by non-English speakers at the UN Climate Talks.

Principle 3:

To avoid adding to existing layers of inequality, new ICT solutions should be operable by, and relevant to, non-English speakers.

Operable in low-resource contexts; usable by all

A number of negotiators emphasized the ICT constraints that their delegations face. These include limited or no internet access; reliance on old computers with limited

processing power and battery life; limited or no access to smart phones and tablets and – for some – unreliable electricity supplies in their domestic offices. Similarly, delegates noted that many negotiators (and especially some of the elder and more experienced members) are not comfortable using the latest hardware.

Principle 4:

New ICT solutions should be sensitive to the low-resource context in which many negotiators operate and should deliver benefits to all - regardless of their familiarity with ICTs.

Contributing to more effective preparation for meetings

Interviewees were clear that there is no alternative to having knowledgeable and well-prepared negotiating teams at the conferences. At the ‘sharp end’ of the negotiations – during informal and bilateral meetings – PMV negotiators must have the confidence, knowledge and skills to secure favorable agreements whilst working under immense pressure. Virtual support is unlikely to be easily accessible at these moments.

Principle 5:

New ICT solutions should help build negotiators’ long-term capacity; enabling more effective preparation for meetings. They should complement and support existing e-Learning and capacity-building initiatives.

Appropriate to context and working patterns

Negotiators from PMV countries are, in every sense, operating ‘on the edge’ at the UN Climate Talks. Their knowledge, time, energy, equipment, language ability, experience, and skills are often stretched to – and beyond – their limits by the vast demands of the process and in the face of far better-equipped delegations.

As a direct consequence of these pressures, PMV negotiators work in ways that are not always intuitive to ‘outsiders’. Senior negotiators explained this can lead funders to focus on the wrong issues, or to misunderstand delegates’ precise motives and

working patterns – resulting in products and services that are inappropriate or impractical. Delegates have little scope to accommodate flawed ‘solutions’ in their already-strained activities.

Principle 6:

We recommend working closely to ensure new ICT solutions are suitably adapted to the context and needs of the negotiators themselves.

Together with considerations including sustainability, security, feasibility, desirability and cost, these principles provide a set of criteria against which to judge proposed solutions - and also contribute towards an implementing framework to guide the chosen ICT tool's final design and development.

Recommendations for development

As the first ‘paperless’ climate conference, COP18 marks a tipping point for working practices at the UNFCCC. Digital devices and technologies have had an increasingly prominent role in the process over the past twenty years, but from 2012 onwards, the Climate Talks are set to be ‘digital by default’.

From the implementation of PaperSmart to the development of the UNFCCC’s ‘Negotiator’ app, there is a clear and growing *assumption* that delegates will effectively exploit digital devices in their work. As PMV negotiators themselves acknowledge, this “is the way the world is moving [and] we must not be left behind”.

Yet, there is a dearth of technologies suited to the specific needs, resources and capabilities of PMV negotiators. Whilst their rich country counterparts can adapt to paperless working practices using the latest handheld devices and ICT solutions (optimized for use in the developed world), delegates from the poorest and most vulnerable countries are not equipped with equivalent solutions that are sensitive to their context. Digital access to the Daily Programme and official documents via a smartphone, for example, is no use to the majority of PMV negotiators, who are equipped only with a laptop (or in some cases, only a standard feature phone).

The irony is, if negotiators from PMV countries were equipped with appropriate tools, they would stand to benefit most from the transition to digital working practices. PaperSmart opens the door to virtual collaboration at a scale and depth that has never before been possible; it offers a real opportunity to tackle some of the most important and persistent challenges faced by PMV negotiators at multilateral negotiations – including lack of cooperation, lack of technical and legal capacity, lack of institutional memory and lack of confidence.

As such, the transition to ‘digital first’ working practices at the UNFCCC should be considered both a threat and an opportunity for PMV negotiators. If left unsupported – without the ICT capacity to adapt to a new digital era of negotiations – delegates from the poorest countries will struggle to overcome yet another layer of imbalance in the process. If supported with appropriate ICT solutions that are designed to meet their needs and resource-constrained context, there is an opportunity to address existing challenges and to unlock new levels of cooperation.

New ICT tools should be delivered as part of a coordinated and sustained programme of strategic ICT support, there is significant potential to bolster existing negotiator support services and to tackle fundamental inequalities in the process.