



Summary of Interviews | Examining Negotiations and Consensus-building in the UNFCCC

May 26, 2013

Overview

With support from the Climate and Development Knowledge Network (CDKN), Meridian Institute is working to explore some of the components of consensus-building in the UNFCCC. Part of this project has included conducting 22 interviews with a diverse set of individuals involved with, or supporting the climate change negotiations including: both developed and developing country negotiators, some of which have been involved for decades, others who have served for only one or two years; chairs and facilitators, Secretariat staff, and supporting organization representatives.

Interviewees were asked to share their personal experiences in regards to the UNFCCC negotiation process with the objectives of: 1) gathering first-hand perspectives into the process; 2) garnering insights as to how multilateral agreement is reached; and 3) identify ways in which the process could best be supported. Interviewees were asked about the key factors in reaching agreement and about the relationship of those factors to the capacities of negotiators, chairs, and facilitators, and the UNFCCC negotiation process as a whole.

The key factors presented in this summary are aimed at providing tools and mechanisms for disaggregating the complex process of multilateral negotiations and some of the components involved with reaching agreed outcomes. While this summary document does not do justice to the depth of insight shared during the interviews, it aims to provide an analysis of interviewees' collective experiences within the following areas:

- A Policy Dialogue Model & Layers of the UNFCCC: provides a lens for interpreting the negotiation process
- Preparing for Negotiations: outlines ways negotiators can best prepare themselves
- Skills and Approaches for Chairs and Facilitators
- Measures to Support the Consensus-Building in the UNFCCC Process
- Conclusions; and
- Recommended Resources

A Lens for Examining Multilateral Negotiations & Consensus-building

Multilateral negotiations are often viewed as highly complex systems with many moving pieces. It is sometimes difficult to determine what factors lead to success vs. failure and how some of these factors relate to each other. To help explore this complex multilateral policy negotiation process, the **Policy Dialogue Model**¹ illustrated on page three can be used as a lens for interpreting and understanding some of the key factors in a negotiation, how they relate to each other and how they contribute towards reaching an

To reach agreement, the process needs: “a level playing field of understanding the issues; a sense of confidence that all the right players are in the room; a good Chair who knows how to ensure all people can express opinions; and who also has a vision of where possible outcomes are that will be acceptable both inside and outside of the room, so that they can provide a gentle steer.”

agreement. The model includes three major factors: 1) political context; 2) negotiation dynamics; and 3) group process—all of which are typically involved in any policy negotiation. There are also two cross-cutting dynamics of power, and data & information that interact with all three major factors.

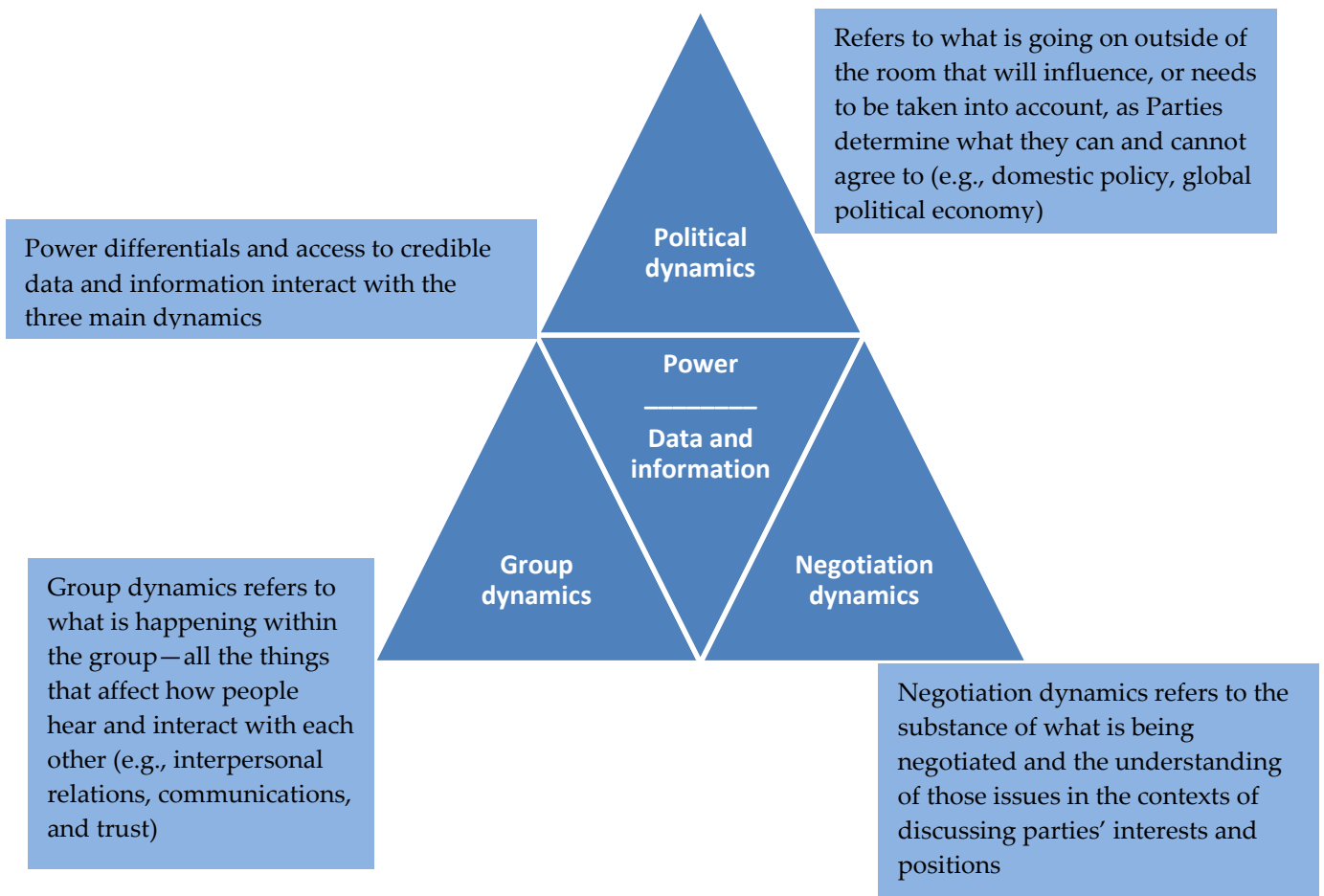
It is important to note that negotiation is a process by which parties work to identify areas of potential compromise where an agreement could be reached, which results in consensus. Therefore, the concept of “consensus-building” is really dependent on whether those negotiations are, in fact, leading towards agreement or not.

According to Dr. Ehrmann’s model, the factor(s) identified by interviewees as being most important in the negotiation process are indicative of one’s dominant perspective or entry point when it comes to negotiations. Some interviewees indicated that making progress all depends on politics; others indicated that trust between individuals is most important and referred to the UNFCCC negotiations as a “very human process”.

One may expect that scientists would emphasize the importance of data and information, and foreign affairs diplomats would prioritize the political context. However, the ability for negotiators, chairs/facilitators, and those supporting the process, to understand and interpret the negotiations more holistically through the lens of all of the model’s dynamics can serve as a valuable tool for assessing what is really happening and for informing future interventions.

¹ This model is based upon and adapted from Dr. John Ehrmann’s Model of a Policy Dialogue. 1997. Dr. Ehrmann is a founding Senior Partner at Meridian Institute. Ehrmann, J. R. (1997). *The Policy Dialogue: A Descriptive Model of a New Approach to Formulating Environmental Policy*. (Doctoral Dissertation). The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

Figure 1.1: A Policy Dialogue Model



Observations from Each Dimension of the Model

Interviewees were asked which factors are most important to take into account when trying to reach agreement. Responses were analyzed through the lens of the Policy Dialogue Model. The below table provides selected quotes which illustrate how the model's dimensions relate to interviewees' experiences. The quotes are illustrative of the different vantage points from which the negotiations are viewed.

<p>Political Context Perspectives: Those with this dominant perspective tend to view the negotiations through a political lens.</p>	<p>"Isn't it entirely about politics? Politics are the formal starting negotiation positions of participants. If you took at their face value would not add up to consensus so you need to overcome them through personal interactions [group process] and improved understanding of interests [negotiation dynamics] so that the politics can readjust a bit."</p> <p>"There are topics that are more or less interesting from a political point of view."</p> <p>"If countries have a specific position that the group sees as impossible to logically understand, it's probably because of other influences outside of the process, such as the political process that's influencing that party to have that specific</p>
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	<p>position. Parties may understand each other, have good communication, relationships, and common knowledge base, but higher level politics within countries or negotiating groups are preventing agreement.”</p>
<p>Negotiation Dynamics Perspectives: those with this perspective tend to focus on the substance of discussions and how parties are expressing their interests, concerns and positions on the topic.</p>	<p>“You need the space to discuss and analyze as many options as possible before you let the political context influence too much- - which leads to parties blocking ideas for political reasons before they are even fully understood.”</p> <p>“If a party is very firm in its position from the beginning to end, it influences the outcome and dynamics of the negotiations because it means that at some point, each and every party has to give in some of its position to a group in order to reach an outcome. It's always good to hear a lot of parties with clear positions--but then they need to share interests in order to come to consensus.”</p>
<p>Group Process Perspectives: those with this perspective tend to focus on the importance of interpersonal relationships, communication, and trust among the group.</p>	<p>“Parties will disagree just because a certain country said it. That tends to play out in the big room plenaries and is less prominent in the smaller groups.”</p> <p>“Without communications, there's no relationship, with no relationships, there's no trust. They all build on each other.”</p> <p>“Having trust of colleagues, personal relationships are extremely important. If you have trust and confidence of colleagues that you will hear their concerns and handle information discreetly then you have a full picture of concerns from all groups. Without trust you don't have the full picture.”</p>
<p>Cross-Cutting Dimensions of Power, Data & Information: Power, data & information are cross-cutting influences that interact with the other three main dynamics.</p>	
<p>Data & Information: interviews revealed how data and information cut across some of the other dimensions in a step-wise process:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. First, scientific data is generated through research; 2. Then it is transformed into usable information via reports, publications and presentations; 3. This information is then interpreted and filtered by the negotiator or party within the context of their national circumstance or political interests; finally 4. Once information is interpreted, it is internalized and becomes knowledge. <div style="text-align: center; margin-top: 10px;"> <pre> graph LR A[Data] --> B[Information] B --> C[Interpretation] C --> D[Knowledge] </pre> </div>	
<p>Power: interviewees identified many aspects and levels in which power plays a role in the negotiations.</p>	

The “UNFCCC environment is very fair irrespective of where you come from, you can relate and engage equally with your counterparts in that process. In terms of empowering all the countries, the UNFCCC is one of the forums that provides an even platform for countries to express their own positions and views.”

“Some countries have been more important in the negotiations than their geopolitical position suggests. They are effective in facilitating compromise and providing leadership in the process.”

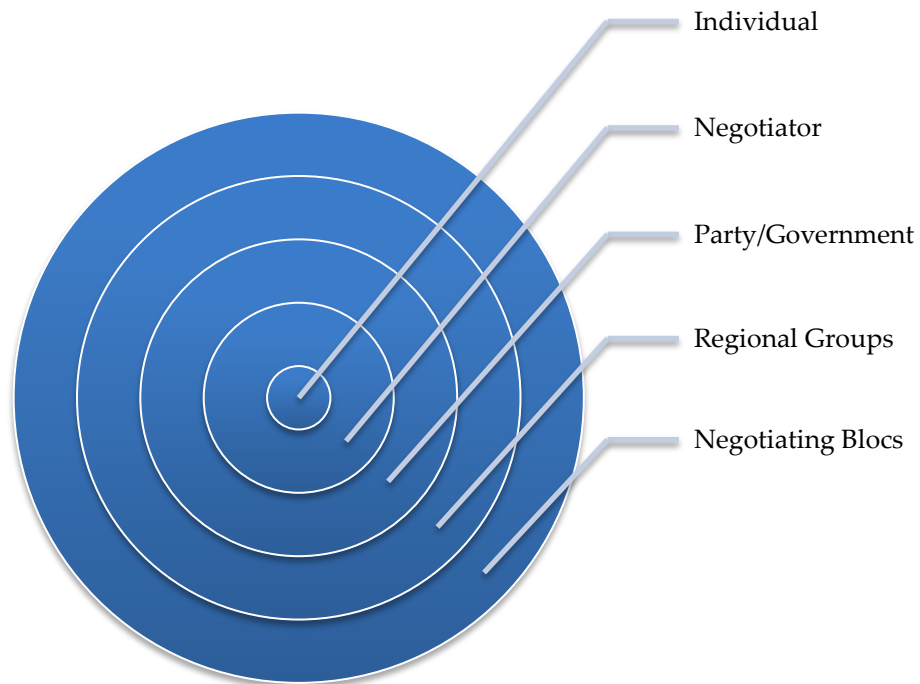
“Major economies--China, US, Brazil, EU, India will always have a lot of influence but individual countries can also have power with the right individual with the right combination of diplomatic and technical skills who can be unbelievably influential and make things happen.”

“Power is influential but it cannot alone drive the process. Climate change is no longer an environmental issue--it's a development, economic, and trade issue. Everyone has realized it's a survival issue for every state. You cannot force anyone...everyone has to agree for it to move forward.”

Peeling the Onion: Layers of the UNFCCC Multilateral Negotiation Process

In addition to discussing the above mentioned dynamics in the negotiation process, interviewees also observed different layers within the UNFCCC system that are important to take into account when trying to navigate the process and achieve an outcome. Several interviewees described the UNFCCC like “layers of an onion” — referring to negotiations happening across many different levels, actors and groups.

Figure 1.2 below illustrates different layers of actors and groups described in the interviews followed by a description and observations of each, starting at the individual level. It is important to recognize there are likely additional layers to take into account such as the Secretariat, the COP Presidency, and observer organizations.

Figure 1.2: Layers of the UNFCCC Multilateral Negotiation Process

Layers of the UNFCCC Multilateral Negotiation Process

Individual Level: the human level which is most closely related to the model’s group process dynamic and includes, interpersonal skills such as relationship-building, trustworthiness, communication style, and being well-received and respected by colleagues. Some quotes from interviewees that reference this layer included:

“It is a very human process. Outcomes are often determined by the combination of personalities that have engaged in the negotiation and national strategies.”

“Individuals can play an extremely important role. We have the UNFCCC history that’s full of agreements facilitated by individuals...not because that country was more effective.”

Negotiator Level: the professional level which is comprised of the individual, but also includes the additional layer of responsibility in representing and serving as an effective negotiator on behalf of their country. This is where the negotiation dynamic is most evident—in how negotiators engage on the substance, and how they communicate their country’s interests and position on that topic.

There were three “types” of negotiators identified, which may be helpful to keep in mind when determining how to relate to colleagues and better understand where they are coming from. It is important to note that interviewees had differing opinions as to the “most effective” negotiator-type, and in many cases it was dependent on the negotiating track (e.g., SBSTA being more technically focused, vs. ADP being more policy focused).

The three “negotiator types” that emerged from the interviews were:

1. **Diplomat:** a politically oriented negotiator, usually without extensive substantive or technical background in the topic. They are well-spoken and make influential political arguments and may have better understanding of other parties’ domestic, regional, or negotiating bloc political context. Over time, this type of negotiator can be perceived as lacking credibility if they do not adequately understand the technical basis of discussion.
2. **Subject Matter Expert:** has strong technical or scientific expertise in the issue and may be able to develop innovative solutions that can contribute to a compromise or agreed outcome. They may not be adept at clearly communicating ideas to other parties in ways they understand, and may lack sensitivity to the political context.
3. **Hybrid:** has both diplomatic skills and subject matter expertise. They understand the issues well and also know how to explain ideas in ways that other negotiators, especially diplomatic policymakers, can understand.

Party/Government Level: the state government layer is where the model’s political context dynamic starts to play a more significant role in determining how that party acts in the negotiations. Some interviewee quotes that describe this level include:

Unlike among individuals, “there’s not much trust between countries, the only thing you can trust a country to do is to act in their own national interest. At a country to country level, you can have confidence that a counterpart is going to act consistently with what you understand their interests to be.”

“Climate change is a big political issue and major agreements are way beyond the purview of negotiators. They have to be decided by presidents and prime ministers. There’s only so much that negotiators can do. They cannot unlock political decisions made at a much higher political level. This is the deadlock; it’s a higher order problem than a negotiation process or training problem.”

Regional Groups: some countries communicate and coordinate regionally before or during a negotiation session. Regional groups may or may not include like-minded countries, but they can be helpful in creating understanding of priorities and for building capacity within the region. This is another level where political context is quite relevant, as illustrated in the quote:

“Political influence is usually exerted somewhere behind the scenes during process of consultations and regional group consultations---that’s where the political impact is realized.”

Negotiating Blocs Level: these coordinated groupings of like-minded countries are aimed at creating more cohesion across 7-8 major groups and positions, rather than having 195 separate positions. It is important to note that each grouping or bloc typically encompasses all aspects of the model. These groupings have their own internal political context, negotiating dynamics, and group process dynamics; and similarly, when negotiating blocs interact with each other, one can often see how each of the dynamics plays a role in shaping those interactions.

Negotiator Preparations

Many interviewees shared how they prepare for negotiations, which may serve as useful advice for other negotiators and delegations. Some of the most important factors identified for being an effective negotiator and contributing towards progress included:

1. **Understand your country's interests and position on an issue.** To do this:
 - Meet with relevant government ministries and key domestic civil society groups;
 - Gather opinions from country experts and independent thinkers;
 - Build your strategy in coordination with regional groups and/or like-minded countries;
 - Ensure your ministers are properly briefed and that you have received written instructions. Specifically, negotiators should have instructions for their country's:
 - i. ideal outcome;
 - ii. compromised outcomes (or aspects they are able to compromise on if needed);
 - iii. bottom-line position which represents the absolute minimum they would accept as an outcome; and
 - iv. "redline" position, which is an unacceptable outcome.
2. **Articulate your country's interests and concerns in a concise and direct way** so that other parties may clearly understand and work with you on possible compromises and solutions.
3. **Understand other parties' interests and concerns as much as possible** in order to help identify areas for compromise and progress. To do this:
 - Read a lot, including news about major events in countries with which you are negotiating, as well as previous negotiation summaries and country submissions to identify key parties on an issue and see how discussion has evolved over time;
 - Talk to colleagues from other countries. Some countries or negotiating blocs engage in teleconferences leading up to the negotiation in order to help them understand each other's positions, identify possible areas for making progress, and develop strategies for addressing the interests of non-like-minded countries.
 - Develop a list of country positions to help determine which countries would be supportive of your position and which would not, and then speak with colleagues from both sides.

Strategies for Negotiators during Negotiations

Determine the will for agreement: Try to understand whether all parties in the room really want to reach agreement by looking at country's positions in other forums and

negotiating tracks. If parties are using delaying tactics or deliberately blocking then it is clear they are not ready to move forward.

- **If there is not the interest or ability to make progress on an issue:** spend time building capacity and understanding; do not push for agreement.
- **If there is interest in reaching agreement:** Negotiators need to show willingness to listen to each other's views and find the compromises needed to move forward. Consider whether the group is using the same words to mean the same thing and if there is enough technical capacity in the room to build the understanding needed to move forward.

Pursue Ideal Outcomes But Accept Incremental

Progress: Lock in a feasible solution rather than holding out for the ideal solution. Reaching a modest agreement now does not prevent a more ambitious outcome in the future.

Consider Constructive Interventions: There are different ways to make your statement: "I understand what you're saying but have you thought about this?" which shows willingness to work together and compromise as compared to, "This is where we are and this is where we stand." which is interpreted as inflexible and uncooperative. Some negotiators have a very difficult position to defend but present it in such a way that others empathize with them and will reach out and try to compromise. This approach can help prevent a more difficult or extreme position from being marginalized in the discussions.

"We often don't reach agreement because the perfect is the enemy of the good, and the perfect just isn't possible...we need a stronger understanding of what's actually possible rather than trying to get the impossible."

Request to meet with other Negotiators: meet with non-like-minded parties in order to hear and better understand their views, rather than trying to convince them why you are right and they are wrong.

"Ambiguity is the lubricant of negotiations": a really skilled negotiator knows when the agreement is sound enough to be implemented on an equitable playing field, but not so detailed that it becomes overly prescriptive. International agreements need to have some ambiguity because legal texts cannot define every instance in every country.

Cultivate Leadership and Compromising Skills: one of the more challenging negotiating skills is helping other parties (even your adversaries, on occasion) to overcome their domestic challenges and compromise with each other in order to achieve a good outcome.

Remember Cultural Differences: take the time to really understand other parties and be cautious about measuring all interventions by your own cultural standard. There are many situations where you may find that you are saying almost the same thing but simply not understanding each other.

The Role of Chairs and Facilitators

Having capable chairs and facilitators was identified by most as a critical element towards making progress in a negotiation. Interviewees described the role of chairs and facilitators as one of close consultation and listening to all parties in order to understand their needs on a particular issue, and to identify and build upon areas of convergence.

Doing this effectively depends on the stage of the negotiation and whether a chair or facilitator has strong process experience and knowledge of the UNFCCC, and whether they have substantive technical expertise on the issue.

Interviews revealed two stages of a negotiation process, as well as three types of chairs /facilitators. The below table describes the two stages of a negotiation process and how they relate to different types of chairs and facilitators:

<p>Stage 1 Negotiation Setting the boundaries of negotiation: what are the key issues for discussion and how will we proceed? -- With new negotiation topics, chairs and facilitators have more scope to actively drive the discussion by hearing parties' views and drafting text.</p>		<p>Stage 2 Negotiation In-depth or technical discussions that require expertise on a particular negotiation issue. -- With longer-standing issues, it is more likely to be a party-driven process in terms of drafting papers and text.</p>
<p>Chair/Facilitator 1: Adaptable and well-received by parties; establishes trust and effectively manages the process. -- Best suited for Stage 1 Negotiation.</p>	<p>Chair/ Facilitator 2: Hybrid of 1 and 2; adaptable, well-received, trustworthy, and also has substantive knowledge on the issue. -- Suited for any stage of negotiation.</p>	<p>Chair/Facilitator 3: Expert on the issue that can clarify and build understanding; may lack trust-building skills and effective process management. -- Best suited for Stage 2 Negotiation.</p>

Helpful Skills & Approaches for Chairs/Facilitators

Interviewees expressed their views on helpful skills and approaches they have seen chairs and facilitators use to help parties make progress, as well as some approaches perceived as unhelpful in leading parties to consensus.

Preparation and Getting Started as a Chair/Facilitator:

- Consult with parties individually to understand their interests and concerns, and identify possible areas for compromise or convergence.

- Ensure key concepts are clarified and misunderstandings are sorted out before entering the negotiation room. If discussions start with misunderstandings it creates a lot of disruption and it is difficult to move forward.
- Start sessions with a brief, neutral, historical overview of the topic and how discussions have evolved to help inform newer negotiators and set a common understanding as the basis for discussion.
- Nothing creates success like success--focus on areas where there is an opportunity to reach agreement and then tackle more challenging issues.
- Read a lot, including about what is happening outside the process in order to find solutions in unexpected places.

During a Negotiation as a Chair/Facilitator:

- Encourage an atmosphere of dialogue, talking, and problem solving early in the process and support parties to engage informally or bilaterally outside the formal discussion in order to promote relationship-building and improved understanding of various interests and positions.
- Chairs should pick facilitators who have trust among parties and ideally embody "hybrid" capabilities of both good process skills and technical understanding of the issue.
- Utilize the Secretariat to diffuse situations by requesting neutral, objective information on the history of the issue, technical clarifications, or procedural issues.
- Bring in outside stakeholders in a strategic way so they are aware of the discussion and can help inform parties' positions.
- Facilitators should aim to turn everyone into interest-based negotiators and problem-solvers. Often times, breaking the group into bilateral or small group discussions can help resolve differences and find areas for compromise. It is nearly impossible to problem solve in a plenary session; parties just repeat their positions and do not give much detail on their real concerns or interests.

Moving Towards Agreement as Chair/Facilitator:

- Develop a "friends of the facilitator group"--a very informal group of people who represent different views and can help get a pulse for what might work as a solution. Use this group as your advisors in the process, in addition to the consultations taken with all parties including the more extreme positions on an issue. However, the "friends of the facilitator group" should never be perceived as having a privileged position towards the text. The chair/facilitator needs to discretely create the space for consultations with this advisory group, while recognizing it is not a substitute for consultations with all parties.
- Call on people strategically. If a facilitator knows or has a general sense of what people are thinking, they can make progress by calling on certain people whom they know will help move the discussion forward.
- Prevent countries from feeling isolated in a given negotiation process or remaining silent on an issue, because even one country could block agreement in the end if they are not involved in building the solution.

- Balance bracketed text or areas of dissent in a way that ensures all views are represented and balanced. Chairs/facilitators should also clean-up bracketed text in a balanced way without hurting just one side.

Chair/Facilitator Approaches Perceived as Unhelpful

Interviewees shared some experiences and observations on chair and facilitator approaches that were perceived as unhelpful in helping parties to reach agreement. These included:

- Using a hands-off approach and leaving parties to work it out themselves is inefficient, time-consuming, and ineffective in reaching agreement.
- Picking a side, or proposing a text that represents the chair or facilitator's view of consensus creates more noise and disruption.
- Chairs/facilitators that are too heavy handed will quickly be reminded it is a party-driven process.
- Simply calling on people to speak without helping to summarize the sense of the group and move the discussion one step forward is ineffective.
- Reacting to a party's intervention, even if it is in anticipation that other parties would react, is unhelpful. If opposing parties do not react, it indicates they do not have a strong opinion. However, if the chair/facilitator reacts it can create safety in numbers and ultimately more opposition.

Supporting the UNFCCC Process

In addition to the key factors of negotiations and building agreement, interviewees were also asked about how the UNFCCC process itself could be best supported in order to enable progress and consensus-outcomes.

A number of themes emerged including:

- Reducing the level of complexity in the number of meetings and negotiating tracks;
- The role of informal dialogue and communications;
- Ways that supporting bodies can support the process; and
- Observations about a consensus-based vs. majority voting.

“The UN with 195 countries is the only place where vulnerable countries have a say. Everything else excludes them (G-8, G-20). The only place they have a say is the UN. If any agreement will have legitimacy it will be in the UN. No matter how inefficient, it's the only game in town where they have a say.”

1. Fewer Meetings & Negotiating Tracks

Many interviewees indicated that less was more in terms of the quality of discussions and the ability to make progress. Potential benefits cited in having fewer meetings included: allowing more time for negotiators to consult domestically; helping to get new ideas into the process; and providing time for countries to incorporate new thinking to inform their positions on an issue. Others said reliance on future meetings provides an

excuse for punting issues down the road. Therefore, fewer meetings would raise expectations for what each meeting should achieve and make it more difficult to procrastinate and put a decision off until the next meeting. Some selected quotes below elaborate on the above points:

“The intensity in which the UNFCCC negotiations are carried out doesn't allow national governments to do broader consultations and offset their basic positions. If you have a civil servant arriving to COP with basic instructions, and in a couple of months you go back to that same issue with no additional information and expect that country to change their view.”

The “speed of negotiations is so fast and embedded in closed group of negotiators that there is not sufficient time for technical people to go back home and analyze the options and solutions. It goes back to the strength of the consensus, and the fact that stronger consensus like the type you need for a future climate agreement needs careful consideration as to the conditions under which countries can rationalize the commitments back home.”

“You don't get more progress by creating more streams, you create less coherence. Issues might be detached from each other but they cannot be solved separately.”

2. The Role of Informal Discussions and Communications in Reaching Agreement

While the interview questions did not specifically address informal meetings, most interviewees identified the importance of informal discussions and communications in helping to build relationships, trust, and understanding among people in their personal capacities, which can help move things forward when they come back to the table as negotiators representing their country.

Many interviewees described informal dialogue settings (sometimes convened by Secretariat, sometimes convened by parties outside the process) as a helpful preparatory discussion prior to formal negotiations. Some of the benefits identified were: a less tense environment where people can speak more openly about their interests; the ability to learn from each other and share knowledge on the topic which builds confidence; the most efficient way for getting new ideas into the negotiation process; and creating group cohesion and long-term relationships. Some selected quotes describe the different roles in detail:

“In a formal setting, it's a tense situation, people are looking at you to determine which side you are taking and whatever you say is subject to different interpretations. In informal discussions you are not being pressured so you are more open to express yourself. Informal meetings helps to prepare for formal negotiations; you're able to bargain and know what sort of tactics to use in preparation for the formal negotiations.”

“Informal dialogues among negotiators have been helpful in boosting parties' confidence. When we share and debate some of the issues, we learn from other people, and you become very knowledgeable and you hear interesting views from other parts of the world.”

“Look at the ADP (Ad Hoc Working Group on the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action), the co-chairs are very good, supported by a smart Secretariat and they're experimenting with a new way of running negotiations--trying to create a more evidenced based conversation and build confidence by running roundtables and workshops back to back. Before parties negotiate they have experts come in and speak to the topics. This is innovative and is working reasonably well.”

“In REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation), for example, it has a lot to do with the fact that the same group of people sees each other in the REDD+ Partnership, UN-REDD and the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF). These discussions have been enormously helpful for socializing and ground-truthing ideas and allowing people to build relationships and trust, which has been very helpful for advancing REDD in the negotiations.”

3. Secretariat Support

The role of the Secretariat in supporting negotiations was referenced by many of the interviewees as playing a critical function and maintaining a delicate balance of providing support while ensuring neutrality, objectivity, and a party-led process. A couple of selected quotes offer some insights as to additional support the Secretariat might consider:

“There might be a role for [the Secretariat] to play in using their experience to assess the level of competency within a group and trying to provide information that can help build capacity. This may be political and harder to achieve than it sounds—they don't want to direct negotiators in one way or another, but it would be helpful to develop tools to build technical capacity in the room.”

“The Secretariat can help prioritize issues and give more time to new issues that will require more discussion to determine the scope.” On the other hand, the Secretariat can also play a role in organizing the talks to prevent time being spent on issues where it is clear that parties are not ready to reach agreement.

4. COP Presidencies

There were different perspectives on how COP Presidencies could be structured to best enable progress and agreement. Some interviewees thought that designating a President for more than one year would help provide continuity and build longer-term capacity to effectively manage the process. Others thought having a rotating Presidency but convening negotiation sessions in the same place each year would help reduce costs and ease logistics and travel for delegations. A third perspective emphasized the importance of negotiators having exposure to different cultures, climates, and country contexts in order to cultivate better understanding of a country or region's circumstances. Regardless of the location, most interviewees underscored the importance for COP Presidencies to be welcoming and well-prepared in terms of providing appropriate meeting facilities, efficient and adequate transportation, and culturally-sensitive food choices. In addition to the basic meeting support, interviewees emphasized the importance of COP Presidencies consulting with all parties to identify priority areas where it may be possible to reach agreement rather than unilaterally choosing a domestic priority to focus on at a COP.

Finally, several interviewees underscored the importance of building capacity among COP Presidencies to appropriately support the negotiations, as elaborated below:

"COP Presidencies need to fully understand how the UNFCCC process works to help efficiently and effectively enable and promote progress and agreement in the discussions. If Presidents do not understand the process well and how to best navigate parties through it, a lot of time will be wasted and momentum for reaching agreement will be threatened."

5. Consensus vs. Voting

The UNFCCC process was often described as slow-moving and frustrating at times—but this type of process was also seen a “necessary evil” in addressing a problem as complex as climate change and attempting to reach consensus agreement across 195 countries.

Majority voting mechanisms were recognized as more efficient, however, most interviewees felt strongly that voting would fundamentally change the inclusive, multilateral nature of the negotiations. Voting could also have detrimental results such as alienating a minority of countries, resulting in them withdrawing participation, or creating too much emphasis on lobbying rather than collective problem-solving. It is also important to recognize the distinction between not blocking agreement and voting in favor of an outcome. Alternatively, a compromise approach between consensus and voting was also suggested:

“Because it’s consensus, everyone must agree or not object. If we had majority agrees then we could move forward. We really need to have innovative ways of blending consensus and majority so that in certain instances we can move forward. If we always vote, then some parties will say I didn’t vote for that and therefore I won’t implement it.”

Conclusions

The interview findings and this summary report have identified a number of components and key factors involved in reaching consensus in the UNFCCC multilateral negotiations. From these “insider interviews”, it is clear that no one singular component can be addressed that will lead to consensus. Rather, consensus agreements are built upon all, or most, of the identified factors lining up and positively contributing to the negotiations.

On an individual/negotiator level, some of these concepts may prove helpful for interpreting what is happening in a given negotiation and why. This, in turn, could also help isolate challenges and inform possible interventions to overcome those challenges (e.g., Are there domestic political challenges preventing certain parties from agreeing? Do we need to better understand each other’s interests on this issue? Is there a lack of trust among individuals? Is the chair or facilitator providing the support needed to make progress?)

In thinking about specific negotiating tracks or the UNFCCC process as a whole, the models and components put forth in this report could be useful for chairs/facilitators, negotiators, and those supporting the process, as diagnostic tools to systematically interpret the process of negotiations and better understand some of the key factors that underpin the ability to achieve consensus-based outcomes.

Recommended Resources

- Multilateral Environmental Agreement: Negotiator's Handbook
<http://www.unep.org/environmentalgovernance/Portals/8/documents/NegotiatorsHandbook.pdf>
- A Survival Guide for Developing Country Climate Negotiators
<http://www.iisd.org/cckn/www/index.html>
- The Art of Controversy, by Arthur Schopenhauer
http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/s/schopenhauer/arthur/controversy/content_s.html



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