



## Key messages

- Climate diplomacy has the potential to advance multilateral action on climate change, outside of the UNFCCC process.
- Governments that see climate diplomacy as a way of securing national-level benefits from positive action on climate change are also more likely to promote progressive outcomes in the UNFCCC itself.
- Least developed and most climate-vulnerable nations, such as the Republic of the Marshall Islands, are starting to develop experience with climate diplomacy and have lessons to share.
- Climate diplomacy needs support at home if it is to be successful overseas. States should try to understand how climate action could serve their own and other countries' national interests, and use that understanding to inform discussions in diplomatic relations.
- Effective pursuit of climate diplomacy requires building capacity in countries' diplomatic corps on climate-related issues.

## Climate diplomacy: Seeing the bigger picture

**Achieving an international climate agreement by 2015 requires global coordination and cooperation – a difficult challenge. Diplomacy, the practice of conducting negotiations between state and group representatives, is critical to integrating climate change into foreign policy and to developing the conditions domestically and internationally for securing a global deal. But although climate change presents as urgent a global threat as other policy issues such as nuclear non-proliferation, trade and security, it does not receive the same level of prioritisation or resources.**

Climate diplomacy is the practice of managing negotiations under the current international climate regime.<sup>1</sup> One of its aims is to deliver a global agreement in 2015 that will limit the global temperature increase to a maximum of 2°C and create the conditions for climate compatible development. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) sits at the heart of this complex regime; it is increasingly influenced by many formal and informal institutions and diplomatic forums. The dispersed nature of this regime creates multiple coordination and cooperation problems that have delayed progress towards a global agreement.

Climate diplomacy can ensure that national priorities are reflected in the often abstract world of international climate negotiations, and that these negotiations promote additional domestic climate actions. Without such efforts, it is likely that support for discussions within the UNFCCC will be insufficient, and that states and groups will not reach an ambitious agreement. Developed countries, negotiating blocs and groupings, such as the European Union (EU), have long practiced climate diplomacy in an effort to shape international negotiations to deliver

outcomes consistent with their priorities. Least developed countries (LDCs) have often lacked sufficient capacity to actively engage in climate diplomacy, and consequently have had limited influence in shaping negotiations.

This policy brief outlines the critical elements of effective climate diplomacy and identifies approaches that countries, especially LDCs, can consider in an effort to develop their own capacity for successful climate diplomacy.

### Barriers to climate diplomacy

All countries face challenges to effective climate negotiation. While the barriers set out below are not exclusive to LDCs, they tend to be more acute for these countries.

**Resources and capacity.** Limited resources and capacity affect the ability of countries to marshal technical and strategic information or to develop the diplomatic skills necessary to engage effectively in international relations. Often, resources are directed to priorities that are considered to be more pressing. Diplomats from LDCs, in particular, may lack the capacity to engage effectively in national debates and international negotiations.

### Authors:

Kiran Sura and Nadia Schweimler, CDKN

**Institutional architecture.** For example, the division of responsibility for climate diplomacy between Ministries of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and Ministries of Environment (MoE), and the specialised segregation of issues within the MFA, can result in the climate receiving lower priority. Climate change is often treated as the responsibility of the MoE alone, which means knowledge is not shared systematically with other ministries and consequently is not embedded into decision-making at all levels of government. At the international level, climate-related decisions requiring political trade-offs are often only discussed at the UNFCCC, in isolation from the wider international political context.

**Influence.** Regulatory capture distorts evidence-based decision-making and demotes climate change on national and international political agendas. Climate diplomats from LDCs often lack the technical expertise or negotiation skills to affect national and international diplomatic agendas, given their limited resources, capacity and position in the existing geopolitical landscape.

**Lack of access to influential non-UNFCCC forums.** Increasingly, climate diplomacy is taking place outside the UNFCCC, e.g. in forums such as the Major Economies Forum or the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, in which the major emitters are represented disproportionately. Limited access to these non-UNFCCC forums will prevent LDCs from influencing them.

## How to build and strengthen climate diplomacy?

The ultimate goal of climate diplomacy is twofold: to build the political conditions for an international agreement, and to facilitate international coordination and cooperation beyond the UN negotiations. The following measures set out how these barriers could be overcome.<sup>2</sup>

### Establish climate change as a national policy priority

Those seeking to undertake climate diplomacy need to demonstrate the need for action domestically and internationally, and how change will be

delivered across all elements of society – government, business and civil society. Governments need to demonstrate leadership by communicating not only the threats and opportunities of climate change, but also the costs and benefits of action, and by creating an enabling environment for change. To do this, they must engage actors (e.g. the media and industry) who influence the status of climate change on the political agenda. In such instances, governments need to send a clear message that action is not only economically rational and technically possible – it is also in the public interest.

Encouraging transparent debates on climate change (e.g. about opportunities and near- and long-term impacts on individuals and business) can raise awareness of why climate change should be considered a national priority. New messengers are needed to champion climate change narratives, to demonstrate that this issue is too important to relegate to politicians and climate experts. Public debates are an opportunity to listen to the most climate-vulnerable and often marginalised constituencies. Such debates provide crucial domestic political context for climate diplomacy. In addition, strong domestic climate change legislation tends to correlate with high ambition at the UNFCCC level, creating the political space for an international agreement.<sup>3</sup>

National institutional architecture should be reformed to integrate climate change across ministries, constituencies and sectors. This might involve integrating ministries or departments, or the creation of inter-ministry committees for climate change. Reforms would facilitate the flow of information across government and enable ministries to pool resources and skills to align climate change with issues such as resource price volatility, competitiveness and security. A whole-government approach will enable coordinated government action on the climate and will build domestic political support for action. Developing good inter-ministerial relationships will be key to achieving this.

### Develop the capacity of diplomats and climate diplomats

Increasing climate experts' capacity to influence others in their interactions at

home and abroad is key to their role. Climate diplomacy efforts must support government officials' learning and change norms on climate change within governments. Two elements should be considered:

- **A diplomatic directive on climate change.** It is vital for the MFA leadership to signal that climate change should be considered in dealings at all levels of foreign diplomacy. Gaining buy-in from the Secretary for Foreign Affairs and developing a top-level plan would be effective measures. The appointment of a climate envoy to raise awareness, influence debates and spur action both nationally and internationally is a strong signal that climate change is a diplomatic priority.
- **The right skills and knowledge.** Although seasoned diplomats are equipped with negotiation skills, they may not have the technical knowledge required to help forge climate agreements. Strong climate diplomacy depends on developing both the technical knowledge of diplomats and the diplomatic capacity of climate experts, e.g. through skills and knowledge exchanges among peers. This is particularly true for heads of state and senior government officials, as they operate in high-level national and international forums.

### Deploy diplomacy effectively at the international level

Diplomacy is essential for making the links among domestic, foreign and international climate policy. There are several measures that countries, especially LDCs, can take to navigate these complex interfaces. The following approaches can be used to build trust, develop a mutual understanding of each actor's interests, priorities and positions, and engage in open and transparent dialogue.

- **Create forums to exchange knowledge and pool diplomatic intelligence** across government and international alliances, in order to undertake joint analysis on issues of common interest. This not only addresses the resource and capacity constraints that some countries

### Box 1. 'New climate diplomacy' from the Marshall Islands

Since the Copenhagen Climate Conference in 2009, the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), a low-lying atoll state, has placed climate change at the heart of its foreign policy. Foreign Minister Phillip Muller led the development of a national Climate Change Roadmap, which recognised that climate change represents a grave threat to the survival of the Marshall Islands, and severely compromises its development prospects. To address this, the Government established a National Committee on Climate Change, chaired by RMI's most senior public servant, and comprising the heads of all relevant government agencies. The Committee received input from key diplomatic posts prior to each meeting and considered climate mitigation and adaptation actions.

Under the constraint of limited capacity across its foreign service, the RMI has designed and is implementing a 'New Climate Diplomacy Strategy', which focuses on:

- enhancing its technical prowess in the UN negotiations on climate change, including through various coordinating roles within the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS)
- taking opportunities to engage in non-traditional forums for climate diplomacy, including the Cartagena Dialogue for Progressive Action and the UN Security Council
- enhancing RMI's international profile through media exposure and public outreach.

RMI is hosting the 2013 summit of the Pacific Islands Forum, which convenes the leaders of the 14 Pacific Island states, Australia and New Zealand, and leaders of major emitting countries, to galvanise action on climate change.

face, but also helps to identify any conflicts and synergies, as well as establishing a common evidence base to underpin negotiations.

- **Establish a core team and develop a strategy** for coordinating action and building cooperation. It is vital that this team be engaged at both the national and international level, has sufficient power to establish links with other diplomats and influential figures, and can gain access to the right networks and forums. A strategy is needed to identify who to negotiate with, where and when, as well as what foreign policy concessions can be made. Diplomats need to form strategic alliances and determine what success looks like in the UNFCCC to enable them to articulate priorities – from the opening statements to the informal consultations where compromise packages are ultimately decided.
- **Engage heads of state** and other high-level foreign policy officials on climate change and exploit their entry points to influential international meetings such as the UN Secretary-General's 2014 Leaders' Summit on climate change. It is important that these activities take place regularly throughout the year.

### Routes to knowledge

Countries can develop the four following areas to advance climate diplomacy:<sup>4</sup>

#### Socioeconomic context

Contextual information (e.g. climate impacts and the national socioeconomic landscape) will enable engagement with government and key constituencies. This knowledge can underpin the analysis of the drivers, barriers and interests of those who influence the foreign policy agenda. Activities to collect and organise this kind of information include:

- mapping the interests, synergies and conflicts among influential groups at the national level, forming dedicated cross-government research units to collate and analyse information
- establishing monitoring protocols both on the ground and using information and communications technology
- creating secure cross-government information-sharing systems
- ensuring confidential, independent validation of internal government analysis from external experts.

### Climate science and economics

Good technical understanding of climate science and economics, as well as associated uncertainties and limitations, is crucial. The impacts of climate change on a nation's most vulnerable people, resources and infrastructure should be well understood, as should adaptation technologies. Additionally, the costs and benefits associated with policy and technological options must be known. Governments can invest in academically rigorous scientific, technological and economic research at universities and specialised institutes.

### Political context

Climate diplomacy must interpret national political positions and place them in the context of climate change politics specifically, and international politics more generally (in the UN and beyond). Understanding how best to communicate information on climate policy is crucial. Activities such as mapping the national political economy and identifying political and financial trade-offs and synergies can help. The development of a robust analytical framework, which provides consistent interpretation of information that is often subjective, is critical to enabling rigorous decision-making.

### Interactions of actors and groups in other countries

The interactions, drivers and barriers of actors and groups (e.g. political parties, religious groups and the general public) in various countries can be complex and challenging to interpret using public information. To carry out assessments of a country's national interests, information should be collected and shared through traditional diplomatic channels, e.g. embassies, consulates and diplomatic visits. Additionally, countries can develop multilateral forums dedicated to understanding each others' national interests, where analysis is pooled and tested between countries, ultimately building mutual understanding.

### Conclusion and recommendations

Overall, stronger climate diplomacy can support a successful outcome at the UNFCCC negotiations by helping to

## Box 2. Climate diplomacy in the LDC Group

One way in which LDCs practice climate diplomacy is by building multilateral strategic alliances to exert greater influence at the international level, e.g. AOSIS and G77. The LDC Group rose to a new level of prominence and influence in 2011/12 through the diplomatic efforts of then-sitting Chair Mr Pa Ousman Jarju. Mr Jarju helped launch the following processes:

- **Establishing a core team to serve the Group.** Responsibilities involved producing an LDC paper series, convening meetings with members to foster dialogue, and preparing for formal and informal meetings.
- **Developing a clear and comprehensive media and communications strategy.** Actions involved the creation of a LDC Group website, media briefings and meetings with critical actors in the negotiations. Mr Jarju published an open letter to United States President Obama in *The Guardian* (UK).
- **Partnering with other negotiating blocks.** The LDC Group partnered with AOSIS and the EU to launch the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action.

Mr Jarju is now Special Climate Envoy for The Gambia – the first envoy of its kind from a developing or least developed country. He will embark on diplomatic missions to various cities across the world, meeting with senior government officials, academics and civil society organisations to build alliances and consensus for ambitious and urgent action on climate change.

establish climate change as a national strategic priority – and by using the full weight of a country's diplomatic service to do so. To achieve this, national political leaders need to: gather the necessary intelligence; make the case for climate change as a key cross-cutting foreign policy issue; lead a national consultative process involving all stakeholders; and mandate strong cross-government work on climate issues.

These recommendations do not have to be approached in a particular sequence, but rather taken on board in a tailored manner to suit each

country's engagement in domestic and international negotiations. There are numerous practical actions that countries can pursue to help focus diplomatic resources on climate issues and to develop capacity in climate diplomacy. These include the development of a climate diplomacy action plan and the appointment of a climate envoy. Diplomatic directives and investments are required to support the development of technical knowledge in diplomats and the diplomatic skills of climate specialists.

With stronger climate diplomacy, states will be able to engage more effectively

on climate change both bilaterally and multilaterally, and within and beyond the UNFCCC. Placing climate change at the heart of foreign policy, both nationally and internationally, is critical to inspiring greater ambition on climate change.

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## About CDKN

The Climate and Development Knowledge Network (CDKN) aims to help decision-makers in developing countries design and deliver climate compatible development. We do this by providing demand-led research and technical assistance, and channelling the best available knowledge on climate change and development to support policy processes at the country and international levels.



[www.cdkn.org](http://www.cdkn.org)

e: [enquiries@cdkn.org](mailto:enquiries@cdkn.org)

t: +44 (0) 207 212 4111

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