**Climate action: Diplomats’ discussions yield four themes for 2014**

*The Gambia’s Special Climate Envoy Pa Ousman Jarju identifies four themes for action on climate change in the UN negotiations and beyond.*

Diplomats from 11 countries met at the International Institute for Environment and Development recently to discuss this year’s big milestones in climate change policy:

* In the UN negotiations, nations will begin drafting a new global climate change agreement to adopt in 2015 and bring into effect in 2020.
* Outside the negotiations, Heads of State will share their plans for domestic action on climate change at the [UN Secretary-General’s Climate Summit](http://www.un.org/climatechange/summit2014/) in September.
* By December 2014, government negotiators will identify the information nations must provide to turn their domestic actions into contributions to the 2015 agreement.

Four major themes emerged from the discussions at IIED.

**1. We all must act to confront climate change**

The previous international agreements -- the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and its Kyoto Protocol -- required only developed countries to commit to action. These agreements neither halted the rise in global greenhouse gas emissions nor addressed the challenges the [Least Developed Countries](http://ldcclimate.wordpress.com/) (LDCs) and other vulnerable countries face in adapting to climate change.

By contrast, under the 2015 agreement, all nations should contribute their fair share to the global response to climate change. This theme of action by all nations, which ran throughout our discussion last week, is supported by:

* The latest climate science, which emphasises the scale of the challenge
* The world’s changing demographics, including the rapid rise of a global middle class
* The vulnerability of the LDCs, Africa and the Small Island Developing States

The LDCs believe the new agreement must adhere to the core principles of the UNFCCC, including “common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities” and the needs for equity, poverty eradication and the survival of nations. However, these principles must encourage action rather than justify inaction.

**2. Now is the time to showcase domestic climate action**

Around the world, nations are acting to address climate change in inspiring ways. Nine of the LDCs have developed strategies for ‘low-carbon, resilient development’, while 12 of the LDCs have moved beyond adaptation to detail the ways they can reduce their greenhouse gas emissions.

In Bangladesh more than [two million households have solar power systems](http://www.worldbank.org/en/results/2013/04/15/bangladesh-lighting-up-rural-communities). The Gambia is finalising plans to strengthen its agriculture sector’s resilience to climate change. The government is also planning a consultative process to define its national contribution to global climate action under the 2015 agreement.

These moves come despite the limited economic capacities of these countries, and their minuscule contribution to the world’s cumulative emissions. Outside of the LDCs, Brazil has achieved a [drastic fall in emissions](http://www.nature.com/news/brazil-reports-sharp-drop-in-greenhouse-emissions-1.13121) thanks to avoided deforestation. Costa Rica aims to be [carbonneutral by 2021](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carbon_neutrality#Costa_Rica).

These examples show what is possible. All nations should showcase their domestic actions so that they might inspire the rest of the world.

**3. Outside the UN talks, world leaders must raise the level of ambition**

The 2015 agreement’s overall level of ambition will be determined through a bottom-up approach, with each nation deciding its individual contribution. While the UN negotiations focus on the form of the agreement and the rules these contributions must follow, there is little opportunity to influence nations as they decide how ambitious they will be.

In this regard, the UN Secretary-General’s Climate Summit provides a rare opportunity for Heads of State to directly engage with each other. By highlighting their own plans, genuine leaders can push their peers to take the most ambitious domestic action possible.

**4. The narratives surrounding climate action must change**

Two narratives that have been dominant in the past are now out of date. There are better stories to tell. The first narrative focused heavily on the LDCs’ extreme vulnerability rather than the actions they undertake to confront climate change. That all changed in 2011 when we adopted a new strategy: “victims becoming heroes”. The current Chair of the LDC Group follows the strategy: [“from ‘after you’ to ‘follow us’”](http://ldcclimate.wordpress.com/2013/03/25/from-after-you-to-follow-us-opening-speech-by-chair-of-the-ldc-group/).

The LDCs take climate action seriously. Many of them are planning their contributions to the 2015 agreement and doing all they can at the national level. They are willing to contribute their share to move others forward, provided this doesn’t undermine their efforts toward poverty eradication and sustainable development. As the countries that have contributed least to climate change, yet are most vulnerable to its effects, the LDCs have a strong moral voice, which we will use to add momentum to the global response to climate change.

The second narrative says action to address climate change is too expensive. That is a myth we must bust, because such action can also create opportunities. Ahead of the Climate Summit, the [Global Commission on the Economy and Climate](http://newclimateeconomy.net/) will release a report that will show that the economic benefits of acting on climate change will outweigh the costs, even in the short and medium terms.

Around the world, governments, business and citizens need to understand the opportunities that climate action presents. By working together we can all reap the benefits.

*Pa Ousman Jarju was The Gambia’s Special Climate Envoy, and a former chair of the Least Developed Countries group at the UN climate change negotiations*. *He is now the* [*Minister of Environment, Climate Change, Water Resources, and Parks and Wildlife*](http://observer.gm/africa/gambia/article/pa-ousman-jarju-named-new-environment-minister)*.*

*To read more about Mr Jarju’s thoughts on climate action in 2014, see his recent* [*interview*](http://www.rtcc.org/2014/01/29/climate-ambition-from-eu-central-to-success-of-paris-deal-says-envoy/) *with Responding to Climate Change.*