



WORKING PAPER



Supporting ambitious Intended Nationally Determined Contributions: Lessons learned from developing countries

By Chris Dodwell and Emelia Holdaway, Ricardo-AEA,
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About this Working Paper

CDKN has been working with a range of expert organisations to provide technical assistance to nine developing countries as they prepare their INDCs for submission to the UNFCCC by October 2015. This Working Paper summarises some of the key learning points that have emerged from this diverse experience. This Working Paper should be seen as a companion volume to CDKN's 'Guide to INDCs' (2015), which provides a practical example of how an INDC could be structured and potential key elements and content. Each section cross-references the relevant text from the Lima Call to Climate Action and other relevant guidance, suggests data sources and provides illustrative examples of the type of content and narrative that Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States might include.

About CDKN's Negotiations Support programme

This Working Paper and the related technical support to developing countries on INDC preparation is a principal part of CDKN's Negotiations Support programme. CDKN's vision is that international climate change processes and agreements should reflect and respond to the positions and challenges articulated by the world's poorest and most vulnerable countries. We are working to help the leaders and negotiators of these countries to become informed, skilled, active, connected and influential actors in international climate change talks. Only when they have a strong voice and can bring their influence to this international stage will more robust, progressive and equitable outcomes be possible for all parties.

In support of this goal, CDKN:

- provides legal and technical support to inform negotiation positions and related policies
- facilitates training and capacity building for negotiations teams
- supports the least developed and most climate-vulnerable countries to participate meaningfully in international climate talks and related meetings
- improves negotiators' access to information on climate issues.

Reviewers

This Working Paper would not have been possible without the valuable insights of CDKN colleagues supporting INDC preparations in Africa, Asia and Latin America, and the country representatives who have actively contributed their experiences to this exercise and, in doing so, have strengthened the lessons outlined in this Working Paper.

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Houses and buildings with solar panels on Taquile island at Lake Titicaca in Peru.

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Executive summary

Securing an ambitious international climate agreement at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) 21st Conference of the Parties (COP21) in Paris, December 2015, will be critical for averting dangerous climate change and limiting warming. To help prepare for these negotiations, countries have agreed to outline publicly the post-2020 climate actions they intend to take under a new international agreement. These are known as Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs).¹ The concept of INDCs was introduced at COP19 in Warsaw, 2013, and refined in the Lima Call to Climate Action (Decision 1/CP.20).²

The submission of INDCs is a unique opportunity for developing countries to influence the shape of the new international climate regime, at the same time as accelerating their national actions. They are a necessary foundation for a successful outcome from COP21 and will be vital for effective climate policies in the years to come.

A key challenge facing the officials responsible for developing INDCs is how to strike a balance between ambition and feasibility. Officials also need to ensure that the actions identified reflect the development priorities of their own countries. This task can be made much easier by learning from the experiences and lessons of countries that have already developed and submitted their INDCs.

Developing countries are placing a high priority on preparing their INDCs. This demonstrates the seriousness with which they are taking climate action and the outcomes of international negotiations. For example, the 1 October 2015 deadline for developing INDCs has generated real momentum and seen high-level political inputs and commitment. Developing countries are using this momentum to raise their profile with potential donors and build support for climate compatible actions.

INDCs present a real opportunity for developing countries to showcase the practical steps they have taken in recent years to mainstream climate change into their development strategies. Countries can also strengthen the link between development priorities and climate action, by referencing the upcoming Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and national development plans within their INDCs.

Key messages

Since 2014, CDKN has been supporting nine countries to develop INDCs: Bangladesh, Colombia, Ethiopia, The Gambia, Kenya, Pakistan, Peru, the Republic of the Marshall Islands and Uganda. There is a broad spectrum of technical capacity and preparedness across these and other developing countries. We have seen different governments take different approaches to preparing INDCs: some have commissioned new analysis (e.g. on feasibility or baselines) while others have used existing resources. The level of stakeholder engagement has also varied. In all cases, however, political will is a key driving force and ministerial-level consultations an important part of the process.

These countries are at various stages of the INDC preparation process, but they are already providing valuable lessons, which will benefit other countries, now and in the future. To capture these emerging lessons and challenges, we conducted a series of interviews with people preparing INDCs in CDKN's priority countries in early 2015 and at the Bonn Climate Conference in June 2015. This Working Paper sets out the five key conclusions of these interviews:

1. Consider INDCs as statements of political ambition, both domestically and internationally.
2. Have a clear vision for the structure and content from the outset.
3. Build on existing policies, with targeted use of new analysis to fill knowledge gaps.
4. Build broad-based support across economic sectors through innovative approaches to consultation.
5. Make plans for effective implementation now, and consider how international support, finance and other mechanisms may adjust ambitions after 2015.

1. Consider INDCs as statements of political ambition, both domestically and internationally

The INDC development process starts with the goal of political ownership and approval of the document within countries. This stage may require the consent of ministers, the cabinet, the head of State, parliament or the legislature. Thereafter, the INDC is submitted to the UNFCCC, where each country's commitment will be aggregated to inform global ambition.

A cornerstone to developing an INDC is constructing an effective and inclusive political narrative that explains how the proposed actions are in the country's interest. Where ambitious action on climate change is already part of national development priorities, this may be a question of articulating existing narratives rather than creating new ones.

The importance of reinforcing the need for action should not be underestimated. Some interviewees commented that previous political agreement in their country is no guarantee of continued buy-in for action. In other countries, INDCs can be linked to long-term aspirations or targets for climate action announced by leaders at international climate meetings, such as the UN Climate Summit in 2014.³

An important aspect of the INDC process is to bridge the gap between the technical potential for actions and their political feasibility. Interviewees stressed that developing INDCs is more than just a technical exercise (e.g. compiling a greenhouse gas inventory). Even if high-quality technical data is available, political will and impetus are still needed to deliver an INDC. But equally, in order to build a convincing case for action across ministries, political decisions will need to be underpinned by effective and well-presented evidence.

One interviewee noted that the real art lies in constructing scenarios using existing or new data; such information can be used to articulate clear choices for ministers, which are consistent with their stated goals and aspirations. In Ethiopia, for example, existing policies such as the Climate Resilience and Green Economy Strategy were used as the basis for its INDC, as this had already been agreed across ministries. However, it was still necessary for the ministerial committee to agree to the text of the INDC, which led to an updated version of the INDC being forwarded for the Prime Minister to sign off. Cross-ministerial committees that engage in discussions and make use of the data are also very important (see Section 4).

Some countries, though, will be starting from scratch and they will face several additional challenges, such as deciding upon a level of mitigation action that is fair and ambitious, given their national circumstances and capabilities (the UNFCCC invites countries to commit to fairness and ambition). In this situation, countries have started by identifying the actions that provide the clearest national co-benefits (e.g. those that increase energy security or access to energy), have cost savings through efficiencies, create jobs or offer adaptation co-benefits.

Some of these countries have looked at others in similar economic situations and sought to use these as a benchmark for their own activities and levels of ambition. Others have used the INDC process as an opportunity to demonstrate leadership by making moral arguments for others to follow their example, thereby raising collective ambition. For example, the Gambian Government has used its upcoming INDC submission as an opportunity to raise global ambition: The Gambia is only responsible for 0.05% of global emissions, and the Government argues that this leaves no excuse for larger emitters to avoid submitting ambitious INDCs.⁴

The country representatives we interviewed flagged the challenge of how to capture the political momentum generated by the INDC process, in particular from stakeholders proposing potential mitigation actions across a range of sectors. Countries will not want to over-commit to delivering actions which are not fully scoped, but equally they may wish to demonstrate the mitigation potential of their proposed actions in order to interest donors in future projects. Thus, there may be advantages in including information on 'technical mitigation potential' alongside more concrete, politically sanctioned commitments on mitigation.

It is clear that many developing countries intend to strike the balance between ambition and feasibility by submitting two levels of action in their INDCs: a set of unilateral outcomes or actions, which they will seek to deliver from their own or existing resources, and more ambitious – and, in several cases, conditional – contributions, which will need financial or technical support. The interviewees from developing countries commented that this allows them to view ambition in the INDCs as an opportunity to change their development pathways and provide essential services for their people (e.g. the provision of clean energy to those who lack access to energy). Many countries are currently in the final stages of determining the levels of unilateral and supported action; further lessons on how to manage this process will surely emerge in the coming months.

2. Have a clear vision for the structure and content from the outset

The UNFCCC's decisions on INDCs at the Warsaw and Lima COPs were not specific, which created problems for countries in terms of how to structure their contributions. This has been addressed to some extent by the well-informed, insightful guidance from international bodies and respected think tanks. Much of this was presented at a workshop of the Durban Forum on Capacity-Building, held at the Bonn Climate Conference in June 2015.⁵ Nonetheless, one of the first requests from countries receiving CDKN support was for advice on how to structure their INDC document, the level of detail that should be included, and how best to structure the information to be presented.

The first examples of INDCs, both drafts and final versions, have been available since the beginning of 2015. Submissions from developed countries are highly standardised in terms of format and content. However, at the time of publication of this Working Paper, only four INDCs have been published by developing countries. While these have common elements, they have all used different approaches.

One of the most striking aspects of the INDCs written to date is their brevity. While formal National Communications to the UNFCCC tend to run to hundreds of pages,⁶ INDC documents have been

much shorter. Russia's is only three pages and Morocco's, which is the longest, is only 15 pages. Most incorporate technical annexes or other supporting documents by reference, rather than including them. This partly reflects the political nature of INDCs: it is likely to be easier to get political, multi-stakeholder approval across ministries and multiple stakeholders for a shorter, high-level document.

The INDCs from developing countries are likely to include more detailed information on national development and climate change priorities than those from developed countries. For example, they are more likely to include adaptation components and information on the international technical and financial support needed to implement elements of their contributions (known as 'means of implementation').

3. Build on existing policies, with targeted use of new analysis to fill knowledge gaps

Many developing countries have already started to take action on climate change, meaning there is often an existing base on which to build an INDC. In addition to National Communications, many countries have developed national climate change strategies and actions plans, Low Emission Development Strategies, Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Actions (NAMAs) and Technology Needs Assessments. These will all provide a good foundation for developing INDCs, especially where they align with national development planning processes and priorities (see Box 1). Nonetheless, countries have encountered a number of issues in using both new and existing evidence effectively during the INDC process.

First, the technical analysis that supports the political commitments on mitigation and adaptation actions in INDCs needs to be more robust and of higher quality than the analysis undertaken for a National Communication. INDCs will come under scrutiny from national stakeholders, including inter-ministerial processes and sectoral interests; for example, the cement sector has been very actively participating in Peru. But other countries and international bodies will also appraise INDCs carefully. A number of countries have therefore started their INDC process by undertaking quality control assessments of existing emissions projections and mitigation analysis. They have prioritised the gaps to be filled, particularly in terms of updating old data.

Second, one of the main benefits of developing INDCs for many countries has been the process of synthesising existing data and analysis across sectors, and beginning to institutionalise this process. Such data is often held by different ministries and institutions, and is underpinned by different metrics and methodologies. While National Communications have used cross-sectoral approaches, they are typically carried out as one-off projects by independent consultants, who work in ways that are poorly understood by others. Such approaches do not provide information on how the results have been derived, missing an opportunity to build analytical capacity and knowledge.

By their nature, INDCs are likely to require analyses to be updated in the future, and the implementation of actions will need to be reported. This has meant that countries have taken greater ownership of policy-making processes and have established measures for transferring knowledge and skills into relevant ministries. Although national and international expertise has been brought in to support the development of INDCs, building local capacity has been a central component of CDKN's support to INDC projects (see Section 5).

Third, where new analysis is being undertaken in preparation of an INDC, countries have had to focus their resources on filling the most significant technical gaps in the existing evidence base, rather than trying to address all the gaps in the limited time available. By contrast, where there is recent evidence to support comprehensive climate action plans, countries have been able to focus on other issues, rather than having to duplicate or update a strong evidence base. One area on which countries have focused this new work is quantifying the economic costs and benefits of adaptation and mitigation actions, particularly around development co-benefits. Some countries have also found it worthwhile to address new technical challenges, such as how to maximise the synergies between mitigation and adaptation (by capturing the mitigation impacts of adaptation actions and vice versa).

Box 1. Articulating the link between INDCs and development plans

Christiana Figueres, Executive Secretary of the UNFCCC, has said that the purpose of INDCs is to support sustainable, robust growth and enhance resilience, while at the same time reducing emissions. There is ample evidence that developing countries have made significant steps forward in mainstreaming climate change into their national development priorities and planning processes. The preparation of INDCs provides the perfect opportunity to explain how climate policy can align with economic growth and development objectives, thereby increasing the robustness of implementation plans in the INDC. The following table gives country-specific examples of the national development priorities and planning processes that could align with the INDCs.

Country	National development plans (year)	Climate change plans (year)
Bangladesh	Vision 2021 6th Five Year Development Plan (2011) Master Plans (sectoral)	Climate Change Strategy & Action (2008)
Ethiopia	Growth and Transformation Plan for 2011–15 (GTP1) and GTP2 for 2016–2020	Climate-Resilient Green Economy (ongoing)
Kenya	Kenya Vision 2030	National Climate Change Response Strategy (2011) National Climate Change Action Plan (2013)
Peru	NAMAs for agriculture, forestry, transport and waste (around 2012) Planificación ante el Cambio Climático (PlanCC)	
Uganda	Second National Development Plan (2015)	National Climate Change Policy (2013)

The INDCs are also a timely opportunity for countries to reference the post-2015 development framework in their submissions. The 17 SDGs⁷ will be adopted in September 2015, and countries may want to think about how their INDC could reference the particular goals that reinforce their development priorities.⁸ The links between the UNFCCC and SDG processes are increasingly recognised; at the Bonn Climate Conference in June 2015, some delegates commented that the SDGs are a chance to build political ambition ahead of COP21.

Finally, there are limits to the additional technical work that can be completed before COP21 given the time and resource constraints, particularly in countries which have previously done little cross-sectoral analysis. However, a lack of perfect information should not be a barrier to action. The flexibility inherent in the nationally determined aspect of INDCs means that countries with lower technical capacity can still bring forward mitigation actions in specific sectors, even if these are not economy-wide outcomes. This means that actions where national benefits are best understood – such as increasing access to energy through renewable technologies or REDD+ programmes – can be prioritised, while further work to analyse the potential of actions in other sectors can be included in the implementation parts of INDCs.

For example, Uganda has focused on using existing data, particularly from their Second National Communication and the Low Emission Capacity Building Project, and sharing data more effectively between ministries. New cost-benefit analysis was conducted and compared to the National Climate Change Policy’s Costed Implementation Strategy, looking at co-benefits in agriculture, disaster risk reduction, energy, transport and water. By contrast, Bangladesh has used the INDC process to update its projections of future greenhouse gas emissions and to develop a range of mitigation scenarios, with expert opinions supplementing this where data is missing.

4. Build broad-based support across economic sectors through innovative approaches to consultation

In all countries, the INDC development process is an opportunity to broaden awareness of climate change across government, business and society, and increase buy-in among these groups to the outcomes of the process. This reinforces a major lesson from CDKN's broader experience at the country level: the process is at least as important as the technical content.

A first step is to ensure that the background and aims of INDCs – including potential opportunities and risks – are well understood by decision-makers and a broad range of stakeholders, including the private sector. Ideally, this understanding should cover how climate change links to national development priorities, the differences between actions at the national and international level, the role of the UNFCCC, the importance of the forthcoming Paris Agreement, and how the INDCs will be part of this agreement.

Participatory processes are critical to ensuring the measures included in INDCs are feasible. This tests their potential among those likely to be engaged in later implementation and ensures they are robust and aligned with other policies and activities. Participation also builds support for implementing actions in the INDCs at an early stage. There are examples of good participatory approaches from several of CDKN's priority countries.

- In The Gambia, INDC consultations have been held at three levels: technical, district and national. These have involved policy-makers, technical experts from different ministries, the private sector and civil society. Participants at the third national INDC preparation meeting, held in June 2015, included four government ministers (for energy, environment, tourism and youth), representatives from key ministries (including agriculture, energy, finance and planning, and forestry) and regions, and media representatives. At this and previous consultations, there was great interest in waste management options; while the mitigation potential in this sector is modest, the development co-benefits are perceived to be strong. This was a reminder of the need to frame climate change discussions around the current problems that people face (currently there is no effective waste collection or management system in The Gambia).
- Peru has developed a highly participatory and inclusive INDC preparation process. The Government has established a multi-sectoral commission representing 11 ministries, with the responsibility of approving the country's final INDC document. The private sector is expected to implement many of the proposed activities, particularly in the mitigation sector, and the Government has sought to engage private actors throughout the development process. Peru also published a draft of its INDC for public consultation on 5 June 2015. All interested parties have an opportunity to comment and provide feedback on the document before it is presented to the UNFCCC.

Inter-ministerial processes are also important for gaining government approval for INDCs. These need careful handling, in particular regarding how technical evidence is prepared and presented to senior officials and ministers.

- In Bangladesh, the political process recognises the distinction between the generation of technical evidence and the political decisions taken as a result. A Technical Committee has been established and sectoral stakeholder consultations are conducted to consider technical questions, while a more senior Advisory Committee reviews the political questions to be put to ministers.
- In Vietnam, two versions of the INDC have been prepared – a shorter version for submission to the UNFCCC and a longer version containing greater technical analysis and policy options for consideration by different ministers and their officials.
- Uganda commissioned two large stakeholder consultation workshops: the first on the outline INDC and baseline report (conducted in May 2015), and the second on the draft INDC (held in July 2015). Key stakeholders, from both inside and outside the Government and at national and sub-national levels, were engaged throughout the whole INDC development process.

- In Ethiopia, a stakeholder workshop for Government officials was held once a draft INDC had been written. This highlighted the importance of allowing sufficient time to engage all key stakeholders in preparing the INDC in order to secure final approval at the end.

The importance of planning and executing consultation processes effectively cannot be underestimated, even for countries that are just kicking off their INDC preparations. A major effort to undertake a comprehensive consultation process might seem disproportionate at the time, but it is likely to pay dividends later on.

5. Make plans for effective implementation now, and consider how international support, finance and other mechanisms may adjust ambitions after 2015

Ambition is nothing without implementation. This is as true for developing an INDC as for any other aspect of government policy, so INDCs must include information on how the commitments within them will be implemented and monitored. This is especially important for developing countries, which may lack the appropriate institutional frameworks to support implementation and whose INDCs may not be seen as robust without them.

Many countries are using the development of their INDC as an opportunity to enhance their national analytical and policy capacity. This makes sense, as the INDC process is likely to be repeated on a cyclical basis. Capacity building has been expressly included in many INDC support projects, with steps taken to ensure that accessible tools are used and that the underlying data is used subsequently to design policies. For example:

- In The Gambia, the INDC development process was used to raise awareness across ministries of the opportunities and benefits of low-carbon development; it was also used to enhance the technical capacity of Government officials in terms of how to use the analytical tools and approaches that will be needed to implement the INDC.
- CDKN's support to Bangladesh's INDC process had a specific objective: to build local expertise and the Government's capacity, as well as understanding and awareness of the INDC process. The aim was to identify the gaps in understanding and capacity in Bangladesh, and to provide training on how to hand over the emissions projection model used.

The INDC process can be used to set up the institutional structures needed to oversee the implementation process, including inter-ministerial arrangements. Interviewees from Small Island Developing States commented that detailed sectoral plans, including specific actions to reduce emissions, will increase the confidence of other parties (including donors) and increase the likelihood that the plans will be followed through.

INDCs are an opportunity for countries to request support from international donors for the technology, capacity building and finance they need to realise the actions to which they have committed. Countries should be as specific as possible about the type of support they need, as well as the financial costs. Interviewees noted that the countries with the INDCs that are well planned and costed are likely to be the greatest beneficiaries of donor support. An illustrative example of how to capture this information is included in CDKN's INDC guide.⁹

Countries should also include monitoring, reporting and verification systems in their INDC. These will allow them to track the effectiveness of climate policies, both as a means of public accountability and to aid reporting to donors on the impacts of their investments. These systems can capture lessons on what is working and what is not, and so improve the effectiveness of future investments. In Ethiopia, the Government has recognised the importance of an effective monitoring, reporting and verification system. This is partly due to the challenges encountered when trying to measure progress made to date, which were the result of inconsistent approaches across projects and sectors. In Peru, monitoring, reporting and verification systems are seen as a periodic opportunity to increase the country's ambitions on climate adaptation.

6. The road to Paris and beyond

INDCs are due to be submitted at COP21 in December 2015, but this will not be the end of their story. Each INDC should contain 'intended' contributions for post-2020, typically including actions stretching 10 or 15 years into the future. Many things will change during this period, including countries' capacity to carry out further analysis and identify additional actions on climate change. INDCs, like other plans, are being produced in a context of uncertainty over future climate impacts, as well as uncertainty over the availability of international finance and other support. So countries should not expect their INDC to include every detail of the actions they hope to take long into the future, or related implementation plans. Rather, INDCs can include countries' intentions to build on existing planning processes, such as the development of comprehensive national climate change plans, and requests for support to undertake such work.

As INDCs potentially will become NDCs (Nationally Determined Contributions) after COP21, the implementation phase will be useful in setting a benchmark for national development indicators, as well as demonstrating the feasibility and achievability of the contributions submitted. Combined with regular reviews and the 'ratcheting up' of ambition, this practical experience of implementation will support progress towards a pathway that limits the world to warming of 2°C or less.

Endnotes

- 1 See: www.wri.org/indc-definition
- 2 The Lima Call to Action was agreed at COP20 in December 2014. See: www.unfccc.int/files/meetings/lima_dec_2014/application/pdf/auv_cop20_lima_call_for_climate_action.pdf
- 3 See: www.un.org/climatechange/summit/2014/09/2014-climate-change-summary-chairs-summary
- 4 See: www.trust.org/item/20150526085455-wm8tj
- 5 Examples are available on the UNFCCC website: www.unfccc.int
- 6 See: http://unfccc.int/national_reports/annex_i_natcom/submitted_natcom/items/7742.php
- 7 The list of draft SDGs and targets is available at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgsproposal>. These are unlikely to change substantially during the final months of negotiation.
- 8 The CDKN Working Paper on the links between climate and development in the SDGs includes a table (on page 9) highlighting the goals most relevant to climate action. See: http://cdkn.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/CDKN_SDGs_WP_final_low-res.pdf
- 9 See: <http://cdkn.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/CDKN-Guide-to-INDCs-Revised-May2015.pdf>

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 level.

About Ricardo-AEA

Ricardo-AEA is a consultancy with world-leading energy and environmental expertise, operating in the UK and Europe and on projects around the world. We support opportunities to advance sustainable practice in energy and climate change, air quality, sustainable environments, resource efficiency, waste management, chemical risk and sustainable transport.

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