



## Africa Regional Dialogue on **Forests, Governance & Climate Change**

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### Africa, Forests and the Global Negotiations on Climate Change *Background Paper #1*

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#### Architecture of the UNFCCC negotiations

Although discussions on climate change are of global interest, it is within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), set in place since 1992, that the decisive negotiations on this topic started. To date there are 192 parties engaged in the UNFCCC negotiations including African countries. The purpose of the negotiations is to lead all the parties to come to a consensus on global and national initiatives that can help stabilize or reduce the greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions to a proportion that will sustainably curb the global warming. The convention entered into force in 1994 and in 1995 all the signatory Parties of the treaty held their initial meeting, known as the first UN Conference of Parties (COP 1). Between the 1995 and September 2010, a total of 15 COPs have been held in different cities around the world. COP 16 will take place in Cancun, Mexico from November 29 to December 10, 2010. The COP is the highest decision making authority of UNFCCC. In addition to the COP, there are other negotiating structures under the UNFCCC framework. Three such prominent structures are:

1) **The Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (COP/MOP)** is the association of countries that have signed and ratified the Kyoto Protocol. It leads long-term negotiations on Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), adaptation to climate change and capacity building.

2) **The Ad hoc Working Group on further commitments for Annex I Parties<sup>1</sup> under the Kyoto Protocol (AWG-KP)**. This group was established in 2005 during COP 11 in Montreal and assembles to date 190 countries plus the European Union that have ratified the Kyoto Protocol (U.S non member). Its main mission is to engage these countries in additional climate commitments.

3) **The Ad Hoc Working Group on Long-term Cooperative Action (AWG-LCA)**. It assembles the 192 Parties of the UNFCCC and was established in 2007 during COP 13 in Bali, (Indonesia) with the mandate to stimulate agreements on international strategy for addressing climate change after 2012. Key areas of intervention include: mitigation, adaptation, technology development / transfer and financing. Unlike the COP and COP/MOP's meetings which are held mostly on a yearly basis, the AWG-LCA and AWG-KP meet several times a year. The 14<sup>th</sup> session of AWG-KP and 12<sup>th</sup> session of AWG-LCA took place on October 4-9, 2010 in Tianjin, China. Due to the decision making authority of the COP, the AWG-LCA and AWG-KP meetings often culminate at the end of the year with the annual UN COP whereby the outcomes of these bodies' work are presented and debated.

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<sup>1</sup> Annex I Parties are industrialized countries and countries whose economies are in transition. Other blocs are made up of: Annex II countries (developed countries which pay for costs of developing countries) and Developing countries or non-Annex 1 countries.

## **African's interest and role in the UNFCCC climate negotiations**

Africa is an important player in the UNFCCC negotiation on climate primarily because it is a host to one of the most significant tropical forests in the world (Congo Basin forests). Scientific evidence reveals that forests act as natural carbon sink when they are not cleared or altered but when cut down or poorly managed, they are responsible for about 12-15% of GHG emission (van de Werf et al. 2009). Fighting deforestation, promoting sustainable forest management (SFM) and conservation, therefore become key elements of the climate negotiations. These negotiations are conducted in the framework of REDD+ mechanism (reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation + Conservation and SFM). The key negotiating position of African nations is that their full commitment to REDD+ can only be ensured if they are offered viable alternatives to activities causing deforestation or are given a fair compensation for preserving their natural ecosystems. Africa is also interested in the climate change because it recognizes the negative impacts of this change on the continent. Despite the fact that 80% of the GHG emissions come from fossil fuel burning, overwhelmingly due to industrialization of developed countries, African countries are/will be the most vulnerable to warming resulting from these emissions, because they have limited capacities to adapt to climate change or mitigate its negative effects and also because of their populations' high reliance on agriculture for income. This is particularly true for the Least Developed Countries (LDC) of Africa and more so for the Sahel countries that have witnessed over the past two decades significant increase in drought and desertification, shifting patterns of rainfall and floods. These changes will also have devastating consequences on the 15 Small Island Developing States (SIDSs) found in Africa. Studies conducted under the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) have revealed that the anticipated increase of 0.7 degree Celsius of the Earth's temperature in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will lead to a rise in the sea level above 1.4m in the next 100 years. This will obviously threaten the livelihoods and existence of African's SIDSs.

## **African negotiation Strategies and Position: the consensus making process**

To make their voices heard during the rounds of UN Conferences on climate change, African countries have in recent years strived to develop a common position on this issue. This posture is built around different integrated views from the continent and ideas from other negotiating blocs which Africa belongs to, like the G-77 + China<sup>2</sup>, the Alliance of SIDS and LDCs. Despite noticeable differences between these blocs, many commonalities exist between them. These commonalities are seen in particular between the African Group and the G-77. The closeness between these two blocs is explained among other reasons by some similarities they share in terms of forestry, economic development and especially by the fact that the G-77, with its 130 member countries, is a powerful negotiating group through which Africa can hope to better make its concerns heard. During the COP 15 in Copenhagen, the African Group supported the proposal of the Alliance of SIDS to limit the increase in global temperature to 1.5 degrees Celsius by the year 2050.

It is the product of strategic alliances between the African Group and other blocs and intra-African consultations that form the basis of what can be considered as Africa's position on climate change. The years 2008 and 2009 were turning points in this process. The consensus making during these two years was achieved through a series of meetings assembling actors from different social, political and economic spheres from the continent of Africa. Three key forums have been instrumental in shaping the Africa's common position on climate issues: the platforms of Algiers in November 2008 and Nairobi in May 2009 and the first Committee of African Heads of State and Government on Climate Change (CAHOSCC) in Addis

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<sup>2</sup> The Group of 77 (G-77) was established on 15 June 1964 by seventy-seven developing countries. Over the time it has increased to 130 countries. The original name was retained because of its historic significance.  
<http://www.g77.org/doc/>

Ababa in August 2009. The purposes of these gatherings were to help set up a common view on key climate issues of interest to Africa. This common position was to be defended during the UN annual sessions on climate change and especially during the COP 15 in Copenhagen. Adaptation to climate change, mitigation of its adverse effects, finance and technologies acquisition have emerged as consensual topics among Africans and their predominant negotiation themes.

With respects to mitigation and adaptation, African views converge on the argument that the industrialized countries (especially Annex I countries under the UNFCCC), must support the African States' efforts to cope with climate change since they are primarily responsible for global warming to date; they should commit to ambitious and quantified GHG emission reduction goals (in conformity to the Kyoto Protocol) According to Africans, the industrialized nations should more specifically abide by the UNFCCC's principle of "*common but differentiated responsibilities*" and the Kyoto Protocol requirement that African nations be submitted to no binding commitments. During the COP 15, the developed countries rejected the African proposition suggesting that industrialized countries should reduce their GHG emission by at least 40% below 1990 levels by 2020 and by 80% - 95% by 2050. Along the same line, the proposition of stabilizing the temperature at 1.5 degree Celsius was opposed in favor of a global goal of 2 degree C by industrialized countries. Regarding mitigation in particular, African countries agree to engage in carbon sequestration projects as envisaged through international mechanisms such as REDD + (for forest countries) and CDM (afforestation and reforestation - for the savanna and Sahel countries).

The main conditions they emit are: a) that these initiatives be consistent with their socio-economic development, b) that adequate financial resources are mobilized and appropriate technology set in place, c) that national capacities are strengthened. On finance, during the COP 15, the African group requested from developed countries a compensation of \$67 billion annually to support the continent's adaptation efforts and \$200 billion per year for its mitigation operations. The amounts of \$10 billion/year for the period 2010-2012 and \$100 billion by 2020 proposed by developed countries were considered to be insignificant and disappointing to most African countries. The other financial stumbling blocs during the negotiations and that continue to feed the discussions between the parties involved include:

- the financial and institutional mechanisms to be set up;
- the initiatives that should be eligible for funding: new or pre-existing adaptation / mitigation projects?
- whether the cash to be released will be a reclassification of the Official Development Assistance (ODA) as a climate fund or 'new and additional' fund above the existing ODA? - the source of the funding: bilateral or multilateral sources, public or private financing?
- the safeguards and standards for all the initiatives envisaged.

### **Loopholes of the consensus**

While acknowledging the unprecedented efforts of Africa to establish a common vision throughout the climate talks, it is worth bringing forward some divergences that emerged along the negotiation path between some of its constituents. In the preparatory phase of COP 15, some prominent actors of the civil society like Wangari Maathai of Green Belt Movement (Kenya), while recognizing the importance of North-South cooperation, was more in favor of African solutions to the climate crisis and pointed at the bad governance as a major cause of the deterioration of environment in Africa. A similar divide has also been

observed with the sharp critique against the African Union (AU) spokesperson at COP 15 (the Ethiopian prime minister Meles Zenawi) the South African president Jacob Zuma. Critics spoke out against their approval of the final COP 15 Copenhagen 'Accord' (which they considered illegal because it did not respect the UNFCCC procedures) and more importantly because African financial requests were not met. This stance is notably defended by the Sudanese diplomat Lumumba Stanislaus Di-Aping, chairman of the G-77. Mithika Mwenda of the Pan African Climate Justice Alliance accused Zenawi of selling out "*the lives and hopes of Africans for a pittance*" and that he was not representing Africa.

For Mwenda and many other members of the civil society, Africa should have maintained a "*wait and see posture*" by not signing the COP 15 'Accord' because doing so equates to signing a "*suicide pact*" for the continent. In general, more and more Africans, in the name of climate justice and equity, tend to support (officially or not) of massive international funding for mitigation and adaptation versus zero commitments to any GHG emission reduction as implied by the Bali Road map. This division between Africans' civil and political elites leads straight to the heart of the consensus making process, conjuring up questions such as: How representative and effective are those who are supposed to speak on behalf of the continent during international forums? How democratic and transparent is the selection process? The ecological diversity in Africa also fuels regional political alliances hence, potential and real differences in the climate related debates among Africans. There is for instance an often unspoken opposition between the Sahel / savanna dominated countries and forested countries in Africa (ex. Congo Basin countries).

With the large attention given by the international community to tropical forests and the prospects of important financial investments on REDD+ projects, the Sahel countries feel marginalized. CDM projects emerge therefore as an opportunity for these countries to also benefit from the new international capital flows. An inclusion of afforestation and reforestation in REDD + could strengthen this trend and perhaps reduce discrepancies between African regions. Disparities in patterns and levels of economic development also fertilize differentiations. This is particularly the case between South Africa and many African LDCs. Officially or unofficially, these LDCs would want South Africa to engage in more low-carbon actions and especially that it is not placed at their level in the process of allocating climate funding. Ironically the principle of "*common but differentiated responsibilities*" is used by Africans to rationalize their differences. Similar correlations could be made between the African SIDSs and non African SIDSs.

The membership in more than one negotiation bloc or influential group could also fuel oppositions. Blocs' interests may differ from one another. South Africa for example is both a member of the African Group and BASIC<sup>3</sup>. It still yet to be clarified to what extent the African membership in G-77 contributes to or reduces the dissonance between African States.

Overall, the discordances among Africans in the climate talks were perceptible before, during and after COP 15. Like the consensus they are traced along the ecological diversity lines, geo-political alliances and socioeconomic differences. These divergences could be interpreted as the sign that, behind the apparent consensus of the African Group during the UNFCCC negotiations, there are significant and sometimes concealed divergences among its members, contributing to seriously weakening its posture and influence in these gathering

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<sup>3</sup> BASIC is a bloc of 4 major developing countries (Brazil, South Africa, India and China) formed just before the COP 15 to act jointly during this summit.

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