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# Increasing the influence of LDC climate diplomacy

## Developing a theory of change

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**Climate diplomacy**

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## About the author

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## Produced by IIED's Climate Change Group

Climate change disproportionately affects the poorest people in the world. The Climate Change Group works with policy and research partners to redress the balance by helping the poor in low and middle-income countries achieve climate resilience and development. We strive for fair deals for people exposed to increasingly severe and unpredictable climate that can destroy livelihoods and exacerbate poverty. In particular, we identify, generate, share and employ new knowledge that can be used to shape development polices, practices and programmes to address climate change.

The global climate law, policy and governance team within the Climate Change Group helps Least Developed Countries and other vulnerable developing countries to achieve equitable and ambitious outcomes in global climate decision making.

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As climate diplomacy becomes an increasing necessity, more countries are working to integrate climate change into their foreign policy. They do this both to further international cooperation to combat and address the issue and to protect domestic interests in climate change decisions that have wide implications on economic development, national security and other matters. This paper presents a theory of change that depicts how the world's poorest countries can increase the influence of their climate diplomacy. Join the debate to help us further develop our spheres of influence and interrogate our assumptions as we strive to contribute to best policy and practice in this field.

# Contents

# Executive summary

Climate change will affect issues ranging from economic development to national security. In response, many governments are working to integrate climate change into their foreign policy in the hope of furthering international cooperation to combat and address the issue, while also protecting their national interests in climate change decisions. The reality of modern climate diplomacy extends beyond the UN climate change negotiations. Actors across the geopolitical spectrum – including the world's poorest nations – agree to act to reduce emissions with their neighbours, plan to adapt to climate change impacts together in regional groups and make expressive calls to foreign publics with the aim of raising ambition.

The 48 Least Developed Countries (LDCs) are the least responsible for causing climate change. They also have the least capacity to act to combat climate change through foreign policy efforts or domestic undertakings, but are most at risk under a changing climate (Richards 2001). Although it is in their national interests to address climate change, engaging in international climate change decision making poses greater financial and technical challenges to LDCs than it does to other developing and developed countries. So how are the LDCs among the nations integrating climate change into their foreign policies? What actions could the poorest nations take to increase their influence in international climate change decision making?

This discussion paper presents a theory of change – an approach to thinking about how change occurs – to help us understand how the world's poorest countries can increase the influence of their climate diplomacy. It draws on IIED's 15 years' experience supporting the LDC Group – a negotiating bloc at the United Nations Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) – in climate change negotiations and a series of co-authored publications with officials from The Gambia, Ethiopia and Bhutan.

This theory of change depicts four intersecting spheres of influence that can lead to the poorest nations exercising increased influence in international climate change decision making. These include:

1. **Increasing participation in diplomatic forums:** Including LDC government representatives' participation in forums for climate diplomacy and international decision making, such as the UNFCCC negotiations.
2. **Strengthening domestic infrastructures to support diplomatic engagement:** National mechanisms that support diplomatic engagement – for example, coordinating and prioritising climate change across government ministries and departments.
3. **Integrating climate change across policies:** Developing strategies, policies and plans that integrate climate change and support action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to its consequences.
4. **Increasing public diplomacy:** Using strategic messaging and interacting with the international media to reach the public in other countries.

Within each of these four spheres of influence, we present results chains linking actions, outputs and outcomes that culminate in the overarching impact of increasing LDC influence in international climate change decision making. We believe that thinking through these results chains and interrogating the assumptions that underlie each link can help LDC government officials and advisors – and the research institutes and international NGOs that support them – to

determine the approaches and challenges to increase their influence.

Climate diplomacy is a complex and dynamic issue and it is beyond the capacity of any linear, static model to fully represent its scope. Each national context is also different and there is no set path to influence. But we believe that, given the LDCs' similar economic classifications and relations with climate change, we can extrapolate parallels between their approaches to climate diplomacy into a useful overarching theory that can be updated over time. This paper aims to initiate discussion of this theory of change, contributing to best policy and practice in this important field.

## DISCUSSION POINTS:

1) Is a theory of change a useful approach to help government actors think about how and where to invest resources to further their engagement in climate diplomacy?
2) Do the four spheres of influence make sense? Are there other areas the poorest nations should engage in to increase their influence?
3) Do the suggested actions, outputs and outcomes make sense? Are there better alternatives or additions?
4) Do the assumptions in Tables 1–4 hold true in the international climate regime as you experience it? Are there other assumptions that we are missing?
5) Are there other key enabling or disabling conditions that we have overlooked?

# The poorest nations and climate diplomacy

# 1

Climate diplomacy is a growing necessity, and an increasing number of countries are working to integrate climate change into their foreign policy. They do this in the hope of furthering international cooperation to combat and address the issue, while also protecting their own national interests in climate change decisions, given the implications these have on a wide range of issues: from economic development to security. Gauging which players influence global decisions about climate change or where they draw their influence is a multidimensional challenge. The reality of modern climate diplomacy extends beyond the UN climate change negotiations and falls to actors across the geopolitical spectrum (Mabey *et al.* 2013).

As a practical illustration, take the remarks of US Secretary of State, John Kerry, in September 2015. Addressing a special session of the Major Economies Forum on Energy and Climate (MEF) – the dialogue initiated by President Barak Obama in 2009 to facilitate discussion among the world's largest economies – Kerry stated: "[L]ast year, I invited many of you and your counterparts to join me for a special foreign ministers session of the Major Economies Forum, and it was the first time that a group that large came together at a ministerial level specifically to focus on climate change as a foreign policy priority. I'm very, very pleased that now we're growing still as more and more countries are joining the significant effort to deal with this challenge, and it means that you share the belief of an increasing number of leaders around the world that despite all the other challenges that we face – and there are many – addressing the global threat posed by climate change has to remain an absolute top priority."[1]

The increasing trend of high-level officials' engagement in climate diplomacy marked the run-up to the Paris climate change negotiations in December 2015. What Kerry's remarks do not make clear however, is the growing participation of the world's poorest nations in this field. At the September 2015 meeting, Secretary Kerry addressed representatives from the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) as well as the 17 major economies participating in the MEF.[2] Among the LDC representatives were The Gambia's special climate envoy; Angola's minister of environment; and the chair of the LDC Group, a negotiating bloc at the United Nations Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

But what factors enable the poorest nations to effectively engage in climate diplomacy? The 48 LDCs are the least responsible for causing climate change and have the least capacity to combat it through foreign policy or domestic undertakings. They are also most at risk under a changing climate (Richards 2001). Although it is in their national interests for the issue to be addressed, engaging in international climate change decision making poses greater financial and technical challenges to them than to other developing and developed countries. Given this context, how are the LDCs integrating climate change into their foreign policies and what actions could they take to increase their influence in international climate change decision making?

The global climate law, policy and governance team in IIED's Climate Change Group has worked with the LDCs since 2001, when the nations formed a negotiating bloc in the UNFCCC. The practical experience gained in supporting the LDC Group and its climate diplomats has informed our development of a theory of change for increasing the influence of LDCs' climate diplomacy.

The theory of change hypothesises the actions, outputs and outcomes that lead to the impact of poorest nations exercising increased influence in international climate change decision making. It depicts these results chains in four intersecting spheres of influence:

- Increasing participation in diplomatic forums
- Strengthening domestic infrastructures to support diplomatic engagement
- Integrating climate change across policies, and
- Increasing public diplomacy.

We believe that thinking through these spheres of influence and interrogating the assumptions that underlie each link in the chain can help government officials, advisors and the research community determine how LDCs can best engage in climate diplomacy.

As each national context is different, there is no set path to influence. But we believe that, given their similar economic classification and relationship to climate change, we can extrapolate parallels between the LDCs' approach to climate diplomacy into a useful overarching theory. This paper aims to initiate discussion of this theory of change among government officials, advisors and the research community to further define it and so contribute to best policy and practice in this important field.

This discussion paper begins by introducing the poorest nations and climate diplomacy (Section 1) and theories of change (Section 2). It lays out our methods and approach to developing this theory of change (Section 3) before exploring each of its four spheres of influence in detail and presenting the theory of change diagram (Section 4). The paper ends with a look at the cross-cutting and enabling conditions for increasing the influence of LDC climate diplomacy (Section 5) and series of questions for readers to consider as they join the discussion (Section 6).

[1] John Kerry, US Secretary of State (29 September 2015) Remarks at the Major Economies Forum Ministerial. New York City. See www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2015/09/247478.htm

[2] The 17 major economies participating in the MEF are: Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, the EU, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Korea, Mexico, Russia, South Africa, the UK and the US. See www.majoreconomiesforum.org

# What is a theory of change?

# 2

A theory of change is an approach to thinking about how change happens. It maps the steps that culminate in a desired impact and interrogates the conditions and assumptions that underpin the reasons why change occurs (Vogel 2012). A theory of change is not meant to represent a set ideal; rather, it should incorporate ongoing reflection – hence the discussion format of this paper. The approach gets stakeholders to explain their understanding of change, answering questions such as: What assumptions are implicit in the sequential steps or results chain that lead from actions to outputs to outcomes to impact? And what enabling conditions could influence the entire results chain?

Theories of change have been widely used in international development (Vogel 2012). The theory of change we develop in this paper describes how the poorest nations can increase their influence in international climate change decision making. It lays out a series of sequential steps – called results chains – which include:

- **Actions:** specific activities that nations or government officials do – for example, governments send climate diplomats and other high-level officials to UNFCCC negotiations
- **Outputs:** the desired results produced by the actions – for example, climate diplomats can form and engage in alliances and coalitions
- **Outcomes:** the changes that occur as a result of the outputs – for example, alliances and coalitions increase the profile of national positions in UNFCCC decisions and outcomes, and
- **Impact:** the targeted change in international development – for this theory of change, it is that LDCs have increased influence in international climate change decision making.

Each step along the results chain is grounded in assumptions. Making these assumptions explicit is a key component of the theory of change process (Biggs *et al.* 2005). For example, the link between the action and output in the example above is based on assumptions such as: climate diplomats and other high-level officials are well informed of the issues for negotiation and the positions of blocs and groups of nations. Specifying these assumptions tests the validity of the results chain.

The theory of change approach has not been applied to climate diplomacy before now. Climate diplomacy is a complex and dynamic issue and we recognise that linear, static models cannot adequately describe the full extent of its scope. But we believe that a theory of change can help LDC government officials and advisors – and the research institutes and international NGOs that support them – think through the approaches for and challenges to increasing their influence.

# Methods and approach

# 3

To develop this theory of change, we drew on IIED's global climate law, policy and governance team's work with the LDC Group in the UN climate change negotiations and its support to specific climate diplomats within the group.

IIED has supported the LDC Group in the UNFCCC negotiations for 15 years, since the group was established in 2001. In 2010, IIED staff began providing support as registered members of LDC delegations, with Dr Achala Abeysinghe acting as legal advisor to successive chairs of the LDC Group since 2011. In this role, Abeysinghe helped shape the LDC Group's strategy for engaging in the UNFCCC negotiations.

From 2013 to 2016, the team directly supported climate diplomats, including The Gambia's special climate envoy, the first such envoy to be appointed by an LDC. The IIED team worked with in-country experts to distil policy pointers from a selection of LDC experiences with climate diplomacy and published them as a series of IIED briefing papers examining practices in The Gambia, Bhutan and Ethiopia, with recommendations for other poorest nations to further their diplomacy engagement. We reference the written outputs generated from these case studies in this discussion paper.

The experience we gained supporting climate diplomats and the LDC Group within the UNFCCC negotiations, and the themes that resulted from co-authoring publications with officials from The Gambia, Ethiopia and Bhutan, both informed the development of this theory of change. The theory presents four overlapping spheres of influence (see Section 4). The approaches of each sphere include results chains that build toward the desired impact of poorest nations increasing their influence in international climate change decision making. The four spheres also reflect the findings of a literature review focused on developing country participation in the UNFCCC, climate diplomacy and low-carbon resilient development.

We depict the spheres as overlapping because they create mutually enforcing feedback loops, with the results chains of one often benefitting progression through the results chains in another. To emphasise this, we depict several components within the results chains in the overlapping space between two spheres. The four spheres of influence are:

1. **Increasing participation in diplomatic forums:** This includes LDC government representatives in climate diplomacy and international decision making forums, such as UNFCCC negotiations.
2. **Strengthening domestic infrastructures to support diplomatic engagement:** National mechanisms that support diplomatic engagement – for example, coordinating and prioritising climate change across government ministries and departments.
3. **Integrating climate change across policies:** Developing strategies, policies and plans that integrate climate change and support action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to its consequences.
4. **Increasing public diplomacy:** Using strategic messaging and interacting with international media to reach the public in other countries.

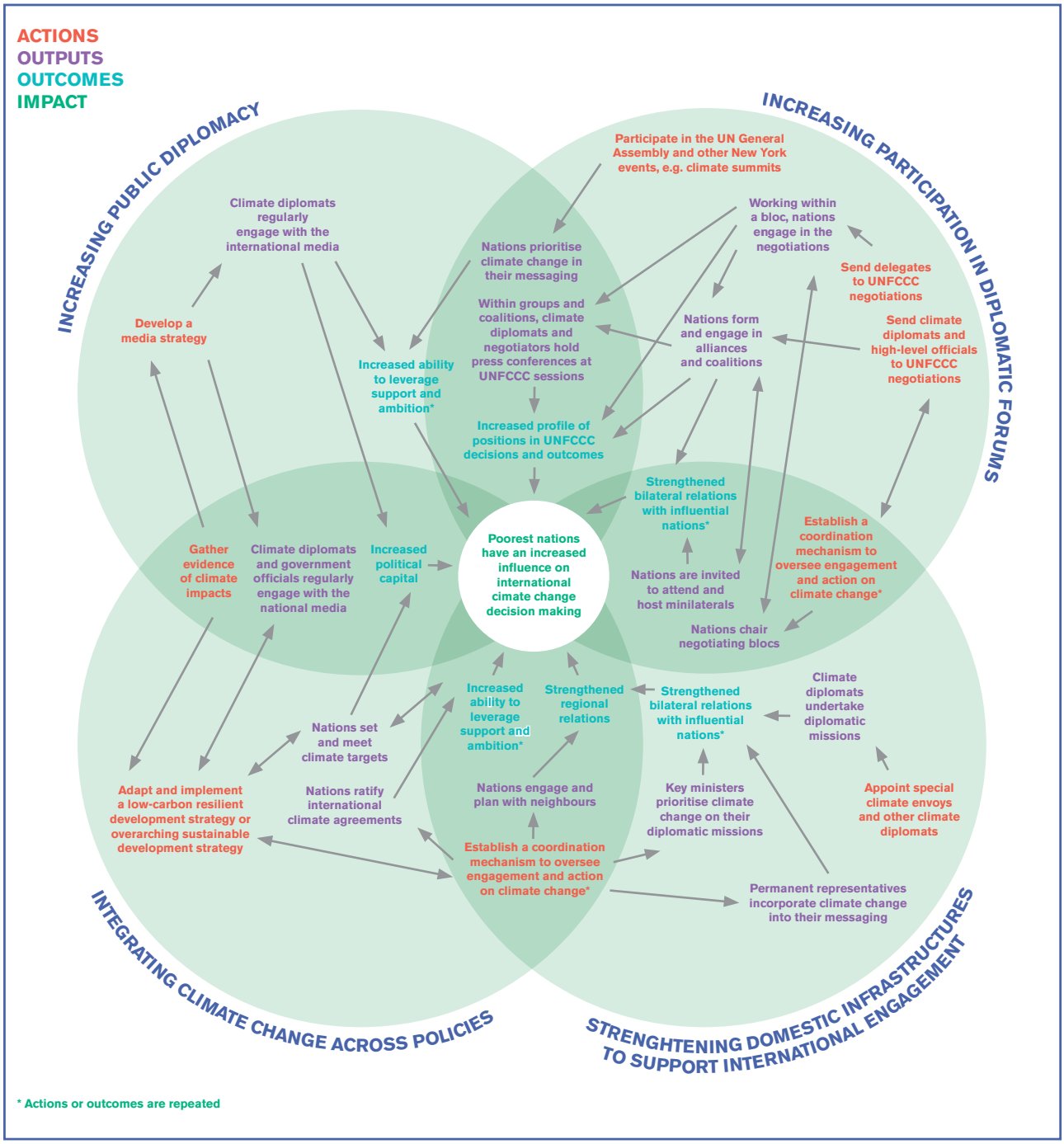
In Section 4, we describe each sphere of influence and lay out the assumptions that underpin their results chains. We drew these assumptions from the teams' practical experience supporting climate diplomats and the LDC Group and from published literature.

# Exploring the four spheres of influence

# 4

Figure 1 shows the four spheres of influence. Each involves government-led actions (red), outputs (purple) and outcomes (light blue) that are connected in a results chain leading to the overarching impact (green) of increased LDC influence in international climate change decision making. While most actions, outputs and outcomes along the results chain connect linearly, some links form a feedback loop (depicted with a double sided arrow in Figure 1). Tables 1–4 show the assumptions that are implicit in the links along the results chain – for example, action to output or output to outcome. We also discuss the assumptions for each sphere and describe at least one example of an action leading to the desired impact.

Figure 1: Proposed theory of change for increasing the influence of LDC climate diplomacy



## 4.1 Increasing participation in diplomatic forums

This sphere relates to the participation of government representatives in forums for climate diplomacy and international decision making. Countries reach formal global agreements on climate change under the auspices of the UNFCCC. As such, many of the activities in this sphere relate to LDC countries' representation within this forum. Much of the literature and the team's experience supporting the LDC Group also concentrates on the UNFCCC. Although participation in the UNFCCC is critically important, climate diplomacy extends beyond these negotiations. As its focus moves from the target setting that marked the negotiation of the Paris Agreement to the implementation of its commitments, the international climate regime will continue to expand beyond the UNFCCC to include a wide range of other institutions and partnerships (Mabey *et al.* 2013). Effective climate diplomacy will also have to expand to encompass these activities.

Actions in this sphere need to build technical and diplomatic representation in the UNFCCC negotiations and other forums, including multilateral bodies like the UN General Assembly and minilateral forums such as the MEF. These minilaterals are smaller, club-like compositions of government representatives that discuss and negotiate climate change (Falkner 2015). Although outside the UNFCCC, the conclusions reached at minilaterals can influence negotiations.

For example, a results chain focused on building diplomatic representation involves the action of sending climate diplomats and other high-level officials to UNFCCC negotiations. This action leads to the output of climate diplomats forming and engaging in alliances, which forms a feedback loop with another output of climate diplomats being invited to attend and host minilaterals. The resulting outcome is strengthened bilateral relationships with influential nations, which leads to the desired impact of increased influence in climate change decision making. This results chain is built on several assumptions, including that the link between output and outcome assumes that the alliances and coalitions formed represent a greater balance of power than the prevailing group positions.

An example of a results chain that focuses on technical representation begins with the action of sending national delegations to UNFCCC negotiations. A resulting output of this action is that delegates engage in the negotiations by working within negotiating blocs to reach the outcome of increasing the profile of national positions in UNFCCC decisions. This outcome results in the desired impact: increased influence in climate change decision making**.** Several assumptions are implicit in this results chain, including that national delegations are well informed and can effectively participate in UNFCCC negotiations, which take place in English. See Table 1 for the full list of assumptions.

Table 1: Assumptions underpinning the 'Increasing participation in diplomatic forums' sphere of influence

| LINK | ASSUMPTIONS | NOTES |
|---|---|---|
| Send delegates to UNFCCC negotiations→ Working within a negotiating bloc, nations engage in the negotiations | Delegations are well informed and can effectively participate in UNFCCC negotiations, which take place in English. | Literature on the constraints developing country delegations face in the UNFCCC negotiations overwhelmingly cites a lack of: negotiating knowledge, experience, negotiating skills, information and support; and language problems as significant obstacles (Richards 2001; Andrei *et al.* 2016; Page 2003). |
| | The delegation is composed of enough negotiators to cover the scope (range of topics) and size (number of parallel meetings) of the UNFCCC negotiations. | The small size of LDC delegations is a significant challenge to their effective participation, especially given the growing size and scope of UNFCCC negotiations (Neeff 2013; Richards 2001). The UNFCCC provides funding for two to three negotiators from each LDC delegation. Supplementing this number carries significant financial implications, so most LDC delegations consist of fewer than 15 people. If we remove non-governmental representatives from this number, it drops to fewer than three (Andrei *et al.* 2016). |
| | Delegations are composed of members who will remain within the UNFCCC for several years. If continuity is not assured, handover between delegates is well managed. | Continuity allows delegates to take on coordination roles within blocs, facilitation and chairing roles offered by the Secretariat, and so on. |
| | The delegation can coordinate, establish common positions and work effectively within a negotiating bloc. | In many developing countries where capacity is particularly challenging, negotiating in groups is the most feasible option to influence outcomes (Mabey *et al.* 2013). |
| Working within a negotiating bloc, nations engage in the negotiations → Increased profile of positions in UNFCCC decisions and outcomes | The negotiating bloc is well coordinated and can negotiate effectively with other blocs to reach mutually beneficial agreements. | |
| | The negotiating bloc can gather and share intelligence on other group and party positions to strategise the best approach. | Groups such as the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), the LDCs and the European Union (EU) pool their insights and information to help shape their tactics inside the negotiations (Mabey *et al.* 2013). |
| Working within a negotiating bloc, nations engage in the negotiations → Nations form and engage in alliances and coalitions | Blocs garner enough consensus on a particular issue to align with other blocs or groups. | |
| | Negotiating blocs are represented by trusted leaders (eg group chairs or lead coordinators) that form a single point of contact to build alliance with other blocs or groups. | |
| Increased profile of positions in UNFCCC decisions and outcomes → Poorest nations have an increased influence on international climate change decision making | The reflection of national positions in UNFCCC decisions and outcomes is a primary marker of influence in international climate change decision making, as the UNFCCC is recognised as the forum for formal global agreements on climate change. | |

*continues*

| LINK | ASSUMPTIONS | NOTES |
|---|---|---|
| Send climate diplomats and other high-level officials to UNFCCC negotiations → Nations form and engage in alliances and coalitions | Climate diplomats and other high-level officials are well informed of the issues for negotiation and the positions of blocs and groups of nations. | |
| | Climate diplomats and other high-level officials are able to effectively engage in diplomatic activities, which take place primarily in English. | Nations should strengthen diplomats' skills in shaping debates, fostering trust, understanding others, building alliances to influence, and finding compromise and/or constructive ambiguity. These skills do not involve studying transferable actions, but developing the ability to deliver workable results (Mabey *et al.* 2013). |
| | Climate diplomats and other high-level officials can tie together the negotiations' technical and political levels and are empowered to make trade-offs between them. | Climate diplomacy must manage political trade-offs (Mabey *et al.* 2013). |
| | Climate diplomats and other high-level officials can work within blocs and are entrusted to represent them at a political level. | Some groupings (eg AOSIS and the EU) have pooled capacity for diplomatic engagement (Mabey *et al.* 2013). |
| Nations form and engage in alliances and coalitions → Increased profile of positions in UNFCCC decisions and outcomes | The alliances and coalitions formed represent a greater balance of power than the prevailing group positions. | For example, the LDC, AOSIS and EU alliance moved the negotiations forward when they reached a stalemate in Durban (Mabey *et al.* 2013) and the High Ambition Coalition was cited as a key instigator of the Paris Agreement in the final days of COP21 (Brun 2016). The positions held by these coalitions are largely reflected in COP outcomes and decisions. |
| Working within a negotiating bloc, nations engage in the negotiations ↔ Nations chair negotiating blocs | National delegations maintain involvement within negotiating blocs. This allows them to take on leadership positions, such as bloc chair, which further institutionalises national delegations' involvement in the bloc. | |
| Nations form and engage in alliances and coalitions ↔ Climate diplomats are invited to attend and host minilaterals | Climate diplomats are able to maintain involvement in alliance and coalition building and demonstrate effective diplomat practices. | |
| | Climate diplomats can form and maintain working diplomatic relations with influential nations, allowing them to form alliances and elicit invitations to minilaterals. This, in turn, further develops diplomatic relations and alliance building. | Minilateral forums run by influential nations include the MEF (hosted by the United States) and Petersberg Climate Dialogue (hosted by Germany). Other types of minilateral forums include the Climate Vulnerable Forum and the Cartagena Dialogue, which have rotating chairmanships and can be hosted by LDCs. |
| Nations form and engage in alliances and coalitions → Strengthened bilateral relations with influential nations | Climate diplomats have the skills to form and maintain lasting bilateral relations with influential nations such as the US, China and the EU. | |

*continues*

| LINK | ASSUMPTIONS | NOTES |
|---|---|---|
| Nations form and engage in alliances and coalitions → Within groups and coalitions, diplomats and negotiators hold press conferences at UNFCCC sessions | Negotiators and diplomats have enough time to hold press conferences at UNFCCC sessions. | |
| | Groups and coalitions have enough media support to arrange for press conferences and induce the attendance of journalists. | |
| Within groups and coalitions, diplomats and negotiators hold press conferences at UNFCCC sessions → Increased profile of positions in UNFCCC decisions and outcomes | Negotiators and diplomats can deliver clear, relevant and compelling narratives in their climate messaging. | Climate messaging can draw on ethical and moral arguments to put pressure on influential nations to compromise. AOSIS and LDCs have effectively leveraged their ethical position, which is powerful in a 'one country, one vote' forum such as the UNFCCC (Mabey *et al.* 2013). |
| | Press conferences generate media attention in influential nations. This media is consumed by foreign publics and government officials. | |
| | Press conferences draw the attention of civil society organisations active in the UNFCCC, who consequently add their support to group or coalition positions. | |
| | Messaging and media attention influence other groups and parties and lead to compromise, benefiting group or coalition positions. | |
| Strengthened bilateral relations with influential nations → Poorest nations have an increased influence on international climate change decision making | Nations meet more regularly with influential nations and gain a practiced knowledge of how best to influence them. | |
| | Strengthened bilateral relations are maintained with nations who play an active and prominent role in international climate change decision making. | |
| Participate in the UN General Assembly and other New York events, eg climate summits → Nations prioritise climate change in their messaging | National representatives who participate in the UN General Assembly and other New York events agree to prioritise climate change in their messaging and do so in a knowledgeable manner. | |
| Nations prioritise climate change in their messaging → Increased ability to leverage support and ambition | Nations can present strong narratives and compelling messaging about climate change, which generate enough attention from foreign publics and government officials to garner support from donors and ambition in others. | Reporting on the UN General Assembly and other New York events enjoy a wider viewership than UNFCCC negotiations, often due to the high level of government representation present. |

## 4.2 Strengthening domestic infrastructures to support diplomatic engagement

This sphere relates to the domestic infrastructures that support diplomatic engagement, beginning with the coordination and prioritisation of climate change across government ministries and departments.

Establishing a coordination mechanism to oversee engagement and action on climate change is the first step in most of the results chains within this sphere and the next: 'Integrating climate change across policy' (see Section 4.3). Effective climate diplomacy requires ownership across government, as balancing conflicting economic, energy, climate change and diplomatic goals requires policy coordination at the highest level (Mabey *et al.* 2013). National coordination in delivering effective climate diplomacy, which draws upon a nation's strengths across departments, is also important (Craft and Tshering 2016). Sending the best delegations to diplomatic forums and appointing climate diplomats reflects a government that has identified climate change as a national priority – an enabling condition of this theory of change.

An example of a results chain within this sphere includes the action of appointing special climate envoys and climate diplomats. The output of this action is that climate diplomats undertake diplomatic missions, which in turn produces the outcome of strengthened bilateral relations with influential nations. This ties in to the outcome of climate diplomats forming and engaging in alliances discussed in Section 4.1. Among other assumptions, this results chain assumes that climate diplomats have the skills and resources to form and maintain lasting bilateral relations with influential nations such as the US, China and the EU. For a full list of assumptions, see Table 2.

Table 2: Assumptions underlying the 'Strengthening domestic infrastructures to support diplomatic engagement' sphere of influence

| LINK | ASSUMPTIONS | NOTES |
|---|---|---|
| Establish a coordination mechanism to oversee engagement and action on climate change ↔ Send delegates to UNFCCC negotiations | The coordination mechanism is well run and equipped. It also has political authority over sectoral ministries. | In most cases, the ministries of foreign affairs or environment lead on policy coordination. In some, special climate envoys are the conveners of various government departments (Mabey *et al.* 2013). In Ethiopia, Prime Minister Hailemariam established the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, which is a dedicated to coordinating the climate change agenda (Craft and Endalew 2016). |
| | After UNFCCC sessions conclude, nations translate and interpret international agreements and decisions (mainly from English) for dissemination nationally. This knowledge of UNFCCC decisions continually informs the composition of the delegation sent to the negotiations. | |
| | While UNFCCC negotiations are ongoing, nations translate text for officials back home. Informed officials continually weigh in and help develop positions that evolve with the negotiations. | Some LDCs identify language issues and time to translate text and decisions for officials back home as big challenges, which make it difficult for them to develop their position in a timely manner (Andrei *et al.* 2016). |
| | Nations recognise the value of continuity in their delegations and manage turnover in participation at the negotiations either through the transmission of knowledge or the continuation of dedicated staff. | Some LDC governments use participation in negotiations as incentives for officials; others nominate new delegates for each session on a rotational basis. But high levels of turnaround means the retention of little institutional memory and many delegates have to learn on the job during negotiations (Andrei *et al.* 2016).<br>Rapid turnover of negotiators and using political criteria to select them is a common practice in developing countries (Richards 2001; Gupta 2000). |

*continues*

| LINK | ASSUMPTIONS | NOTES |
|---|---|---|
| Establish a coordination mechanism to oversee engagement and action on climate change ↔ Send delegates to UNFCCC negotiations (cont.) | Nations draw delegates from relevant ministries (eg environment, foreign affairs or finance) to bring their best skills and information to the negotiations. | Effective coordination among national agencies ensures governments bring their best talent to the negotiating table (Craft and Tshering 2016). |
| | Delegates have enough time to prepare and engage in the UNFCCC negotiations. | LDC delegates often have to follow other multilateral processes and/or are responsible for national portfolios that extend beyond climate change. So they have little capacity to prepare for UNFCCC sessions, be represented in the meetings or participate in side events (Andrei *et al.* 2016). |
| | The coordination mechanism gathers and analyses intelligence on other nations. | Gathering and analysing intelligence on the interests, constraints and capacities of other actors and how they perceive national actions and positions is a key component of climate diplomacy. Such analysis requires detailed knowledge of country circumstances and debates, which go beyond mainstream media reports and news headlines (Mabey *et al.* 2013). |
| Establish a coordination mechanism to oversee engagement and action on climate change → Nations chair negotiating blocs | Governments prioritise UNFCCC negotiations to the extent that they are willing to devote resources and staff to oversee the chairing of a negotiating bloc. | Chairing a negotiating bloc typically involves a two-year term. |
| Appoint special climate envoys and other climate diplomats → Climate diplomats undertake diplomatic missions | High-level officials have the political freedom to make appointments specific to climate change. | In LDCs, the appointment of special climate envoys and other climate diplomats appear to be in recognition of personal ability rather than the necessity of the position. |
| | Appointed climate diplomats have the time and resources to undertake diplomatic missions. | Given the high importance of limiting climate risks, climate diplomacy remains under-resourced in most countries (Mabey *et al.* 2013). |
| Climate diplomats undertake diplomatic missions → Strengthened bilateral relations with influential nations | Climate diplomats have the skills and resources to form and maintain lasting bilateral relations with influential nations and blocs, such as the US, China and the EU. | |
| Strengthened bilateral relations with influential nations → Increased ability to leverage support and ambition | The strengthened bilateral relations are with nations and blocs that are in a position to provide support, such as the US and the EU. | |
| | The strengthened bilateral relations allow nations to influence country positions, particularly those of large emitters like the US, China and the EU. | Strengthening relations with international partners fosters better understanding and appreciation of national progress, challenges, concerns and needs. It also allows Bhutan to bridge critical gaps in finance, technology and capacity, enabling it to take climate action (Craft and Tshering 2016). |

| LINK | ASSUMPTIONS | NOTES |
|---|---|---|
| Establish a coordination mechanism to oversee engagement and action on climate change → Nations engage and plan with neighbours | The coordination mechanism has the mandate and funding to bring together relevant officials from national and foreign ministries. | |
| | Nations have working relations with neighbouring countries. | |
| Establish a coordination mechanism to oversee engagement and action on climate change → Nations engage and plan with neighbours | Nations have the foresight and political infrastructure to engage in cross-sectoral long-term planning with other countries – and neighbouring countries have this desire and ability as well. | Ethiopia addresses climate change planning at the regional level through the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), comprised of Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Somalia, Kenya, South Sudan and Sudan. The IGAD has begun preparing a regional climate change strategy for 2016–2030 to harmonise national efforts to adhere to low-carbon, climate-resilient sustainable development; this includes Ethiopia's export of energy generated from hydropower to Sudan, Djibouti and Kenya (Craft and Endalew 2016). |
| | There is political willingness to plan and share information on climate change and its impacts on regional economic development and national security with neighbouring countries. | |
| Nations engage and plan with neighbours → Strengthened regional relations | Efforts to plan with neighbours bring demonstrable benefits, such as efficient development projects, ease of access to resources, and reduction of climate risks. | |
| Strengthened regional relations → Poorest nations have an increased influence on international climate change decision making | Increased engagement between neighbouring countries transfers to the UNFCCC negotiations and other forums, where strong regional relations facilitate common positions and negotiating strategies. | |
| Establish a coordination mechanism to oversee engagement and action on climate change → Permanent representatives incorporate climate change into their messaging | The coordination mechanism efficiently communicates its work to permanent representatives stationed abroad and facilitates their understanding of the issues. Permanent representatives regularly report back on their interactions. | To increase their influencing bandwidth, countries can mobilise generalist diplomats who are permanently stationed in key capitals to undertake climate diplomacy (Mabey *et al.* 2013). |

*continues*

| LINK | ASSUMPTIONS | NOTES |
|---|---|---|
| Permanent representatives incorporate climate change into their messaging → Strengthened bilateral relations with influential nations | Permanent representatives present strong narratives and compelling messaging about climate change in regular meetings with government representatives of their host nations. | |
| Establish a coordination mechanism to oversee engagement and action on climate change → Key ministers prioritise climate change on their diplomatic missions | The coordination mechanism efficiently communicates its work to key ministers and facilitates their understanding of the issues. Key ministers regularly reports back on their interactions. | The prioritisation of climate change by key ministers on their international trips and diplomatic engagements can increase a nation's influencing bandwidth (Mabey *et al.* 2013). |
| | Key ministers are receptive to prioritising climate change. | |
| Key ministers prioritise climate change on their diplomatic missions → Strengthened bilateral relations with influential nations | Key ministers have the time and resources to undertake diplomatic missions to influential nations and blocs, such as the US, China and the EU. | |
| | Key ministers have the skills and resources to form and maintain lasting bilateral relations with influential nations. | |

## 4.3 Integrating climate change across policy

This sphere relates to the development of strategies, policies and plans that integrate climate change and support action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to its consequences. This integration is the foundation of successful climate diplomacy, which begins at home (Craft and Jallow 2014).

For example, an action within this sphere is the adoption and implementation of a low-carbon resilient development strategy or overarching sustainable development framework. This forms a feedback loop with the output that nations can set and meet climate targets. This output in turn forms a feedback loop with the outcome of having an increased ability to leverage support and ambition and ties in to the outcome of increased political capital. The assumptions underpinning the step from action to output in this results chain include: that the strategy informs the setting of achievable targets; that implementing the strategy enables nations to meet their climate targets; and that nations can attract and secure the financial, technological and the other means needed to implement their low-carbon resilient development strategy. For a full list of assumptions, see Table 3.

Table 3: Assumptions underpinning the 'Integrating climate change across policy' sphere of influence

| LINK | ASSUMPTIONS | NOTES |
|---|---|---|
| Establish a coordination mechanism to oversee engagement and action on climate change ↔<br>Adopt and implement a low-carbon resilient development strategy or overarching sustainable development strategy | Nations are able to share information across sectoral ministries and different ministries (eg environment, finance, planning, industry, trade and energy) are willing to work together. | Delivering an effective climate strategy is beyond the capacity of any one department. Mainstreaming climate change into new institutions can lead to tensions inside governments as traditional actors – such as ministries of environment – lose power, leverage and agency (Mabey *et al.* 2013). |
| | The inter-ministerial coordination mechanism interacts with, oversees and updates the low-carbon resilient development strategy on an ongoing basis. The strategy's implementation informs the work of the coordination mechanism. | For climate change to be mainstreamed into national economic and political debates, governments will have to engage many other institutions on an ongoing basis through inter-ministerial coordination (Mabey *et al.* 2013). |
| Adopt and implement a low-carbon resilient development strategy or overarching sustainable development strategy ↔<br>Nations set and meet climate targets | The strategy informs the setting of achievable targets. Implementing the strategy enables nations to meet their climate targets. | Driven by its development philosophy of Gross National Happiness, which includes pillars of sustainable socioeconomic development and protection of the environment, Bhutan has achieved carbon neutrality (Craft and Tshering 2016). |
| | Nations can attract and secure the financial, technological and other means of implementing their low-carbon resilient development strategy through project funding and bilateral development assistance. | |
| Nations set and meet climate targets →<br>Increased political capital | Other nations and international media recognise that LDCs are setting and achieving climate targets. Given the LDCs' negligible role in causing climate change and their limited capacity, this recognition fosters goodwill. | Fulfilling international commitments and achieving carbon neutrality increased Bhutan's political capital on the international stage, bolstered its national credibility and strengthened its negotiators' moral authority to lobby for greater ambition from others (Craft and Tshering 2016). |
| Increased political capital →<br>Poorest nations have an increased influence on international climate change decision making | Greater recognition and goodwill gives countries an increased say in international climate change decision making. | |

*continues*

| LINK | ASSUMPTIONS | NOTES |
|---|---|---|
| Nations set and meet climate targets ↔<br>Increased ability to leverage support and ambition | Valuing that LDCs are setting ambitious climate targets, donor nations offer the financial, technological and other means of implementing them through project funding and bilateral development assistance. Work to achieve the climate targets furthers nations' experience in leveraging support. | |
| | Nations promote their setting and achievement of climate targets. Given the LDCs' negligible role in causing climate change and their limited capacity, this serves as moral pressure for other nations to act ambitiously. | |
| Increased ability to leverage support and ambition →<br>Poorest nations have an increased influence on international climate change decision making | LDCs leverage support and ambition from influential nations, who also play an active and prominent role in international climate change decision making. | |
| Establish a coordination mechanism to oversee engagement and action on climate change →<br>Nations ratify international climate agreements | The coordination mechanism has the political authority to recommend the ratification of international climate agreements to the appropriate national bodies, which act on these recommendations. | |
| Nations ratify international climate agreements →<br>Increased ability to leverage support and ambition | Donor countries value the ratification of international climate agreements. | |
| | Nations promote their ratification of these agreements.<br>This serves as moral pressure for other nations to act ambitiously and ratify them as well. | International climate agreements often require ratification by many nations to enter into force – for example, at least 55 countries accounting for 55 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions had to ratify the Paris Agreement before it could enter into force. |
| Gather evidence of climate impacts → Adopt and implement a low-carbon resilient development strategy or overarching sustainable development strategy | Nations form and update the low-carbon resilient development strategy, taking into consideration nationally-specific climate information. | |

## 4.4 Increasing public diplomacy

This sphere relates to using the media as a platform to deliver strategic messaging about climate change. The international media is the primary vehicle for reaching, informing and influencing the general public in other countries and thus the focus of efforts to increase public diplomacy. The media plays an important role in fostering the national interest debate – the dialogue through which countries define their goals and ambitions.

One of the goals of climate diplomacy is to play a role in shaping this conversation about climate change. Recognising that the conversation needs to be shaped both at home and abroad, the portion of this sphere that overlaps with the previous sphere – 'Integrating climate change across policy' (see Section 4.3) – also depicts interaction with national media outlets.

This sphere's results chains all involve the action of developing a media strategy. An effective media strategy is a crucial component of public diplomacy, as it reduces the risk of confusing messages, allows for announcements to be spaced out for maximum impact and can ensure that messages are timed to coincide with audience interest (Craft and Jallow 2014). One of this sphere's expected outputs is that climate diplomats regularly interact with the international media, giving interviews, appearing on television and radio programmes, publishing opinion pieces and so on. The outcomes of this output include increased political capital and an increased ability to leverage support and ambition. Both of these lead to the desired impact. The assumptions underlying this results chain include the nation's ability to form compelling narratives and climate messaging and to generate enough attention from foreign publics and government officials to garner support. For a full list of assumptions, see Table 4.

Table 4: Assumptions underpinning the 'Increasing public diplomacy' sphere of influence

| LINK | ASSUMPTIONS | NOTES |
|---|---|---|
| Gather evidence of national climate change impacts → Develop a media strategy | Nations can accurately gather and record evidence to track national climate change impacts. They regularly integrate this information into their national media strategy. | Generating evidence to support climate advocacy provides diplomats with a firmer foundation for influence as they are armed with country-specific data (Craft and Endalew 2016). |
| Develop a media strategy → Climate diplomats regularly engage with the international media | Nations form their media strategy in consultation with climate diplomats and government officials who use climate change messaging. | |
| | Climate diplomats and government officials who use climate change messaging are well informed of – and adhere to – the media strategy. | |
| | Climate diplomats and government officials have diplomatic communication and media skills and can engage with the international media – for example, in English, French or Arabic. | Climate diplomats require appropriate communications skills to effectively engage with the media (Craft and Jallow 2014). |
| Climate diplomats regularly engage with the international media → Increased political capital | Climate diplomats and government officials can deliver clear, relevant and compelling narratives in their climate messaging. | |
| Climate diplomats regularly engage with the international media → Increased ability to leverage support and ambition | Nations can generate enough attention from foreign publics and government officials to garner support. | Climate messaging can draw on ethical and moral arguments to put pressure on influential nations to increase their ambition. AOSIS and LDCs have effectively leveraged their ethical position as being disproportionately (and in some cases existentially) threatened by climate change, while having contributed little to emissions. Ethical leverage is strongest in shaping the public debate (Mabey *et al.* 2013). |
| Develop a media strategy → Climate diplomats and government officials regularly engage with the national media | National media outlets report on climate change in a variety of forms – for example, how it relates to weather patterns, the link between climate change and energy production, coverage of the international negotiations. | |
| Climate diplomats and government officials regularly engage with the national media ↔ Adopt and implement a low-carbon resilient development strategy or overarching sustainable development strategy | National media coverage of climate change enjoys wide viewership and is broadcast in local languages. | |
| | Public understanding and opinion have a direct and continuous impact in defining national action, particularly the shaping of government energy policies and development strategies. | National climate change programmes should be rooted in broad domestic political consensus and integrated into national development processes (Mabey *et al.* 2013). |
| | Climate diplomats and government officials regularly discuss the implementation of sustainable development projects in the context of climate change on national media. | News media coverage plays a significant role in shaping possibilities for future climate policy implementation (Craft and Jallow 2014). |

# Cross-cutting enabling conditions

# 5

Several cross-cutting enabling conditions contribute to the success of each of the four spheres of influence and the results chains reflected in the theory of change diagram. Because this theory of change is built on government-led actions, the political will of high-ranking government officials to see these actions through to impact is vital. But identifying climate change as a national priority can be even more powerful than political willingness at the highest level. Such prioritisation transcends political terms and assumes recognition of climate change as a principle public concern. Finally, there will be no results without the necessary finance and support. In this section, we discuss how these three enabling conditions – political will, prioritisation and funding – work to facilitate the influence the world's poorest countries have on international climate change decision making.

## 5.1 Political will at high levels of government

In countries large and small, buy-in from high-ranking government officials acts as a motivator for effective climate diplomacy. For example, Prime Minister Meles Zenawi's legacy of strong political will and leadership on climate change enabled Ethiopia to integrate climate into its development strategy, set ambitious national targets and successfully coordinate climate action across ministries (Craft and Endalew 2016). At the other end of the geopolitical spectrum, President Obama's personal commitment to the issue was a key factor in the US's active role in working with China and other influential nations to ensure the negotiation of the Paris Agreement.

This buy-in from high-ranking officials is useful, as effective climate diplomacy requires significant institutional effort, the mobilisation of costly capacity – for example, significant reallocation of human and funding resources, training and coordination of generalist diplomats, support and timely content for influencing – and strategic focus. This can be a challenge even for the largest countries, let alone the poorest (Mabey *et al.* 2013). Political willingness at high levels of government lessens these burdens and provides a natural integration of top officials into decision making. The involvement of a head of state or government in setting ambitious national climate targets and managing political trade-offs helps ease their passage through the domestic system, allowing the nation to prioritise climate change in its foreign policy.

## 5.2 Identifying climate change as a national priority

For many LDCs – particularly those also classified as small island developing states – addressing climate change is a high priority, because it represents a significant threat to economic development, lives, livelihoods and national security.

Some LDC governments recognise addressing climate change as a core national interest. For example, given the impact of climate change on the Himalayan environment, Bhutan judged that addressing climate change is a component of environmental conservation. And as environmental conservation is one of its government's primary mandates, written into its constitution, Bhutan has integrated climate change into both domestic and foreign policy, giving rise to climate diplomacy (Craft and Tshering 2016).

## 5.3 The provision of finance and support

Effective climate diplomacy and the implementation of low-carbon resilient development strategies both require significant human and financial resources. But the LDCs are the world's poorest nations.

The UNFCCC funds the participation of a limited number of LDC delegates and IIED has supported LDC climate diplomats with project funding from EU governments. It is in the interest of donor governments to support capacity building in groups of poorer countries, even if their interests are not completely aligned. This will help ensure the continued effectiveness and legitimacy of the climate regime (Mabey *et al.* 2013). Although donor funding is not a prerequisite for diplomatic action, the LDCs' national circumstances mean we should not ignore its importance as an enabling condition.

# Join the debate

# 6

This paper presents a theory of change for increasing the influence of the world's poorest nations in international climate change decision making. It draws on the experience of IIED's Climate Change Group in supporting climate diplomats and the LDC Group in the UNFCCC negotiations, and on literature that includes IIED policy briefings produced in cooperation with in-country experts.

We hope this theory of change serves as a tool for government officials, advisors and the research institutes and international NGOs that support them to think through the approaches and challenges to effective climate diplomacy.

Climate diplomacy is a complex and dynamic issue, and like all theories of change, this one will evolve in response to feedback from stakeholders over time. This paper is intended as a platform for initiating a broader discussion with practitioners in this field. As such, we welcome reflections on the following discussion points:

1. Is a theory of change a useful approach to help government actors think about how and where to invest resources to further their engagement in climate diplomacy?
2. Do the four spheres of influence make sense? Are there other spheres the poorest nations should engage in to increase their influence?
3. Do the suggested actions, outputs and outcomes make sense? Are there better alternatives or additions?
4. Do the assumptions in Tables 1–4 hold true in the international climate regime as you experience it? Are there other assumptions that we are missing?
5. Are there other key enabling or disabling conditions that we have overlooked?

Please send feedback directly to Brianna Craft (brianna.craft@iied.org).

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# Acronyms

| | |
|---|---|
| AOSIS | Alliance of Small Island States |
| IIED | International Institute for Environment and Development |
| IGAD | Intergovernmental Authority on Development |
| LDCs | Least Developed Countries |
| MEF | Major Economies Forum on Energy and Climate |
| UNFCCC | United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change |

# Related reading

Andrei, S *et al.* (2016) A study of LDC capacity at the UNFCCC: engaging in negotiations and interpreting outcomes. IIED issue paper. See http://pubs.iied.org/10167IIED

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Craft, B and Endalew, G (2016) Ethiopia's effective climate diplomacy: lessons for other nations. IIED briefing paper. See http://pubs.iied.org/17381IIED

As climate diplomacy becomes an increasing necessity, more countries are working to integrate climate change into their foreign policy. They do this both to further international cooperation to combat and address the issue and to protect domestic interests in climate change decisions that have wide implications on economic development, national security and other matters. This paper presents a theory of change that depicts how the world's poorest countries can increase the influence of their climate diplomacy. Join the debate to help us further develop our spheres of influence and interrogate our assumptions as we strive to contribute to best policy and practice in this field.

IIED is a policy and action research organisation. We promote sustainable development to improve livelihoods and protect the environments on which these livelihoods are built. We specialise in linking local priorities to global challenges. IIED is based in London and works in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East and the Pacific, with some of the world's most vulnerable people. We work with them to strengthen their voice in the decision-making arenas that affect them – from village councils to international conventions.

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