

## Climate Change: An African Opportunity in the Post-2015 Dialogue

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**The catchphrase ‘transformation’ in the United Nations Secretary–General’s Synthesis Report of the Post-2015 Developmental Framework processes, has indicated a fundamental shift in international negotiations on development following the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In reflecting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and other post-2015 processes feeding into it, the report illustrates the highly consultative process that has emerged from the post-2015 dialogue. A fertile ground for multilevel negotiations between civil societies across the world, their national governments; as well as popular conversation on a wide range of development-related issues including climate change has therefore been laid. This should be capitalised on to create a truly African narrative.**

The consultation of key marginalised groups has brought the globalised problem of climate change onto the agenda, challenging states to address this if the post-2015 development agenda is to ensure poverty eradication.<sup>1</sup> Climate change, the mass extinction of species, deforestation, desertification and many other related consequences stand to expose the global limitation of current unsustainable developmental practises and the unwillingness of political and economic leaders to address climate justice. Environmental injustice is

<sup>1</sup> B Burns. 2014. Release: Women at COP 20 Blast Failure for Real Action in Lima. *Women Gender Constituency*. Available: <http://www.womengenderclimate.org/release-women-at-cop-20-blast-failure-for-real-action-in-lima/> (last accessed 19 February 2015)

a particular problem for Africa with the continent's poor and marginalised contending with disproportionate and increasing impacts of climate change and diminishing resources.<sup>2</sup>

The concept 'climate change' provides a multilevel dynamic to engage with in the post-2015 developmental framework. As a concept, climate change due to its globalised impacts enables stakeholders to firstly reassert the claim of universality of human rights. It also takes into consideration the specificities of the citizenry's ecological footprint on the developmental agenda. Climate change thus, challenges the human rights discourse to find a way to reconcile socioeconomic rights threatened by climate change with the developmental aspirations on a global level. On the small-scale, climate change recognises the fact that inequality within societies be it income, race, gender inter alia can be understood in terms of an individual's ecological footprint that in turn indicates an individual's vulnerability to the effects of climate change. The concept of climate change reignites the calls of marginalised groups including women, the poor, islanders, indigenous people and many more for a sense of global ethics to reinvigorate conversation on the link between climate change and development.<sup>3</sup>

The Africa Group (AG), a coalition of African states that negotiate for the continent through the G77, has been criticised for its inability to represent a coherent African voice in global forums. The AG is an important voice in international environmental negotiations. Part of the problem for the AG is how to reconcile the interests of diverse African and engage in a coherent manner. There is also a sense of separation between delegations at the UN in New York and the capitals of respective countries ensuing from the lack of clear political directives.<sup>4</sup> In addition, the small delegation size of many African states in comparison to developed states and the absence of key figures and technical support significantly reduces the African voice in multilateral platforms.<sup>5</sup> However, the Africa Group has made strides in altering their global political standing through an improved climate change architecture.

The African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN) established in 1985 is one of the most notable forums in this regard. It is a permanent forum tightly connected to the African Union (AU) and New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). This has provided policy direction for regional and local environmental matters though regular high level meetings of African ministers of the environment.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, the Common Position on African Environment and Development has formed a firm African sense of expectation for international negotiation. Keeping in mind that the position does not relate to human rights, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights in its Resolution on Climate Change and Human Rights and the Need to Study its Impacts in Africa recognises the need for climate change negotiations to include human rights.<sup>7</sup> Though not without problems, climate change as an avenue for concerted African effort, is an opportunity for the continent to form a coherent voice.

The evolving climate change infrastructure created by African states is an opportunity to strengthen African voices in view of the continent's vulnerable position in global political and economic forums. The UN Synthesis report's call for proactive and consultative engagement is an opportunity to leverage on these advancements in African climate change infrastructure to assert an Africa agenda in the post-2015 process. This sort of agenda can unite African state parties and Africa civil society to speak with one voice. Climate change in the post-2015 dialogue is a perspective that will assist in Africa reaching sincere developmental

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<sup>2</sup> D Tadesse. 2010. The impact of climate change in Africa. *Institute for Security Studies*. Available online: <http://www.issafrica.org/uploads/Paper220.pdf> (last accessed 19 February 2015)

<sup>3</sup> S Rixecke. 2011. Reconceptualising Human Rights in the Context of Climate Change: Using the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a Platform for Future Rights in *The Right to Landscape: Contesting Landscape and Human Rights*. (Eds) Egoz, S Makhzoumi, J and Pungetti, G. UK: Ashgate Publishing 23-38

<sup>4</sup> M Richards. 2001. A review of the effectiveness of Developing Country participation in the Climate Change Convention negotiations. *Overseas Development Institute*. Available online: <http://www.odi.org.uk/resources/docs/4740.pdf> (last accessed on 19 February 2015)

<sup>5</sup> S Page. 2004. *Developing countries in international negotiations: how they influence trade and climate change negotiations*. IDS Bulletin 35 (1): 71-80.

<sup>6</sup> International Institute for Sustainable Development. 2008. *Environment and Development Decision-Making in Africa (2006-2008)*. Available online: [http://www.iisd.org/pdf/2008/env\\_decision\\_africa.pdf](http://www.iisd.org/pdf/2008/env_decision_africa.pdf) (last accessed 18 February 2015)

<sup>7</sup> W Sholtz. 2010. The promotion of regional environmental security and Africa's common position on climate change. *African Human Rights Law Journal*. HRLJ 10 (12): 1-25

goals envisioned in the Africa 2063 initiatives. Moreover, climate change is a tool to connect authentic African experiences from the ground to African negotiators in international fora through the regional infrastructure available. Ultimately, climate change and development is an opportunity for the consolidation of an African narrative.

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