

# Africa's Journey in the Global Climate Negotiations



**Africa  
at COP21**

**A Synthesis Report for Policy Makers**

**By**

**ClimDev-Africa**



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## Key Milestones of the African Group (1985-present)

1985	First meeting of the African Ministerial Conference on Environment (AMCEN) in Cairo
1989	African delegates attend Noordwijk Ministerial Conference on Climate Change
1991	African Heads of State recognize the need for an African Common Position ahead of Rio Earth Summit at OAU Abuja Summit
1991	First Regional African Ministerial Preparatory Conference for the Earth Summit held in Cairo
1992	African states participate in United Nations Conference for Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio, Brazil.
1992	49 African states sign the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)
1995	African States participate in 1 <sup>st</sup> UNFCCC Conference of the Parties (COP1)
1998	African states sign the Kyoto Protocol
1998	African states complete Common Position on the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM)
2001	First African COP held in Marrakesh, Morocco
2006	Kenya hosts COP12 in Nairobi
2007	African states sign Bali Plan of Action
2009	AMCEN holds 3 <sup>rd</sup> Special Session on climate change. Ministers agree to Algiers Declaration on Climate Change
2009	Climate for Development in Africa Initiative (ClimDev-Africa) launched as a tripartite initiative under the collective leadership of the African Union Commission (AUC), the African Development Bank (AfDB) and the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA).
2009	African Union establish Conference of African Heads of State and Government on Climate Change (CAHOSCC)
2009	28 African states sign Copenhagen Accord
2010	African Climate Policy Centre (ACPC) established at the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) as part of the ClimDev-Africa programme
2012	South Africa hosts COP17 in Durban.
2012	African Pavilion launched in Durban.
2012	African states agree on Durban Platform for Enhanced Action.
2014	ClimDev-Africa Special Fund launched.
2015	AMCEN holds 15 <sup>th</sup> Regular Session in Cairo. Ministers agree on an African Strategy for Climate Change and the need to speak with one voice at COP 21, Paris, France.

# Introduction

As the region that bears the greatest share of the global climate risk burden, there is a strong incentive for Africa to seek a more decisive global response to climate change. Africa's commitment to the United Nations Framework on Climate Change (UNFCCC) process has been rooted in its shared concern for safeguarding humanity and the planet we all cherish. African states have, therefore, consistently advocated for a legally binding agreement at COP 21 and an equitable arrangement for burden sharing that is commensurate with the scale and ethical significance of the problem.

Unfortunately, the world has so far failed to make significant progress towards these objectives. Despite repeated efforts, some states have resisted adopting a legally binding agreement. All too often, a number of states have pursued a narrow understanding of national interests in the negotiations, seeking to let others shoulder the costs of mitigation or adaptation. But, there has also been a deficit of trust and a more general loss of confidence, as those most responsible for the problem have failed to take into account the concerns of those most affected by it and have not made good on commitments over the years.

Under these difficult and uncertain conditions, it is essential for Africa to constantly re-evaluate and recalibrate its own values and approach to the negotiating process as a whole, and to particular dimensions of the negotiations as well. African states must reflect upon their guiding principles, the specific goals they hope to—or can realistically—achieve, and the means to do so. This is essential if African states are to find the tools and instruments that are needed for reducing climate risks in the present and safeguarding the livelihoods of future generations.

Given this context and background, it is important to take stock of the cumulative impacts of the global climate governance regime on Africa, to document milestone decisions in the evolution of the UNFCCC, and contribute to identifying pathways for more effective representation of African interests regarding climate change. After over two decades of the UNFCCC negotiations, sound analysis of Africa's positions, strategies, successes and failures in the global climate change negotiations constitute a critical tool for ensuring that the region's needs and values are adequately reflected in a future agreement.

It is important to develop an understanding of Africa's needs, especially how to achieve sustainable climate-resilient economic growth; equitable participation in global climate governance processes and agreements that fairly distribute costs and benefits. A sound understanding of Africa's needs and priorities will help effectively match the global scope of the negotiations with regional interests and values. Furthermore, following the constantly changing climate risk profile of Africa, it is important to map out global decisions emerging from the UNFCCC negotiations that are tailored to support regional and national response efforts.

# Key Messages

- 1. Climate change is one of the gravest challenges facing Africa.** It is undermining sustainable development and represents an existential threat to a number of states and communities in the continent. No region has contributed less to the problem, more than Africa, yet millions of people whose livelihoods are predicated on natural resources continue to be acutely affected by climate change impacts.
- 2. Ever since climate change first appeared on the global agenda in the early 1980s, African states have recognized its critical importance to the continent.** They have consistently strived to play their part in the global efforts to address the problem particularly in the context of the UNFCCC.
- 3. Africa's participation in the global climate negotiation has been underpinned by two philosophies; to safeguard the planet for present and future generations and; as a bridge builder across different interests.** The first is a commitment to safeguard the planet for present and future generations and to advance Africa's interests in the context of globally shared values such as equity and, Common but Differentiated Responsibility. The second is a commitment to balance a principled stance with pragmatism in order to expedite the emergence of dynamic and effective agreements. Given this approach, Africa has the potential to act as the conscience of the world in global climate talks and to build important bridges between different interests in the global climate negotiations.
- 4. Africa has shown leadership in the global climate change negotiations by establishing CAHOSCC in 2009 to coordinate the work of AMCEN and the AGN on behalf of the African Heads of State and Government Assembly of the African Union (AU).** Climate change and climate variability are now placed firmly on the agenda of AU Summits. This ensures that Africa will, inter alia, continue to speak with one voice at all levels – Heads of State and Government; Ministers and Technical Groups. The recent decision by the AU Summit that the host country of the Presidency of AMCEN should serve as the Coordinator at the Summit level will inevitably further enhance the coordination of the African Group at global climate change COPs. It will also place Africa in a much stronger position to negotiate more effectively at such COPs.
- 5. Africa has made substantial contributions towards the process and outcomes of the UNFCCC, as a separate negotiating bloc and; as part of G77 and China.** The first COP hosted by an African country (Marrakesh, Morocco, 2001) resulted in a set of agreements and decisions that paved the way for the entry into force and implementation of the Kyoto Protocol. Strong advocacy and lobbying by Africa helped to secure the Nairobi Work Programme on the development and dissemination of information and knowledge that would inform and support adaptation policies and practices. Africa played a key role in shaping and influencing the negotiation that led to the evolution and transition from REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest

Degradation) to REDD+. The REDD+ outcome shifted the focus from deforestation to cover degradation, conservation, sustainable management of forests, and the enhancement of carbon stocks. Current mandates to strengthen pre-2020 ambition and negotiate a post-2020 agreement are occurring under the mandate of the “Durban Platform”. Other areas of contribution include defining the global goal on adaptation and advocacy for climate finance, which is additional, predictable, transparent and sustainable.

- 6. Despite some notable contributions, Africa’s impact on the UNFCCC process, as a whole, has been characterized by severe limitations.** The most important appear to be weak capacity and limited resources. Furthermore, technical negotiators’ organizational structure is somewhat fragmentary and transient; the link between the different levels of negotiation is not always very clear and their approach to some issues is less strategic and more ad-hoc. There is also scope for more systematic engagement with climate change and the UNFCCC process by African political leaders.
- 7. Given the wide and far-reaching impact of climate change on the continent, the adaptation gap remains wide and remains a critical negotiating priority for Africa.**
8. African leadership has understandably consistently stressed the urgency of prioritizing adaptation in the UNFCCC. However, despite the proliferation of initiatives in this area, there remains a wide adaptation gap in Africa, with needs far surpassing available resources. Therefore, scaling-up support for and effort towards adaptation remains a critical strategy in the fight against climate change.
- 9. Capacity building remains a major Achilles heel for Africa, which if not adequately addressed will significantly reduce Africa’s potential to effectively respond to climate change impacts.** Yet, ironically, capacity building across all levels represents an important mitigating tool. This remains a major deficit in the UNFCCC process, and has not attracted commensurate attention given its far reaching implications on both adaptation and mitigation as principal response strategies.
- 10. It is crucial that Africa devises a clear strategy for facilitating rapid clean technology diffusion from industrialized countries in the 2020 agreement.** The promise of large-scale technology transfer was one of the top attractions for Africa’s participation in the UNFCCC in the early days. However, this promise has not materialized. Africa’s performance in attracting the transfer of technology has been relatively unimpressive. Given the crucial role of technology as a facilitator of sustainable development, Africa needs to be strategic going forward.
- 11. Despite laudable efforts the returns on Africa’s engagement in the UNFCCC process, particularly in relation to finance, has been limited.** The continent has also not benefitted from the Kyoto Protocol’s Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) vis-à-vis the success of other regions. Africa’s record in attracting the transfer of clean technologies from industrialized countries and

support for building endogenous capacities have also been equally poor. Better co-ordination and enhanced organization would have yielded tangible results and served Africa better in the global climate negotiations.

- 12. While maintaining an emphasis on adaptation, African governments need to give serious considerations to the achievement of long-term development in the context of a carbon-constrained world.** A ‘development –first’ approach to climate negotiations will likely entail some adjustments in negotiating strategy such as, stronger emphasis on securing international support for the integration of climate considerations; greater focus on linking climate change and REDD+ discourse to energy security; placing strong emphasis on the issues of debilitating debt burdens and; unfair global economic structures in climate and other discussions.
- 13. Africa has shown demonstrable faith in global climate governance.** Many African states have signed and ratified the UNFCCC and its Kyoto Protocol quite early in their evolution. Despite considerable internal constraints, they made concerted efforts to comply with their obligations to the treaty such as the submission of their National Communications and the formulation of their National Adaptation Programme of Action, to cite but a few instruments. Africa’s commitment has been all the more remarkable given the frequently broken promises by some development partners.
- 14. Since 2006, the African Group of Negotiators has become more purposeful, assertive, and generally speaks with one voice at the global climate change negotiations.** The first and second African Common Positions on Climate Change prepared in Nairobi, Kenya in 2005 and 2006 respectively by the African Group of Negotiators (AGN), under the auspices of the African Ministerial Conference on Environment (AMCEN), enabled the AGN to advance Africa’s interest more effectively at COP12 held in Nairobi, in December 2006. The third African Common Position on Climate Change and the related key messages, prepared by AGN, under the auspices of the Committee of African Heads of State and Government on Climate Change (CAHOSCC) and AMCEN, transformed the African Group to negotiate coherently under very challenging circumstances at COP15 held in Copenhagen, Denmark in December 2009.
- 15. Africa needs to devise ways of enhancing the continent’s effectiveness as a negotiating bloc.** The African Group must develop a coherent structural and operational framework; strengthen regional institutions; and develop a coordinated strategy that will support more effective bargaining and improvements in the region’s negotiating capacity.

# Conclusion

Africa's journey over the last twenty years has been largely characterized by peaks and troughs of the negotiations, and painfully slow progress on key issues critical for Africa's development, not least technology transfer, climate finance and capacity building. However, the need for a legally binding and fair treaty remains the crest and crowning on which climate finance, capacity building and technology transfer must ride. The region that has contributed the least to the current environmental problem, has little choice, but position itself to harness growth and rebuild its natural capital to support social and economic transformation.

Nonetheless, African states have been very active in the global efforts to govern climate change. All African states are signatories to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and they have participated regularly in all the annual Conferences of the Parties (COP).

The ability of Africa countries to achieve their development priorities continues to be at risk of being derailed by the pace, magnitude and severity of climate change. The continent and its people are in the front line and continue to be exposed to climate change impacts, as vulnerable people look for new coping strategies and tools.

African countries need to invest in the global negotiations process to ensure better returns on investments and to strategically identify partnerships that will further leverage Africa's position on a number of seemingly intractable problems, not least climate finance, technology development and capacity building. Investments should be reflected in strategy, institutional structures that support Africa efforts within the global climate process and demand for relevant funding to build and retain capacity of negotiators as they continue to defend Africa's interests.

African states are keen to provide sound arguments at COP 21 for protecting food systems, ecosystems and keeping sustainable development in sight. The political debate has been largely marked by vested interests, power differentials and uneven distribution of climate impacts. Africa has consistently argued for adaptation as a response strategy of choice, principally due to the continent low adaptive capacity, but also linked to its negligible carbon footprint compared to the rest of the world, in particular, industrialized nations. Strategically, Africa needs to keep the adaptation argument at the heart of its response strategy. However, it is equally important that African leaders are open to mitigation opportunities that will bring technology innovations much closer to their development agenda.

Indeed, capacity building is one of the major deficiencies affecting Africa ability to compete equally and effectively within the global climate governance. Africa needs cleaner technologies that will enable the continent to transform its agricultural sector and open new avenues of hopes and productivity to millions of vulnerable populations struggling to break even with poverty. Technology is strongly correlated with many of Africa's response strategies and across several sectors. It remains a key tool within the negotiating tool box, and constitutes a strong weapon in Africa's climate 'arsenal' to steer the continent

towards sound investments in key climate sensitive sectors that will translate into sustained growth, fit for purpose infrastructure, resilient energy and agricultural sectors and lay the foundation for climate resilient pathway.

Africa has taken its rightful place within the climate negotiations. It has the potential to lead the world on climate resilient development, and to play a pioneering role in low carbon development technologies. At COP 21, in Paris, Africa will continue to argue for the need to keep warming below 2 degree C threshold, but the region is faced with the realization that its ability to move from a vicious to a virtuous circle will largely depend on the good will of other Parties to the Convention, strong partnerships and adequate sources of funding to align ambition with capability. Africa's transformation is a journey, and climate change provides news opportunities for Africa to reach its destination, and to design current architectures, provide bankable proposals, and stand tall within global negotiators to demand for a legally binding and equitable agreement that will keep present and future generations ahead of the climate change conundrum.

## About ClimDev-Africa

The Climate for Development in Africa (ClimDev-Africa) Programme is an initiative of the African Union Commission (AUC), the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the African Development Bank (AfDB). It is mandated at the highest level by African leaders (AU Summit of Heads of State and Government). The Programme was established to create a solid foundation for Africa's response to climate change. Beyond the AUC-UNECA-AfDB partnership, the Programme works closely with other African and non-African institutions and partners specialised in climate and development



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