What are the main diplomatic challenges involved in implementing the outcomes of the 2015 Paris COP 21 UN climate change conference?

Abstract

Climate financing of mitigation and adaptation measures in the Paris Agreement (2015) to limit global temperature to 2 degrees celsius is a main negotiating diplomatic challenge between developed and developing countries to achieve political consensus and investment in greener technologies, as two outcomes of the COP 21 Conference. Negotiations in the UNFCCC are polarised along developed countries mitigation policy measures whereas developing countries negotiating agenda is skewed towards adaptation measures to deal with the impacts of climate change; and also to forest conservation for its global absorptive capacity to mitigate carbon emissions from developed countries, which transcends political borders. There exist challenges though in implementing this, given that there is no enforcement mechanism and structured coordination in the UNFCCC framework for countries to comply with the financing clause of the mobilisation of US 100 billion annually to 2020 for climate financing flows to developing countries, in the Paris Agreement. Climate change diplomacy is now emerging to accommodate the economic nexus that the economy belongs to the environment and that negotiations need to be framed to protect the environment to allow human to prosper. And the responsibility of public service professionals in using the machinery of government to present analysis and evidence for climate change as a top economic policy priority.

Introduction

In research paper I argue that climate change mitigation and adaptation are two measures agreed to at the COP 21 UN Climate Change negotiations to cap carbon emissions to limit temperatures at 2 degrees celsius. The negotiations by developed countries for climate change adaptation under the financing clause with developed countries presents a diplomatic challenge to achieve political consensus under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and investment in greener technologies, as two outcomes of the Paris Agreement. I will extrapolate this argument that the diplomatic challenge of climate change negotiations is fractured along the global dimension of developed countries support for mitigation financing and developing countries negotiating for adaptation financing given they are net emitters in climate change, which transcends political borders. Secondly, the Paris Agreement has no enforceable mechanism under the UNFCCC nor COP 21 for developed countries to comply with the financing clause. Thirdly, negotiations for climate financing is not formalised under the UNFCCC institutional framework for developing countries to fast track their Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) contribution, in implementing the 2015 Paris Agreement. Fourthly, the UN system has executed its responsibility to manage the emerging threat to human security under the UNFCCC where 174 countries signed the Paris Agreement. Fifthly, the framing of climate change negotiations in the conservation and protection of natural resources and its sustainable use with the economic nexus that natural resource generates wealth. And lastly, the role of public service professionals in devising policies for the preservation of the environment and economic development, for human prosperity.

I have structured the argument along the fractured climate financing negotiations between the developed and developing counties using a case study of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) region as vulnerable Small Island Developing Sates (SIDSs); and their
negotiating challenge to implement the INDCs in climate change adaptation, as their comparative advantage as against developed countries mitigation measures in achieving a collective outcome of 2 degrees celsius, in implementing the Paris Agreement.

In the context of this research paper’s argument and for implementing the financing mechanism Art. 59 of the Paris Agreement, I will define mitigation polices, from a political point of view, “as addressing the causes of climate change” as “greenhouse gas emissions are indeed the primary cause of the acceleration of global warming in recent decades” and in contrast “adaptation practices aim to soften the consequences of climate change (Feld et al, 2015, p.9). The former is a preferred policy option of developed countries to deal with lowering carbon emissions and the latter is the policy alternative for developing countries to a deal with the consequences of climate change, in particular vulnerable SIDSs (ibid). There are already difficulties to reach the 2 degrees temperature target even with the Paris Agreement (2015).

**Negotiations between developed and developing countries are fractured along mitigation and adaptation financing, respectively.**

The UNFCCC negotiations have evolved to reflect the changes in the national and economic circumstances of countries resulting in the Paris Agreement, but this shift is not parallel to the mobilisation of “climate finance which remained too mired in an increasingly antiquated North-South, developed-developing countries dichotomy.” This fractured dimension affects countries diplomatic ability to negotiate finances for the mitigation and adaption process in implementing the Paris Agreement (Ha et al, 2016, p.1). Mitigation is a global public good which affects the global populace and the largest five developed countries account for more than 60 percent of global emissions which transcends political borders. Hence developed countries reduction in greenhouse gas emissions externality, should be shared by both developed and developing countries. But herein lies the dilemma, “developed countries are better prepared to cope with climate change and have stressed the importance of mitigation” to limit temperature to 2 degrees celsius (Feld 2015). The preferred diplomatic practise has been that “developed countries could receive credits towards their domestic targets by investing in lower cost emissions in developing countries” (Ha et al, 2016, p.2). The diplomatic challenge with this is that the cost effectiveness of mitigation measures exist but policies on adaptation are virtually new to the climate change agenda. The Paris Agreement created the Green Climate Fund (GCF), an institutional body to mobilise US 100 billion annually until 2020 for climate financing to flow to developing countries, mostly for adaptation measures. It must be pointed out though, that developing countries have historically contributed little to carbon emissions but are at the receiving end of the trans-border impact of climate change manifested in their economies by flooding, hurricanes, droughts, landslides, and inter-alia. In the context of the case study, CARICOM Small Islands Developing States (SIDSs) as a region has contributed less than 1 percent of global carbon emissions. The diplomatic negotiating challenge for the region now is to secure adaptation financing from developed countries to invest in greener technologies such as afforestation to contribute to mitigate developed countries emissions by forests carbon absorption capacity, across political borders (Field 2016).

From an economic policy analysis “greenhouses gas emissions are a negative externality. Gases expands through the atmosphere across political borders.” Hence, developed countries emissions affect developing countries with no cost imposed on developed countries (Field, 2015, p.9). The Paris Agreement has factored in this cost in the GCF for disbursement to
developing countries who are historically net emitters. With reference to CARICOM SIDSs, they have been recognised by the UNFCCC as amongst “the most vulnerable countries in the face of the effects of climate change” given their vulnerability to the immediate impact of extreme weather and rising sea levels. But while they face serious diplomatic challenges in negotiating with developed counties, SIDSs have “been enthusiastic and contentious contributors” (Hoad, 2015, p.2) to the COP 21 and predecessor climate negotiations.

The question is then, can CARICOM SIDSs implement the modalities of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) given their resource constraints? CARICOM diplomatic agenda for adaptation to climate change includes Reaffirmation of the contribution of Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD Plus) for mitigation efforts. Also with adequate incentives and institutional and financial support for implementation of REDD plus. The implementation of climate funding requires government monitoring capacity and efforts made to maintain that forest be verifiable for financing of mitigation projects under international assistance and compensation. Poor Infrastructure, market imperfections/institutional barriers is an impediment of financial transfers from the North to the South (Eyckmans 2016). CARICOM embryonic Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre (CCCCC) has managed to secure technical assistance from the UNFCCC for its climate change Strategic Plan. Financing through aid should lead to development growth and the outcome is ultimately dependent on the institutions and policies in developing countries. CARICOM institutional strength in negotiating with and securing funding from the GCF for climate adaptation will require the diplomatic commitment made at COP 21 by developed countries (CARICOM Report 2016).

The Paris Agreement has no enforcing mechanism under the UNFCCC nor COP 21 for developed countries to comply with the financing clause

The UNFCCC multilateral program facilitates both developed and developing countries under the same forum for negotiating climate change mitigation and adaptation measures in COP 21 and its predecessor – Copenhagen Accord (2009) and COP 16 (2010) but climate financing is not enforceable in this institutional framework (Hannam etal, 2015, p. 1). The resultant likelihood is that structured negotiations for climate financing which is critical to developing countries INDCs to cut back on the trend of global warming will be ad hoc. In addition to lacking an enforcement mechanism (ibid) for developed countries to comply with the financing commitment of GCF under the Paris Agreement.

The Paris Agreement (2015) Article 59 states “that the Green Climate Fund and the Global Environment Facility, the entities entrusted with the operation of the Financial Mechanism of the Convention, as well as the Least Developed Countries Fund and the Special Climate Change Fund, administered by the Global Environment Facility, shall serve the Agreement.” There is consensus in principle but there is no obligation under the UNFCCC for developed nor developing countries to engage in climate financing (Ha, et al, 2016, p.1). And, while the UNFCCC has the institutional mechanism for climate financing, negotiations and capacity building for developing countries (Hannam, etal, 2015, p. 3), the mobilisation of US 100 billion per annum was agreed to at predecessor negotiations- Copenhagen Accord (2009) and COP 16 (2010). Given this precedent and with no enforcement mechanism for climate financing in the Paris Agreement, what is the likelihood of developed countries honouring this commitment now? (Eyckmans 2016).
The implications of this is looming disaster if developing countries are not afforded aid to enhance adaptation policies in particular CARICOM SIDSs. Research hypothesis on the externalities of climate change consensus is clear. “The potential damage of climate change is most heavily concentrated in low tropical regions and low coastal states such as Latin America and the Caribbean” (Feld, et al 2015, p.2). CARICOM, recognises this as an impediment for the region whose livelihood is under threat from the consequences of climate change and has now focused its diplomatic engagement to secure adaptation financing from the GCF. From a cost-benefit analysis for project funding, CARICOM has a comparative advantage in conservation and management of forest which are large carbon sink and has articulated its diplomatic challenge to secure aid assistance and compensation from the GCF in it mitigation contribution to the absorption of greenhouse gases globally, albeit from developed countries. But its immediate need is to implement INDCs for adaptation to the vagaries of climate change even in the stark reality that its contribution to global warming is less than 1 percent (CARICOM Report, 2016).

**Climate financing negotiations is not formalised under the UNFCCC for developing countries to fast track the implementation their NDCs**

Climate finance is probably the most contentious issue in the UNFCCC negotiations its diplomatic discussions are fractured along a North-South distributional conflict, a zero-sum political game (Ha, et al, 2016, p.2). The UNFCCC, one of its core objective is to marshal resources for climate resilient economies. The mobilisation by developed countries of US 100 billion annually to finance mitigation and adaptation measures in developing countries has long been on the diplomatic agenda. This is in tandem with the new multilateral institution established by the Paris Agreement – the GCF for financing flows to developing counties. But herein lies the diplomatic negotiating challenge that “even if the money is mobilised and if the GCF and other institutions can effectively channel it, a wide gap remain between what is available and what is needed (Ha et al, 2016, p.1).

To close this gap, China opted not to participate in the GCF but to go the route of South-South Climate Fund (SSCF), outside of the UNFCCC framework. China’s policy move “represents further fragmentation in the institutions affecting the climate finance regime” (Hannam etal, 2015, p. 2). This lack of coordination between developed and developing countries financing rules can adversely affect countries mitigation and adaptation measures to lower carbon emission and investment in greener technologies. Hannam, et al (2015) asserts that for climate finance to best achieve its goals diplomatic negotiations should be carried out under the UNFCCC framework for negotiating the rules on climate finance. The SSCF should be tracked within the UNFCCC framework to coordinate with “existing institutions to progressively green all financial flows” (Ha, et al, 2016, p.2). All countries engaged in climate finance should begin reporting their activities to the UNFCCC Standing Committee on Finance (ibid p. 5).

It must be recognised though, that South-South cooperation is legitimised under the UNFCCC Framework. But the UNFCCC should multilateralize its task and leverage its role as international coordinator for climate financing (Hannam etal, 2015, p.3). South-South cooperation for climate financing should be complementary to developed countries commitment to mobilize US 100 billion in climate finance annually. The Paris Agreement (2015) Art. 65 states that “the institutions serving the agreement to enhance the coordination and delivery of resources to support country-driven strategies through simplified and efficient application and approval procedures and through continued readiness support developing
country Parties, including the least developed countries and Small Island Developing States, as appropriate.” For Latin America and the Caribbean region as a whole, the South-South Climate Finance Flow in 2013 amounted to US 3 billion (Ha, et al, 2016, p.3) but this cannot suffice the mobilisation of finances needed for adaptation measures given these countries increasing and immediate vulnerability.

The literature has underscored the ethical dimension of climate financing flows to developing counties from a procedural and distributional justice lens “on how climate finance may support an optimal outcome, arguing that international adaptation transfers could help address the perceived unfairness with historical emission” (Eyckmans, 2016, p. 3). It is well established that SIDSs have contributed little or nothing to the climate change problem and while developed countries have “included absolute or economy-wide emission reduction” in the their NDCs, SIDSS NDCs are a “direct proportion to the precariousness of their plight” to the challenges of financial constraint and lack of technical capacity. Nonetheless, the issue of fairness is enshrined in countries NDCs and the GCF has provisions for the SIDSs climate conditional financing support for adaptation (Hoad, 2015, p.2).

**Synthesis**

Are mitigation and adoption measures compliments or substitutes? Can the reduction in the cost of one (adaptation) reduce the demand for mitigation? And or a reduction in the cost one measure will increase the demand for both (Eyckmans 2016, p.3). Given the existing literature and the negotiation outcomes of the Paris Agreement, it can be assumed that adaption measures in developing countries will reduce the demand for mitigation measures, since adaption as a tool to deal with the consequences of climate change is new to the climate agenda. This is because developed countries have been dealing with the causes of climate change through mitigation policies and adaption measures have only occupied the climate change diplomatic agenda in the last decade because of the recognition of the consequences on developing countries.

There is a school of thought which posits that the financing of adaptation and mitigation measures in developing countries (SIDSs) can encourage negligence on the part of developed countries to violate their NDCs. This is because if SIDSs are complying with afforestation and mitigation which aid in the global absorption of greenhouse gases and there is no enforcement mechanism for countries such as China and the United States (US) if they violate their INDC (Eyckmans, 2016), this will present a challenge for implementing the outcomes of the Paris Agreement.

The polarized climate discussions between the North and the South has been abated by the South –South Climate Finance which emerged to fill this gap but there are diplomatic challenges on how the UNFCCC will coordinate the financing flow in the traditional climate fund from developed to developing countries. The diplomatic challenge then is how to incorporate “China as the most active developing country providing active climate finance on a bilateral basis” within the UNFCCC framework (Ha, et al, 2016, p.4).

**The UN system – managing emerging threats to human security under the UNFCCC**

The UN system responds to the demands of its Member States and it has always reflected its time by adapting to the changing international environment, since 1945. And while the “UN Charter was a product of wartime internationalism,” (MacKenzie, 2015, p.489) the UN
system is functioning in tandem with addressing contemporary threats to economic security such as climate change. This is grounded in the UNSG 2004 report under the theme *An effective United Nations for the 21 Century* which reaffirmed that “the United Nations was never meant to be a utopian exercise. It was meant to be a collective security system that worked” (Schlichtmann 2010, p.1). Weiss & Roy (2016) posits that there is a normative advance for sustainable development which “consist of a new law of international cooperation and protection of natural wealth and resources beyond the limits of national jurisdiction” (Weiss & Roy 2015, p. 1152). And in this context, they referred to the *tragedy of the global commons* because of the global environmental threats which governs the human environment. The UN system executed its responsibility to manage this emerging threat to human security under the UNFCCC where 174 countries signed the 2015 Paris Agreement, which stipulates climate change mitigation and adaptation measures to sustain the environment for economic and human security. This highlights that the universal membership of the UN gives the GA a legitimate role in building global consensus, in this case, on global security- sustaining the environment for economic development and future generations.

Critics, such as Weiss & Roy (2016) argue that the UN elaborate multilateral debates, negotiations and operations has not delivered the financing required for developing countries in particular, the right to economic and social development. While Mackenzie (2015) argues that the only constant in the UN system is its sweeping mandates and global efforts in the ever changing environment and its functionality is being judged by concrete accomplishments such as climate change deliverables. Added to this is the reluctance of some member states to pay their dues. Hence, this line of argument should not be taken too far given that the recent UN Climate Change Agreement (2015) has established the Green Climate Fund (GCF) under the UNFCCC to provide US$ 100B annually in climate financing to developing countries for climate change security. This illustrates the functionality of the UN system in managing threats to economic and development security through the UN system of resolutions, offices, funds and programmes and specialised agencies concerned with economic and social development.

**The Nexus – climate preservation and economic development**

The nexus between climate change and economic prosperity is a recognised policy concern for states in particular for developed economies. This was reflected in the negotiations of the 2015 Paris COP 21 UN climate change conference. Diplomats negotiating on climate action in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) are now cognizant that “conservation and protection ran into economic concerns and therefore became about sustainable use as a resource” (Bamsey Lecture, APCD). In effect climate change diplomacy is now emerging to accommodate the economic nexus that the economy belongs to the environment and that international negotiations need to be framed to protect the environment to allow human to prosper (Ibid) for future generations.

The framing of climate change negotiations in the conservation and protection of natural resources and its sustainable use with the economics nexus that natural resource generates wealth (Ibid) is reflected in the Paris Agreement. At the COP 21 negotiations, climate change mitigation and adaption emerged as two diplomatic measures to meet the 2 °C limit for carbon emissions. Adaptation measures for the conservation and protection of forest in developing states is virtually new to the climate agenda. This is because the institutional infrastructure for climate diplomacy – the UNFCCC with state diplomats and non-state actors (NSAs) who have considerable resources and technical competence in this area posits that
human action is responsible for the depletion of natural resources. And this is inexorability link to economic development for wealth creation. Hence, a concerted diplomatic attempt was made at COP 21 negotiations for developed economies to commit US 100 billion annually for climate adaptation measures in developing states. The rationale behind this is that developed economies climate change action are more suited to mitigation measures since they have depleted their natural resources, such as forest conservation, and for the most part less developed economies have sustained these resources. This equity framing of the climate negotiations is unprecedented with states universal obligation vis-à-vis their INDCs. This correlates with the fact that developed economies, as greater emitters of greenhouse gases, will have to commit to greater INCDs; and also to the climate financing of US 100 billion for the United Nations (UN) Green Climate Fund (GCF). This is intended to fund developing states adaptation measures for the sustainable use of forest conservation and reafforestation, since they are net emitters of greenhouse gases but are the most heavily affected.

Climate negotiations are now being framed by the nexus of environment preservation and economic development. Diplomatic negotiations are now centred on the possibility that if developing states go down the path of heavy industrialisation they would damage the environment. And that the efforts to protect the environment would be at the expense of developing states (Ibid). This is somewhat of paradox, given that developed states have advanced economically with resulting damage to the environment through high pollution greenhouse gases. Climate change is a global public good where greenhouse gases are not confined to territorial borders but travels across political boundaries. Its consequences are felt in other states and this requires a collective political action to manage the economic development-climate sustainability equilibrium, for the good of all. Hence, the economic theory of dependence framed climate negotiations “that wealth needs to be transferred form the rich to the poor in order to compensate for the need to protect the environment” (Ibid). The GCF established by the Paris Agreement is in place for diplomats from developing countries to negotiate climate financing for adaption projects for the sustainable use of their forest, which will have a global effect of mitigating the emissions of developed economies. This theorising of climate change negotiation has resulted in “common but differentiated responsibilities” for states vis-à-vis their INDCs and commitment to the GCF to realise the link between the sustainability of the environment and economic development.

Climate change negotiations framed in the dependency paradigm is fractured in the North-South blame sharing dilemma about who is responsible for the depletion of the environment and who should appease who. There has always been a recognition that developed economies need to transfer wealth to the poorer economies in the South, given that they have contributed little or nothing to climate change (Ibid). To some extent though, environment diplomacy at COP 21 managed to tilt the burden-sharing framing of negotiations to “economic change as an opportunity for innovation” (Ibid) with the GCF for green growth for economic development. In effect, the international climate change commitments from both the developed and developing states have recognized that there is economic prosperity to be harnessed from sustained used of resources. The argument is if all resources are depleted then economic development will naturally take a downward spiral. The realisation of this though, requires states to commit the Paris Agreement INDCs and the GCF for developing countries, albeit there is no binding clause holding them accountable for adherence to the agreement.

The responsibility of public service professional in climate change policy
As public service professionals in the machinery of government, our responsibility is to present analysis and evidence for climate change as a top economic policy priority. It is imperative for states sustainability of the environment and for the survival of all—present and future generations. The question is how can public service professionals support governments in their climate change mandates? We can through the machinery of government’s soft infrastructure of systems and procedures to implement the Government’s diplomatic commitment at COP 21 – their obligation at INDCs in tandem with states climate change mandates.

Max Weber in the study of public administration outlined this responsibility of a public official in Government service

“... there is a clear relationship of accountability and responsibility... To advise the political leadership on the development, review and implementation of policy, and to manage its own resources so that policy may be implemented. Each public servant is technically accountable through the hierarchical structure of the department, to the Cabinet and eventually to the people of the country.”

Policies for mitigation are aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions to stabilized their concentration in the atmosphere. Public polices in this context “entail developing initiatives to implement more efficient process of production, as well as to use more efficient processes of production and less polluting inputs and cleaner energy sources, but they also involve the increased use of carbon sinks, such as forest” (Feld, 2015, p. 10). Most governments have focused on mitigation policies since climate change was recognized as a threat. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change(IPCC) Third Assessment Report defined Adaptation as the “adjustment in ecological, social or economic systems in response to actual or expected climatic stimuli or other effects or impacts” (Smit et al. 2001, 879).

The estimates of cost-effectiveness are different for mitigation and adaption. The effectiveness of a determined mitigation policy is measured by the amount of greenhouse gas emissions reduced by its implementation. If this translates into avoided global warming is yet to be seen; but this has allowed researchers and politicians to rank mitigation policies in relation to their cost effectiveness. There is no such estimate for adaption, “mostly because policies for each sector translate into different kinds of avoided damages that must then be monetized in order to harmonized the results and allow for their cost-effectiveness” (Feld, 205, p. 10). If it is that the cost-benefit ratio matters when comparing mitigation with adaptation polices, this difference may still delay prioritization of which policies should be put into practice.

Researchers have argued that “poor countries’ lack of resilience to the effects of climate change is rooted on their dependence on agriculture and other weather sensitive activities and their lack of nationwide access to basic infrastructure (World Bank 2010). the correlation then is that climate and extreme events such as droughts, floods and hurricanes, etc., would have more disastrous effects in poor states than in developed states. An effective policy measure would be to “increase poor states resilience to climate change and enhance the well-being of their populations even in the absence of global warming” (Ibid). This is the reason these policies are called “no-regret” polices and states are “encouraged to implement them independently of any global agreement to reduce emission” (Ibid).
Conclusion

In this Research, I have argued that climate change mitigation and adaptation are two measures emanating from the Paris Agreement (2015) but the diplomatic challenge in implementing the financing clause for policy action is inherent in the fractured climate financing negotiations between developed and developing countries.

The comparative advantage of SIDSs, low cost adaptation measures in afforestation can reduce global warming and the mitigation measures by developed countries to put a cap on carbon emissions is a public good, which outcome is a collective good for all. This solidifies the argument that climate change transcends the political borders of countries and the externality from the financing of adaptation measures will realise the outcome of political consensus and investment in greener technologies for the 2-degree temperature target in implementing the Paris Agreement, since the absorption of and greenhouse gases and mitigation of carbon emission span is international.

The UN System has responded to the emerging threats to human security under the UNFCCC and the 2015 Paris Agreement. Weiss & Roy (2016) referenced that there is a normative advance for sustainable development of a new law of international cooperation and protection of wealth and resources which are not limited to a state’s border.

Scholarship is needed to explicate policy formation and analysis in climate financing, especially in adaptation policy measures since it is new to the policy agenda; and the implications of distributional justice for vulnerable SIDSs who have historically contributed little to global warming but yet face challenges in accessing the GCF. In fact, climate financing in adaption measures is probably the most immediate policy action to realise the 2 degrees celsius temperature limit given that forests have an absorptive capacity to mitigate carbon emissions. And this is the responsibility for public service professionals in the machinery of government to devise evidence based policies in preserving the environment for economic development, a future on earth.

References


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