

## Mapping the narrative positions of new political groups under the UNFCCC

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### Abstract

Since 2009, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) regime has seen the emergence of several new political groups. This article analyses how the new political groups are positioning themselves in relation to the key UNFCCC principles (the North–South divide and ‘common but differentiated responsibility and respective capabilities’, CBDR/RC). Drawing on original data, including official statements and submissions, observations at COP17, COP18, COP19 and interviews with delegates, the article analyses the BASIC group, the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF), the Cartagena Dialogue for Progressive Action (CD), the Durban Alliance (DA), the Like-Minded Developing Countries (LMDC) and the Association of Independent Latin American and Caribbean States (AILAC). Modelled after Hendrik Wagenaar’s approach to narrative policy analysis, the article draws a map of narrative positions based on the North–South and new CBDR/RC divisions. This framework reveals the embeddedness of narratives in practice as they unfold in the formation of new political groups. CVF, CD, DA and AILAC align on a narrative of ‘shared responsibility across the North–South divide’. This meta-narrative challenges the hitherto dominant notion of CBDR/RC, which BASIC and LMDC defend through a meta-narrative of ‘differentiated responsibility upholding the North–South divide’.

### Policy relevance

As we approach the UNFCCC 2015 deadline, this article presents a study of the new political landscape for negotiations, specifically of six new political groups in relation to the core principle of ‘common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities’ (CBDR/RC). Prior to COP15, groups primarily organized based on the categorization of their members as either an Annex I (developed country) or non-Annex I (developing country) Party. This created two opposing understandings of CBDR/RC, especially regarding who has the responsibility to act on climate change. This article finds that some of the new political groups are challenging this North–South divide, contributing to a more complex relationship between Annex I and non-Annex I Parties on the CBDR/RC issue. This article provides practitioners and analysts with up-to-date knowledge on the developments of new political groups, which will necessarily form the basis of any policy analysis of the UNFCCC leading up to the 2015 deadline.

**Keywords:** negotiating capacity/process; North–South; UNFCCC; governance; institutional framework; international negotiations

***Authors' note***

*This paper was in review when submitted to the conference, but has been accepted for publication before the conference takes place. We plan to continue to write on this theme and have started work on a new paper that would look at fewer groups, possibly just two: LMDC and AILAC (see below), but instead focus on more issues, such as narratives on adaptation, equity, role of UNFCCC or South-South differentiation, as well as touching more on complexity and institutional fragmentation. We also plan to further develop our theoretical approach making more use of Waagenar (2011), but also include other works. As such, we are very grateful for any comments on this paper and will use them to advance our continued research on this theme.*

**1. Introduction**

The particular division of UNFCCC negotiations in a North–South divide, also referred to as ‘the firewall’, can be seen as representing a narrative division of the world into those with a greater historical responsibility for and capability to combat global climate change (Annex I) and those with relatively less (or no) such responsibility and capability (non-Annex I) (cf. Yamin and Depledge, 2004, p. 24). Essentially, this narrative division is about who has the responsibility to act on climate change. It is manifested in the Convention’s core principle of common but differentiated responsibility and respective capabilities (CBDR/RC) (see UNFCCC Article 3).<sup>1</sup> CBDR/RC is one of the most defining principles of UNFCCC negotiations and is invoked in virtually all major decisions and instruments adopted in the UNFCCC, including the Kyoto Protocol (cf. Brunnée and Streck, 2013; Halldings et al. 2013). CBDR/RC has primarily assumed the form of a clear distinction between the commitments required of Annex I and non-Annex I Parties. However, developed and developing countries alike have increasingly been challenging this balance between commitments and the current model of differentiation. This is also reflected in the academic literature (cf. Klinsky and Dowlatabadi, 2009). This has led to a call for a reinterpretation of the CBDR/RC principle ‘in a more nuanced fashion if it is to operationalize equity and help guide the fashioning of commitments in a regime “applicable to all” under the UNFCCC’ (Winkler and Rajamani, 2014, p. 103). Several new political groups have formed in recent years, some challenging CBDR/RC, others seeking to maintain the status quo. Thus, our research question is: What are the narrative positions of the new political groups under the UNFCCC in relation to the main organizing principles of Annex I/non-Annex 1 and CBDR/RC?

**1.1. Political groups and the UNFCCC negotiations**

The failure at COP15 in 2009 to reach agreement on a comprehensive global climate change deal represents a significant setback in climate negotiations and has led parties to think of new ways to overcome the deadlock (Skovgaard and Blaxekjær, 2013). Since 2009, we have seen the emergence of several new political groups within the UNFCCC negotiations. The role of these new groups has not been comprehensively addressed in the negotiations literature. As this article demonstrates, however, they call for a revised understanding of the political landscape in the run-up to the new deadline for a

global climate deal at COP21 in 2015 (see also Herold et al., 2011, 2012, 2013; reports which reflect the increase in political groups, although they only include CD, LMDC, and AILAC). At COP18, Nicholas Stern referred to ‘the brutal arithmetic of climate change’; meaning that even if the developed countries stopped all emissions, it would not be enough to keep the global temperature increase below 2 degrees Celsius (Harvey, 2012). This message, echoed by several intergovernmental reports, emphasizes a sense of urgency by identifying the widening gap between national and international commitments and what must be done to reduce the risk of significant climate change (UNEP, 2013; IPCC, 2014). Some developed and developing countries have started working together and organized themselves in new political groups, attempting to facilitate progress through a sense of shared responsibility and urgency.

Prior to COP15, the UNFCCC organizational landscape was relatively static in its North–South divide. Annex I groups included the European Union (EU), the Umbrella Group<sup>2</sup> and the Environmental Integrity Group.<sup>3</sup> These groups had many disagreements on issues such as binding targets, and Annex I was rather fragmented. The non-Annex I groups included the African Group (AG – the only active regional group), the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA in Spanish),<sup>4</sup> the Central American Integration System (SICA in Spanish),<sup>5</sup> Central Asia, Caucasus, Albania and Moldova Group (CACAM), the Coalition for Rainforest Nations (CfRN),<sup>6</sup> the League of Arab States, sometimes Arab Group (LAS), the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), the Group of 77 and China (G77), the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)<sup>7</sup> and the Small Island Developing States (SIDS). For in-depth discussion of these groups, see Yamin and Depledge (2004, pp. 32-48).

This article identifies seven new political groups established since 2009: the BASIC group, the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF), the Cartagena Dialogue for Progressive Action (CD), the Durban Alliance (DA), the Mountainous Landlocked Developing Countries (MLDC), the Like-Minded Developing Countries (LMDC) and the Association of Independent Latin American and Caribbean Countries (AILAC). See Table 1 for an overview of the old and new political groups. We apply a ‘narrative policy analysis’ framework to analyse each new political group with which we then demonstrate how the groups adhere to either a ‘bridge-building’ narrative on CBDR/RC focused on ‘shared responsibility across the North–South divide’ or a narrative on CBDR/RC as ‘differentiated responsibility upholding the North–South divide’.

Following this introduction, Section 2 presents our theoretical approach, model of analysis, applied methods and data. Section 3 analyses six new political groups and their individual narratives, mapping the groups according to their identified narrative positions. Section 4 discusses the implications of these new political groups and their narratives in relation to CBDR/RC and the coming climate negotiations deadline in Paris 2015. Section 5 concludes.

**Table 1: List of old and new COP organisations according to categorisation**

	<b>Annex I Party organisations</b>	<b>Non-Annex I Party organisations</b>	<b>Both Annex I and Non-annex I Party organisations</b>
<b>Old groups</b>	Umbrella Group USA EU EIT	G77 and China AG LDC SIDS AOSIS ALBA OPEC CfRN	EIG
<b>New groups</b>		<b>BASIC (2009)</b> <b>CVF (2009)</b> <b>MLDC (2012)</b> <b>LMDC (2012)</b> <b>AILAC (2012)</b>	<b>CD (2010)</b> <b>DA (2011)</b>

*Note: Years in parentheses indicate year of first appearance.*

## **2. Theoretical approach**

### **2.1. Narrative policy analysis and narrative positions**

A narrative framework is applied to understand how the narrative positions of new political groups have manifested themselves in a new political landscape of UNFCCC negotiations. The article draws on Hendrik Wagenaar's (2011) narrative approach to identify the main narratives of the political groups in order to map their narrative positions in the negotiations landscape. The basic assumption here is that language, through e.g. frames or narratives, profoundly shapes our view of the world and reality instead of merely being a neutral medium mirroring it (cf. Fischer and Forester, 1993; Wagenaar, 2011). Hence, meaning is not given by a phenomenon in itself; instead, it is established through intersubjective, linguistic practices, such as narratives. Climate change does not imminently produce (or call for) certain patterns of social change. Instead, actors' interpretations of climate change problems and proposed solutions – in our case, in UNFCCC negotiations – are the outcome of political deliberations on climate change and are being shaped by linguistic dynamics (cf. Demeritt, 2001; Pettenger, 2007; Nielsen, 2014).

We define narratives as means by which actors make sense of the world, a 'mode of knowing', 'providing distinctive ways of ordering experience, of constructing reality', such as an organization's origin and identity (Wagenaar, 2011, p. 209). This way of ordering is further understood in a simple but recognized template given by Aristotle, where the narrative brings 'unity of action ... from the linear sequence that runs from a beginning, in which the protagonist of the story is faced with a challenge or puzzle, via a middle section in which the events develop, to a final section in which the initial

challenge is met or puzzle solved' (Wagenaar, 2011, p. 210). Narratives also serve a 'larger purpose of allowing humans to affirm and reaffirm identities' (Cobley, 2001, p. 222), which is why it is relevant to apply a narrative analysis to new political groups, because narratives then allow us to understand the arguments (strategic rhetoric) of these political groups and examine how these arguments are also expressed and reaffirmed in narrative form as identity through the very organization of the political group, thus also reinforcing an identity-based imperative for certain action. This leads to the development of the concept of *narrative position*, which allows us to combine argumentative and organizational practices in the same analysis of a political landscape. Following Wagenaar (2011, p. 218), we focus on 'the work that stories do in a particular political or administrative context' in order to 'bring out the story's impact on policy making'. Thus, narratives also imply the taking of certain actions (Wagenaar, 2011, p. 215) or, we might add, narratives imply a certain action space. The emergence of new narratives shapes new understandings of what the goals of the UNFCCC negotiations ought to be and ways of reaching them. By mapping the narrative positions of the new political groups, we can draw out some fundamental aspects of the new negotiation dynamics under the UNFCCC.

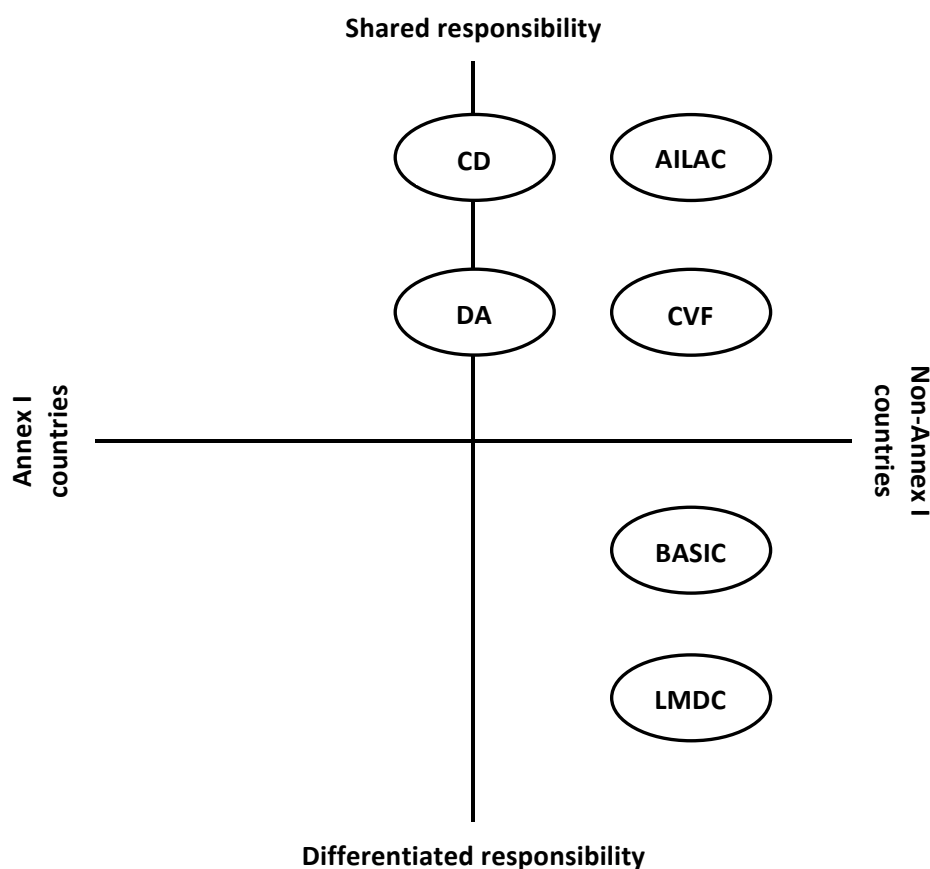
## **2.2. Model of analysis, methods and data**

This article analyses the specific narratives of new political groups in relation to the North–South divide and CBDR/RC based on the premise that these are the defining principles for much of the negotiations. The analysis presents the protagonists (each new group) of the narratives, what they see as the problem(s), and how they suggest reaching a solution. We then draw a map of the groups' narrative positions based on the two dimensions of North–South and CBDR/RC (see Figure 1).

New political groups were identified through own observations at COP17, COP18 and COP19; party submissions, statements and press releases; UNFCCC webpages about groups (2014a, 2014b) and UNFCCC COP reports since COP15 (UNFCCC, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014c). The narratives are identified through qualitative content analysis (Bryman, 2001, p. 180) and triangulation of sources. Narratives can be found in a range of different sources and since it has not been practically possible to secure the same type of sources for all groups, we have worked to secure first-hand sources from every group that also relates to CBDR/RC. Our primary first-hand sources are party or political group statements, submissions, and press releases and primary second-hand sources, include several Earth Negotiations Bulletins and other observers' descriptions. In addition, to secure enough data on the CD, 15 semi-structured interviews were conducted and analysed. If otherwise not mentioned, the analysis is based on the sources listed in Table 2 in the Appendix. The aim here is to present a broad view of the new political groups involved in the 2015 negotiations. We are not aware of other academic work providing such an overview. Consequently, the article does not go into great detail with each group, instead analysing six of seven new political groups in order to provide a more comprehensive view of the organizational context and narratives as well as making a stronger (representational) empirical contribution to

the field of UNFCCC research.

Figure 1. Narrative positions of new political groups under the UNFCCC.



### 3. Narratives and narrative positions of new political groups under the UNFCCC

#### 3.1. Political group narratives: Identities, problems and solutions

The analysis of the six new political groups under the UNFCCC from 2009 to 2013 presents the main narrative of each group, including a brief background of group formation and identity, what they see as the problem(s), and how they suggest reaching a solution. Each group is then plotted on a map according to *narrative position* in relation to the two main UNFCCC principles (see Figure 1). Groups are analysed chronologically. We then discuss new possible policy scenarios.

#### **BASIC**

*'The 2015 agreement must therefore adhere to the principles, provisions and structure of the Convention, in particular the provisions of Article 4 and 12, which reflect the common but differentiated responsibilities of developed and developing countries.'* (BASIC ADP 2-5 statement 2014).

In anticipation of difficult COP15 negotiations, **Brazil, South Africa, India and China** (BASIC) met in Beijing on 26–28 November 2009 and agreed to work together as a group in climate negotiations (Dasgupta, 2009).<sup>9</sup> During COP15, the BASIC group is

credited for brokering the Copenhagen Accord together with the USA, but only after the initial plan for a global deal had failed, something for which some blame the BASIC group (Christoff, 2010; Haldings et al., 2013). BASIC is also blamed by some developing countries for going it alone (Observations, COP17, COP18, COP19). In addition to the numerous meetings and strategizing during UNFCCC negotiations, the BASIC group holds regular meetings at the level of environment ministers. In the BASIC narrative, the group presents itself as an integral part of G77 and often concurs with their statements. The group also identifies itself as speaking on behalf of developing countries at large (partly to avoid being criticized in G77).

The *problem* that BASIC is promoting is that the global North (Annex I countries) has been the main contributor to the current GHG emissions levels and has not lived up to its responsibility and capability. According to the BASIC narrative, the increasing risk of climate change is thus caused by a lack of action from developed countries, which continue to side-step their UNFCCC commitments. The *solution* is that Annex I countries should continue to assume a heavier burden in efforts to better combat climate change issues. Developed countries must also increase their commitments in the 2015 agreement. Moreover, the key solution in this narrative includes 'equitable' access to sustainable development and technology. An important part of the narrative is the continuation of a strong 'South-South' relation in the negotiations; to maintain a unified negotiation block amongst non-Annex I Parties. Any talks about developing countries taking on more climate actions or the re-negotiation of the principles of the Convention are heavily criticized. In the context of the 2015 deadline for a new global climate deal, it is questionable whether the BASIC group is likely to play a central role (as it did at COP15), as it has become less vocal and united as a group since at least COP17, where it seemed that South Africa and Brazil were softer than India and China on CBDR/RC (Hochstetler, 2012; Hochstetler and Milkoreit, 2014). However, BASIC still meets, coordinates and issues statements, and is still part of the political landscape.

### ***Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF)***

*'As leaders of nations highly vulnerable to [climate change], we have a special responsibility to tackle this historic challenge.'* (CVF, 2013a)

Initiated by the Maldives and since joined by 19 other countries, the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF) was formed prior to and presented at COP15.<sup>10</sup> Active in the subsequent COPs in connection with the flagship reports Climate Vulnerable Monitor published in 2010 and 2012, and at COP19 in connection with the presentation of the Costa Rica Action Plan for 2013–2015 (CVF, 2013a), CVF focuses on side-events and advocacy (also outside the UNFCCC) instead of participating in UNFCCC negotiations directly.<sup>11</sup> The CVF's own narrative presents itself as a group of 20 highly vulnerable developing countries already experiencing the negative effects of climate change. In line with other developing groups, a very prominent *problem* in the CVF narrative is the slow progress in UNFCCC negotiations and the resulting ambition gap. Global

inaction is strongly associated with the CVF countries' existence, and the CVF is 'reminding developed countries of their historical responsibilities' (DARA, 2013). Unlike the hitherto dominant developing country narrative, however, the *solution* in the CVF narrative is to be based on 'moral leadership' from other countries as well, and the CVF narrative also reminds emerging economies such as China and India of their moral obligation to also take action. The CVF then underpins this call with its own commitments to a low-carbon development path (CVF, 2009, 2011; DARA, 2013; Observations, COP17, COP18). Action is clearly understood in relation to 'the brutal arithmetic of climate change' (cf. Stern, above); recognizing that especially the industrialized countries have an historical responsibility to act and assist the developing world but that all states must act nonetheless. 'Let's all aim for a truly equitable and successful outcome here at the COP' (CVF and DARA, 2012). In the CVF narrative, the interpretation of – and required action in relation to – equity and CBDR is thus dynamic and forward-looking. *Problem and solution* call 'for the most extensive and inclusive cooperation by all countries, on the basis of equity and in accordance with common but differentiated responsibilities, historical responsibility, and respective capabilities and socio-economic conditions as laid down in the UNFCCC' (CVF, 2011, p. 1). The CVF warrants action with a positive climate change narrative; the CVF (and others) should 'seize this challenge of climate change as an opportunity ... to help lead the world into a new era of prosperity' (CVF, 2011, p. 2). And 'we are improving our competitiveness and believe action on climate change can be configured to boost socio-economic development' (CVF, 2013b). This draws on narratives (of opportunities) found outside the UNFCCC negotiations in especially the green growth communities (Blaxekjaer, forthcoming). Equity and CBDR is understood and presented by CVF with emphasis on shared responsibility. The CVF narrative is clear on the need for all to act and the road ahead; that action must be taken before 2020, and that the COP21 in 2015 is of pivotal importance, thus making the new Costa Rica Action Plan for 2013–2015 a central part of these efforts (CVF, 2013b). The CVF narrative is very much about *action* based on shared responsibility

### ***Cartagena Dialogue for Progressive Action (CD)***

*The Cartagena Dialogue is a forum for developed and developing countries to have frank discussions to better understand others' positions and find areas of possible middle-ground. The Dialogue contributes to progressing the UNFCCC negotiations, especially negotiation on a new global climate change agreement by 2015. (Anonymous interview with CD participant since COP15, February 2014)*

According to the CD narrative, 'after the breakdown of COP15', delegates from EU, AOSIS, LDCs and Latin America met<sup>12</sup> 'to discuss what went wrong and how to prevent it from happening again.' This group of countries 'felt a common need to sit together and discuss these matters in a more honest manner and decided to meet again.' The founding meeting was held in March 2010 in Cartagena, Colombia; hence the name, the Cartagena Dialogue for Progressive Action, which is also meant to summarize the



group's narrative: they met in a developing country in order to engage in dialogue, implying at least two groups (viewed as North–South or as representatives from the EU, Umbrella, LDC and AOSIS), and the participants are progressive and share the view that all must take action. The participants vary from meeting to meeting, and as of writing there are 42 regular participants.<sup>13</sup> The participants are very explicit, both internally and externally, about the identity of CD: 'It is a dialogue, not a formal political negotiation group'.<sup>14</sup> The explanation is that many developing countries apparently find it difficult to be associated too closely with developed countries in negotiations due to formal group memberships and a sense of loyalty to G77 (Yamin and Depledge, 2004, p. 36). However, the CD has been credited for getting the negotiations back on track at COP16 and COP17 and contributing substantially to the Cancun Agreement and Durban Platform texts (Casey-Lefkowitz, 2010; Araya, 2011; Lynas, 2011; Herold et al., 2011; 2012; 2013), which is also part of the self-understanding of the participants (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011, p. 90). Despite not being a formal group, the CD narrative places the act of bridging the North–South divide through dialogue and trust as a central part of the CD identity.

The CD narrative identifies the *problem* to be the general division between the negotiation groups from developed and developing countries and the general lack of trust. The *solution*, 'an ambitious, comprehensive and legally-binding regime in the UNFCCC' (Lynas, 2011), is to be reached by working together 'to clear misunderstandings', 'to restore trust between countries and in the UNFCCC after the chaos of COP15', and to be a 'below-the-radar facilitator of knowledge that performs important functions in negotiations', thereby trying 'to find common ground on all issues'. Like the CVF narrative, the CD narrative also draws on the general green growth narrative of opportunities that lie in the action of leading the way to be 'committed domestically to becoming or remaining low-carbon economies'. The CD narrative is supported by its organizational practice, which does not merely argue for shared responsibility but also illustrates that it is possible in practice. And as some delegates have noted, the CD North–South bridge contributed to the formation of the LMDC(Observations, COP19).

### ***Durban Alliance (DA)***

*'What we need is to effectively stop climate change. And that can only happen if all parties to the UNFCCC process will be committed to concrete efforts'* (EU, LDC and AOSIS, 2011).

The Durban Alliance (DA), came to light during COP17 (2011) in Durban, South Africa. This alliance grew out of the trust established through the CD. Its members consist of the EU, the AOSIS and LDC political groups. In addition to CD, it also includes the COP17 host nation South Africa. The DA is argued to have had significant influence on the Durban outcome (Death, 2012) and was able to place more 'official' pressure on the BASIC group and the USA than the CD or CVF. DA played a limited role at the following COP18 (interview with Martin Lidegaard, Minister for Climate, Energy and Building,

Denmark, 12 June 2013), however, and our observation is that DA has not been vocal since. The DA narrative presents the group as an example of North and South coming together to address the urgency of climate change by strengthening the outcome of the UNFCCC negotiations and not the particular interest of either the North or South.

The *problem* in the DA narrative is the negative effects of the CBDR/RC principle and the resulting stalemate amongst Annex I and non-Annex I Parties and the resulting lack of progress at the UNFCCC negotiations. The *solution* calls for North and South to stand together and demand action from all parties. The DA objective is to work as a bridge towards brokering agreements with other developing countries, in particular emerging economies. As such, CBDR/RC remains an important principle, but the emphasis is on shared as opposed to differentiated responsibilities. Hence, this narrative focuses on the increasing urgency of climate change action and overcoming North–South differences.

### ***Like-Minded Developing Countries (LMDC)***

*‘[N]egotiations shall be ‘under the Convention’ and must be guided by and consistent with the principles and provisions of the Convention, especially the principles of equity and common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities. These principles of the Convention, and the provisions that reflect these principles, are at the foundation of the work of the ADP.’ (2013a).*

In 2012, a group of ‘like-minded developing countries’ held its first official meeting on 18–19 October, hosted by China (IISD, 2012a). This was in the aftermath of the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action in which all of the parties recognized the need to draw up the blueprint for a universal, legal agreement to deal with climate change beyond 2020. A key element in the LMDC narrative in relation to LMDC identity is that universality is not the same as uniformity and that CBDR/RC should remain, as it is also a key pillar for the Convention. The LMDC membership consists of an intrinsic part of G77, but the parties behind the group’s statements and submissions are not completely fixed.<sup>15</sup> The LMDC is a very vocal group with an increasing number of submissions and statements. Similar to BASIC, it promotes itself as unifying and strengthening the position of developing countries in the UNFCCC. It presents itself as being closely aligned with G77 but appears to use a more direct approach in its criticism of the lack of action undertaken by the developed countries. It should be noticed that Brazil and South Africa have not joined LMDC.

The *problem* and *solution* in the LMDC narrative also resemble the BASIC narrative following an interpretation of equity and CBDR/RC; the global North is the problem – both in terms of historic responsibility and lack of action – and should do more to realize a solution. This is often expressed through criticism of ‘inadequate’ or ‘extremely disappointing’ efforts to reduce GHG. Hence, the LMDC narrative emphasizes that rather than the contents of the Convention’s provisions, it is the lack of implementation by developed countries that is the problem. According to the LMDC narrative, the *solution*, ‘achieving the combined goals of environmental sustainability,

social and economic development and equity', will only be reached if certain actions are taken. These include (in no particular order) the ADP negotiations being under the Convention and following the CBDR/RC and equity principles as well as the developed countries increasing their ambitions to reduce emissions and facilitating technology transfer, capacity building and funding to developing countries

### ***Association of Independent Latin American and Caribbean Countries (AILAC)***

*'AILAC's spirit in these negotiations is to build bridges within the variety of realities, capacities and responsibilities among different groups of countries. We have the willingness to act and remain at your disposal for ideas, available to enhance our ambition and to lead with example.'* (AILAC, 2013a).

At the Bonn climate summit in 2012, the Association of Independent Latin American and Caribbean Countries (AILAC)<sup>16</sup> officially declared itself as representing a negotiation group of progressive countries within the G77 (IISD, 2012c). AILAC usually aligns with general G77 statements in UNFCCC negotiations. However, the AILAC narrative follows the CD and CVF positions when it comes to North–South bridge-building and a reinterpretation of CBDR/RC. AILAC can be seen as a 'revolt of the middle' consisting of neither the poorest nor the richest developing countries (Roberts and Edwards, 2012).

The AILAC narrative identifies a key *problem* to be the graveness and proximity of severe climate change and the impact this has on developing countries in particular. AILAC presents the principle of CBDR/RC as relevant (especially in terms of equity), but in its current form it has unfortunately led to a stalemate between developed and developing countries, which in turn has contributed to the lack of progress in negotiations (IISD, 2013a). They want action to happen faster. The *solution* to the problem is for developing countries not to hide behind CBDR/RC but instead assume responsibility both at home and abroad to demonstrate leadership on climate change and stimulate negotiations. AILAC thus proposes reinterpreting the meaning of the principles of the Convention as well as connecting the UNFCCC negotiations of the 2015 agreement with the domestic action countries (developed and developing countries alike) are already taking. 'Even though developing countries did not make a major contribution to the emissions of greenhouse gasses and global warming, they can make a substantial contribution to recovering the balance of the world' (Gabriel Quijandria, Vice Minister of the Environment, Peru, COP18 Statements at the High-level Segment, 6 December 2012). Thus, the narrative solution entails a more dynamic understanding of CBDR/RC in which CBDR/RC represents a tool for global action (according to one's capabilities) and *not* an excuse for inaction (IISD, 2013a). Hence, CBDR/RC should allow countries to become more ambitious when their circumstances evolve. The AILAC narrative promotes an understanding of the climate change challenge as a 'shared responsibility' and a future climate regime based on commitments from all parties (IISD, 2013a).

### 3.2. Political groups' narrative positions

As presented in the analysis above, certain perceptions and narratives of *problems* and *solutions* are overlapping. In the pre-COP15 period, narrative positions were generally divided along the so-called North–South divide (Gupta, 2000), where the South (i.e. G77), stood united (at least officially) in the claim that the North should lead on climate action. From the above analysis, it is possible to map the six political groups according to the two main principles of UNFCCC negotiations; how the groups identify in relation to Annex I/non-Annex I, and how the groups also argue for action with reference to this identity (of self and others) in relation to CBDR/RC. Thus, tying narratives with identity, problems and solutions, the groups' narrative positions emerge – in a new map of the potential action space of the UNFCCC negotiations, where CBDR/RC is no longer – as the only option, interpreted aligning with a fixed Annex I/non-Annex I division (as was the case with the Kyoto Protocol, cf. introduction); instead, the two organizing principles now cross each other and create new possibilities for political action.

In Figure 1 below, CD and DA are placed between Annex I/non-Annex I, illustrating their mixed membership. All other groups are placed towards the non-Annex I area. However, we find that CD, DA, AILAC and CVF are all placed towards the area of shared (North–South) action in relation to CBDR/RC, which represents a challenge to that which has thus far been the dominant political landscape or action space, particularly as CD and DA also organize accordingly. BASIC and LMDC take up a narrative position towards the area, where non-Annex I membership aligns with differentiated action. This meta-narrative states that all negotiations shall be under the existing UNFCCC principles on CBDR/RC and equity, and developed countries must take the lead and raise their ambitions, at minimum implementing that to which they have agreed. Developing countries are the victim of developed countries' historic emissions. Their responsibility is to pull their people out of poverty and must therefore receive financial and technical support for their *differentiated* responsibility.

### 4. Implications of a new political landscape

The analysis has touched upon a general theme relevant for further discussion; the question of implications following the emergence of a more complex political landscape leading up to the 2015 agreement. With seven new political groups (and some old groups, like the League of Arab States, becoming more vocal, UNFCCC, 2013, 2014a), the UNFCCC regime is clearly becoming more complex and fragmented organizationally. The growing number of political groups leads to more actors and voices in the negotiations, and political groups can also become more specialized and may be formed on specific issues such as REDD+ or loss and damage. Alternatively, political groups will only come together briefly in relation to specific points of time in the negotiations, as was the case with DA at COP17.

The trend of increasing complexity and fragmentation mirrors the overarching trend in the fragmentation of global environmental governance (Zelli and van Asselt, 2013). Conversely, our analysis also shows that the narrative positions of the new political groups are aligned to the extent where they really only represent two meta-narratives;

bridge-building or upholding the North–South divide, which illustrates a less complex map or scenario. Looking ahead to the Paris (COP21) 2015 deadline, this article shows that we find ourselves in a different situation than was the case in Copenhagen (COP15). The failure of COP15 was partly explained by a significant gap between developed and developing countries. As we have indicated, this gap is no longer as clear-cut and facilitates a more promising outcome in Paris, with the possibility for increased cooperation across the North–South divide. However, it may also complicate things further. Negotiators are now facing a mosaic of political groups with different agendas and fluid memberships. Getting all parties on board might add to the complexity of UNFCCC negotiations. Finding ways to accommodate new narratives will be a key to success in Paris.

## **5. Conclusion and broader implications**

This article has analysed an organizational and narrative shift in the UNFCCC negotiations since 2009. Seven new political groups have emerged: the BASIC group, the Climate Vulnerable Forum, the Cartagena Dialogue for Progressive Action, the Durban Alliance, the Mountainous Landlocked Developing Countries, the Like-Minded Developing Countries and the Association of Latin American and Caribbean States. All but the MLDC were analysed. In addition to the organizing principle of Annex I/non-Annex I, also referred to as the North–South divide, UNFCCC negotiation positions are now also organized according to a narrative dimension of ‘bridge-building’ or ‘upholding the North–South divide’ in relation to the CBDR/RC principle. The article identified the narratives and narrative positions of the new political groups and then plotted all of the groups on a new narrative-organizational map, where the CVF, CD, DA and AILAC narrative positions align through similar understandings of problems and solutions, the latter with a focus on ‘shared responsibility across the North–South divide’. The BASIC and LMDC narrative positions align through similar understandings of problems and solutions, the latter focusing on ‘differentiated responsibility upholding the North–South divide’. This leads to some broader implications.

The conceptual implication is that practices and narratives shape how we respond to climate change, which can be set up against mainstream analyses of climate negotiations based on (fixed) interests and power. This article demonstrates that negotiations and responses to the changing circumstances for negotiations are not given from the beginning; they evolve through shared practices, as in the new political groups. One of these shared practices is the distinct manner in which groups ‘narrativize’ their roles and positions in negotiations as well as problems and solutions. Thus, we must re-evaluate our analyses of negotiations, interests and positions in light of changing narratives based on shared practices and how narratives shape the potential action space for negotiations.

Narrative policy analysis brings forward key aspects for understanding certain aspects of the UNFCCC negotiations. It is suggested that future analyses of UNFCCC negotiations pay greater attention to this new organizational narrative landscape and the increasing fragmentation amongst developing countries, especially with respect to understanding CBDR/RC. The article has also demonstrated how a narrative approach

can be used to understand recent organizational changes in the UNFCCC negotiations and suggest further research to be carried out on the narratives of these new political groups with respect to other climate governance issues, including equity or loss-and-damage, and how they act upon them.

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## End notes

[1] The principle of common but differentiated responsibility is one of the Convention's defining principles (Article 3). The full wording is as follows: 'The Parties should protect the climate system for the benefit of present and future generations of humankind, on the basis of equity and in accordance with their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities. Accordingly, the developed country Parties should take the lead in combating climate change and the adverse effects thereof.'

[2] Usually consisting of Australia, Canada, Iceland, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, the Russian Federation, Ukraine and the United States.

[3] Mexico, South Korea and Switzerland (unfccc.org).

[4] Established in 2004, ALBA consists of Antigua and Barbuda, Bolivia, Cuba, Dominica, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Venezuela (ALBA, 2013).

[5] Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama and Dominican Republic (www.sica.int).

[6] Formed in 2005 and covering more than 50 rainforest countries working together on a voluntary basis, not just within the UNFCCC (see also www.rainforestcoalition.org).

[7] The draft rules of procedure refer to the procedural rules under the Convention and the status of 'draft', as a final agreement on the rules has never been reached (Yamin and Depledge, 2004, p. 432).

[8] Due to insufficient data, we do not analyse the Mountainous Landlocked Developing Countries (MLDC), consisting of Afghanistan, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. However, it seems as though MLDC is mainly focused on the issue of adaptation (MLDC, 2012, 2013a, 2013b). When MLDC does mention CBDR/RC, the narrative appears to follow BASIC and LMDC (cf. analysis).

[9] The precursor to BASIC might have been the BASIC-Project, an EU-supported project from 2004-07 aimed at enhancing and strengthening institutional capacity on climate change for Brazil, China, India and South Africa (www.basic-project.net).

[10] Afghanistan, **Bangladesh**, **Barbados**, **Bhutan**, Costa Rica, Ethiopia, **Ghana**, **Kenya**, **Kiribati**, Madagascar, **Maldives**, **Nepal**, Philippines, **Rwanda**, Saint Lucia, **Tanzania**, Timor-Leste, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and **Vietnam** (founding countries in bold; DARA, 2013).

[11] The only negotiation statement found was from the COP18 President's stocktaking plenary, 3 December 2012, when 'Bangladesh, for the CVF, identified finance, technology and capacity building as critical for the 2013-2020 period' (IISD, 2012b).

[12] Sources are unclear on which countries actually came together at COP15.

[13] Antigua and Barbuda, Australia, Bangladesh, Barbados, Burundi, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ethiopia, European Union, France, Gambia, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Grenada, Guatemala, Indonesia, Kenya, Lebanon, Malawi, Maldives, Marshall Islands, México, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Panama, Peru, Rwanda, Samoa, Spain, Swaziland, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Tanzania, Uganda, United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom.

[14] However, for analytical reasons we categorize the CD as a political group.

[15] The participation of countries is fluid, but the following countries usually take part: Algeria, Argentina, Bolivia, Cuba, China, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Dominica, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, India, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Malaysia, Mali, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Philippines, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syria, Venezuela (cf. LMDC ADP submission 2014).

[16] Colombia, Costa Rica, Chile, Peru, Guatemala and Panama (AILAC, 2013b). AILAC is also supported by the Dominican Republic (IISD, 2013a).