

---

# Africa's Responses to Climate Change: Policies to Manage Threat and Create Opportunity

**Dr Fatima Denton**

Director, Special Initiatives Division, UN Economic Commission for Africa

**Dr Chukwumerije Okereke**

Associate Professor, University of Reading

**Douglas Brew**

Director External Affairs, Communications and Sustainable Living for Africa, Unilever

**Chair: Bob Dewar**

Associate Fellow, Africa Programme, Chatham House

23 September 2015

The views expressed in this document are the sole responsibility of the speaker(s) and participants, and do not necessarily reflect the view of Chatham House, its staff, associates or Council. Chatham House is independent and owes no allegiance to any government or to any political body. It does not take institutional positions on policy issues. This document is issued on the understanding that if any extract is used, the author(s)/speaker(s) and Chatham House should be credited, preferably with the date of the publication or details of the event. Where this document refers to or reports statements made by speakers at an event, every effort has been made to provide a fair representation of their views and opinions. The published text of speeches and presentations may differ from delivery. © The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2016.

### Introduction

On 23 September 2015, the Africa Programme at Chatham House hosted an event to discuss Africa's policy responses to climate change. African countries will be amongst the worst affected by climate change. High levels of poverty and underdevelopment, combined with insufficient infrastructure, exacerbate the already severe impact of global warming on resources, development and human security. In order to adapt to, and mitigate, the effects of climate change, Africa's leaders need to implement more robust environmental policies, increase local human capacity and encourage renewable energy entrepreneurship. Within international forums, they must better coordinate their position as some of the smallest contributors to global warming.

In the run up to the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris (COP21), which took place in December 2015, the speakers examined how African countries can best position themselves in global negotiations and work with the international community in the transition to low carbon-emission economic growth. They discussed relevant policy adaptations that will enable African countries to address the threat of climate change, whilst creating opportunities for sustainable economic development.

This meeting was held on the record.

For more information – including recordings, transcripts, summaries, and further resources on this and other related topics – visit: [www.chathamhouse.org/research/africa](http://www.chathamhouse.org/research/africa).

#### Dr Fatima Denton

There has been a radical dilution of some of the central aspects of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) since 1992, such as an emphasis on common but differentiated responsibilities, the precautionary principle and the 'polluter pays' principle. The convention is now framed in terms of a collective aspiration and responsibility to reduce carbon emissions. By ignoring the vast variations in historical emissions by country, the inclusivity of the treaty has been compromised. Moreover, there is a clear lack of political will to act on the compelling scientific evidence for climate change. Responsibility has traditionally rested with national governments, but given the urgency of the situation, non-state actors, such as cities and local authorities, must also engage in the fight against climate change.

Africa can champion a low carbon development trajectory at COP21, but to achieve beneficial outcomes from the negotiations, African countries must prepare extensively and design a clear strategy that is based on regional collaboration. Countries from the continent should aim to achieve a number of targets. African countries should advocate for a legally binding treaty that includes some of the core principles that had been removed from the UNFCCC. The treaty must also take into consideration the wider development agenda, and design appropriate mitigation policies. Proposals put forward at Paris must be financially viable yet ambitious. Managing the environmental impact of the energy sector is also a critical priority, and there are already several African countries leading the way by moving towards a cleaner energy sector.

There are several challenges for African countries post-COP21 in their efforts to enact a radical shift towards low carbon development. The extent to which individual countries meet this target will be determined by their ability to create sufficient flows of investment, through appropriate incentives, regulations and policies. Ensuring that development is inclusive will continue to be a priority, as the shift towards low carbon development will create both winners and losers. The Green Carbon Fund (GCF) should act as a catalyst in this process, despite the issues it faces with unpredictable funding and lack of transparency. The fund can support countries that have already made significant progress in the development of renewable energy sources, such as Kenya, Cabo Verde, Rwanda and Ethiopia.

#### Dr Chukwumerije Okereke

Climate change is the most important challenge that Africa faces. Its potentially devastating biological, physical and social consequences may undermine much of the continent's recent progress. The current development trajectory is not sufficiently addressing this threat and may well exacerbate the human security risks of climate change. Global responses to climate change are primarily an issue of justice, and are defined by three asymmetries: varying historical contributions to climate change, the extent to which different regions are impacted by climate change, and the extent to which different actors participate in decision-making and policy design. In the case of African countries, they have made only a minimal contribution to the causes of climate change, yet are the most impacted by it, and they have been marginalized by global decision-making processes.

African countries can mitigate the threat of climate change through a variety of policy options. Across the continent African leaders must develop a deeper engagement with the climate change agenda and UNFCCC, and follow the example of Rwanda and Ethiopia, which have successfully developed green growth strategies due to high-level political will. In particular, parliamentarians need to create enabling institutions, policies and laws. African countries should design clear low carbon development plans that can indicate to international partners the best areas for engagement, as well as the shortcomings in

climate policies. By working in collaboration with international actors, African countries can increase capacity across a number of sectors. Efforts towards capacity-building in Africa are currently extremely limited, and this must change if African countries are to develop the sufficient infrastructure and financial readiness to cope with climate change. In this vein, three centres of excellence should be established with a focus on science, policy initiatives, and implementation and technology respectively.

A pan-African climate change institution should be established that can enhance institutional memory, compile archives and play a key role in harmonizing and amplifying Africa's position in international climate change negotiations.

Africa's international partners have a crucial role to play, and it is essential that they fulfil their current commitments under the UNFCCC. The hitherto failure to honour these has created an environment of distrust and is hampering negotiations. Debt cancellation is also essential, as current levels of debt have left African countries with insufficient resources to commit to climate change requirements. Similarly, interest rates on borrowing for African countries need to be lowered significantly, as the levels are far higher than those in developed countries. Lastly, international partners should commit to transparency and good governance in administration of donor funds.

### Douglas Brew

Climate change is an immensely important issue for Unilever. The company sells basic commodities and gains nothing from poverty or short-term strategies. Across its 180 countries of operation, two sets of trends can be observed. Supplies of key commodities, such as oil and agricultural produce, are dwindling and their prices are increasing. At the same time, consumer requirements have clearly been impacted by urbanization and decreasing water availability. Unilever has adjusted to these global changes, by halving its production of greenhouse gases since 1995, sustainably sourcing over half its goods and generating no hazardous landfills at factory sites across Africa. Given the scale of the global challenge, however, this is not a sufficient response and individual companies like Unilever cannot solve the whole problem. This is why Unilever has developed a partnership with the UN and engaged with international climate change processes.

The continent must set its own development agenda, rather than follow models designed for other regions. Existing policies are quite open, and they will need to be continually re-adjusted in order to account for the changing demographics, demands and aspirations of societies. It is important that these changes lead to smart development policies that address climate change. Global issues, including complicated historical legacies, deficiencies in international frameworks and control of aid flows cannot be addressed by individual countries. Instead, efforts should focus on developing policy discourses that recognize that development and climate policies are mutually beneficial. COP21 is only the starting point for enacting these changes and entrenching commitments, and to build on this Africa must set more politically ambitious targets for itself. The potential for leapfrogging, in both the technology sector and policy, should be clearly recognized and built upon by deploying some of the outstanding technological ideas and practices available globally.

Policy design must incorporate the views of the final beneficiaries – the citizenry. This will require high-level coordination between different sectoral ministries and backing by appropriate legislation. Fostering sustained dialogue that incorporates sensitivity to both technical knowledge and politics will enable a range of voices to be heard in the debate, allow pressure to be maintained on governments, and hold them to account for their policies. This process relies on changing attitudes so that the past rhetoric of

dependency and crisis should be replaced with a new vibrancy and optimism. Africa is capable of controlling its own future, and this current opportunity to do so should be seized.

## Summary of question and answer session

### Questions and comments

What is the role of private sector partnerships in combatting climate change and what policies can encourage innovative domestic and international partnerships?

There is a need for new financial models for social enterprise. Existing financial institutions are highly resistant to change and therefore innovation must come from new financial actors.

Financiers must focus on the private sector and smaller organizations, given the lack of capacity. It is questionable whether the funding of small institutions could be expanded.

### Douglas Brew

The current policy focus remains on traditional technology for tackling climate change, yet this technology is not very sophisticated. Innovative solutions to such bottlenecks will most likely come from smaller organizations. However, the current regulatory framework on the continent is inhibiting the entrepreneurialism necessary for economic growth and climate change. It is therefore critical that high-level contact points are maintained to ensure that the necessary changes occur. Partnerships with different sectors will ensure the development of strong policies based on a variety of perspectives.

### Dr Chukwumerije Okereke

Small-scale projects are essential, whilst bigger projects are also necessary to achieve truly radical progress in tackling climate change.

The GCF has failed by only using three institutions in Africa to channel its climate funds, but this is in part due to the lack of capacity of African countries. This is why urgent capacity-building is required. African governments are not unwilling to act on climate change, but they are encumbered by the lack of a sufficient skills-base and resources. The UNFCCC should dedicate funds to Africa to mitigate the continent's institutional constraints and increase national appetite for government engagement on climate change.

### Question

Is the resistance of African governments to engaging with the climate change agenda the real issue?

### Dr Chukwumerije Okereke

African governments are not unwilling to act on climate change; the core issue is that they lack the capacity to do so.

### Dr Fatima Denton

A smart business model must be developed for Africa in order to transform attitudes, shift policies, create incentives and allow changes to regulations. Best practice developed through past experience should be deployed to enhance this model.

After Paris, the UNFCCC's role will have to shift. As it is a secretariat, it currently lacks the power to shape certain policies or enforce their implementation. African countries must find alternative organizations to partner with alongside the UNFCCC in order to develop concrete initiatives for key priorities, such as

carbon capture, renewal and replenishing of ecosystems, and agricultural production. Decision-making within the UNFCCC currently takes too long given the urgency of the human security issues at stake in climate change.

There has been a paucity of discussion on what an increased capacity should achieve. The exact means of implementation, as well as the transition towards greater capacity will present challenges.

### **Questions and comments**

Western NGOs pressurize Mauritania to stop using fossil fuels, yet it relies on them for economic development. Moreover, Mauritania is still dependent on the exportation of its natural resources, but is simultaneously developing renewable energy sources.

Developed countries are being hypocritical in advocating for an African climate agenda given their unwillingness to adjust their own lifestyles.

Why was the Clean Development Movement (CDM) not featured in this debate?

### **Dr Fatima Denton**

Donor initiatives tend to be designed outside of Africa. Policy responses cannot be effectively adopted if they are designed without the involvement of key local stakeholders, as there will be a lack of ownership and sensitivity to the local context. The impact of the CDM in particular has been hampered by its ownership, design and capacity. Many African countries have been unable to access the CDM, as they are marginalized in global decision-making and lack the necessary capacity and bankable proposals. The CDM was over-ambitious in its twin objectives of reducing carbon emissions and supporting sustainable development. It failed to support sustainable development and to sufficiently contribute to efforts to overcome Africa's challenges.

### **Questions and comments**

Infrastructure development is very important in order to maintain Africa's high level of economic growth. Climate change and development must be addressed together, and international support is integral to Africa's movement to a low carbon future. A transition is necessary to ensure countries do not become reliant on fossil fuels for development.

The climate agenda must be incorporated effectively in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It is unreasonable to anticipate immediate implementation of untested climate regulations, as many African countries are at a very early stage of green development.

### **Dr Chukwumerije Okereke**

Development in African countries is fragile and vulnerable to climate change because of its dependency on primary commodity exportation. Capacity-building, infrastructure development and greater emphasis on disseminating research and technical expertise will be essential in ensuring effective African engagement with new climate technologies. Moreover, unless African economies can move up the value-chain the continent will remain dependent on developed nations for growth. Initiatives like CDM are problematic because they reproduce the marginalization of developing countries.

### **Dr Fatima Denton**

Africa's growth is still precarious, as it is not inclusive and remains dependent on commodities. The development of the SDGs present an opportunity to change the dominant tendency to discuss sustainable

development and climate change separately, and instead understand climate change as a symptom of unsustainability.

### **Question**

Will African leaders engage with the climate change agenda post-COP21?

### **Dr Fatima Denton**

Many African governments already possess the relevant structures to address sustainable development and climate change as national priorities, so these will probably be interconnected. However, it is also necessary to include non-climate drivers in this discussion, and address climate change as a foreign policy issue due to its impact on human security and welfare.

### **Douglas Brew**

The energy mix in Africa will have to contain fossil fuels for the foreseeable future; however, fossil fuels alone will be insufficient to meet the needs of the population in the context of predicted demographic growth. Adopting a green development agenda will raise costs and poses risks, due to demanding regulation and capacity issues, but the dangers of continuing with the current trajectory are much greater. Larger-scale projects should be prioritized in implementation as they are better suited to address the scope of the challenges.

### **Question**

Will the Africa Progress Panel's recommendations, which highlight the opportunities for African leaders to make policy decisions towards the provision of clean electricity to their citizens, enhance domestic confidence?

### **Douglas Brew**

This is likely to be the impact, as the report is honest about the challenges this would involve.

### **Questions and comments**

Why is there such a high risk perception on debt for African countries? How can financial barriers be removed to allow the necessary growth to take place? Why has there not been a greater focus on energy generation on the continent?

Ethiopia has taken a leading role in developing a green economy in Africa, but the country will face a number of challenges as it transforms into a middle-income economy, including population growth and increased urbanization. African countries need to commit to a new development trajectory, rather than blame financiers, donors and colonial histories. A discussion of climate resilient development should try to change social norms, given the current lack of political commitment.

### **Dr Chukwumerije Okereke**

Climate change response and development programmes should definitely be linked. The Renewable Energy Initiative is a positive step in this regard because it connects these two agendas. This is also why Africa's debt is an obstacle in the context of climate change, because it hampers economic growth and diverts resources and capacity from innovative responses to climate change. Similarly, donor money for Africa is mostly disbursed without due consideration for its impact on climate change agendas. This must change; organizations such as the World Bank and the IMF in particular should take steps to develop a green finance regime. Sustainable development is one of the best adaptation measures any country can take.

National legislation is essential to support robust implementation, and parliamentarians must take steps to set clear regulations in order to overcome the bureaucratic issues that are inhibiting entrepreneurship on the continent. Although failure to change the development agenda is, in large part, the responsibility of African governments – due to their level of apathy and lack of engagement – international partners must also work to facilitate these changes.