

Divide and Rule: The Unintended Impact of Paris Agreement Differentiation on LDCs from Africa in Their Climate Diplomacy and Negotiations in the UNFCCC Process

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Abstract

The Paris Agreement's differentiation architecture is a key feature of the international climate regime, enabling countries to submit climate action plans based on their unique national circumstances. The study is designed to investigate the impact of the Paris Agreement differentiation architecture on LDCs from Africa engagement in the UNFCCC process. The study adopted an exploratory research design and adopted a census approach to get a sample size of 66 negotiators from 33 LDCs in the Africa Group of Negotiators (AGN) for questionnaire administration. This paper presents part of the results of the research focused on how the Paris Agreement differentiation architecture inadvertently prevails over the unity of the developing countries and consequently drives collective ambition. The study notes the divide and rule elements of the Paris Agreement through strategic coordination challenges between AGN and LDCs from Africa; the LDCs from Africa's divergent interests from AGN and G77 and China; and the LDCs' appropriation of new friends and partnerships. Consequently, LDCs from Africa are covertly and unassumingly redefining the concept of climate justice by transcending the traditional divide between developed and developing countries that characterized the pre-Paris climate regime in calling for accountability for climate action. The study reveals that the Paris Agreement differentiation system contributes to the weakening of the unity of developing nations in their negotiations in the UNFCCC process, as revealed by how LDCs from Africa participate in the climate negotiations under the current climate regime. The study further found that LDCs from

Africa's positions and tactics differ from those of other developing countries by opting to use non-state actors and sometimes collaborating with developed countries. LDCs from Africa have tactfully been indifferent to Africa Group of Negotiators (AGN) interests such as the African Special Circumstances Agenda. While most developing countries have opposed the agenda, the position taken by LDCs from Africa is interesting because these parties come from AGN, which originated and owns this position. The Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) growing role in climate discussions, with aspirations to become a formal negotiating group, adds to the diplomatic complexity of the developing countries, which is mainly attributable to the Paris Agreement differentiation framework. The Paris Agreement has resulted in fractured solidarity among developing nations, with developing country groups split into subtle self-interested entities that only use formal coalitions when it suits them. However, the unintended impact of the fissure is that LDCs from Africa and the rest of the LDCs are constantly pushing both developed and emerging economies for enhanced ambition, which is the primary purpose of the Paris Agreement. The deepened association with developed countries and non-state actors, especially civil society organizations, is helping LDCs from Africa to push for ambition through lobbying advocacy and enhancing their capacity in negotiations through the inclusion of non-state actors. Further, this development has enabled LDCs from Africa and others to reshape and redefine the concept of climate justice by advocating for a combined consideration of both historical responsibility and the current actions which ultimately brings emerging developing countries into the fold of accountability. The study draws recommendations for LDCs from Africa to ensure unity of developing countries to keep negotiating as one for climate ambition while maintaining flexibility for individual parties to pursue their interests in alignment with the new climate regime.

Keywords

Paris Agreement, LDCs, G77 and China, Ambition, Negotiation, Diplomacy, AGN, Differentiation, Unity, Solidarity, Kyoto Protocol, Africa

1. Introduction

The Paris Agreement has sparked global climate action through Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), by requiring that each party to the agreement submits climate plans every five years (Kinley et al., 2021; Sweeney, 2021; Thakur, 2021). This approach to differentiation, contradicts that of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and its first operating legal instrument; the Kyoto protocol, by blurring the divide between developed and developing countries by establishing shared goals to which all parties contribute through decentralized climate action also known as Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) (Streck et al., 2016; Voigt & Ferreira, 2016a). The Paris

Agreement has mitigated conflicts between developed and developing nations by integrating national climate plans into the international policy framework through a “ratcheting up” and self-determining mechanism (Falkner, 2016; Pan et al., 2017; Van Coppenolle, 2024). The Paris Agreement shifts climate action from global ambition driving national efforts under the Kyoto Protocol to national plans contributing to global goals. The shift in differentiation is significantly impacting how parties are negotiating in the post-Kyoto regime (Dingwerth, 2024; Pickering et al., 2017; Rajamani, 2016). The Paris Agreement differentiation framework has weakened the diplomatic solidarity of developing countries, leading to noticeable fractures in coordination, policy stances, and alliances that LDCs from Africa are undertaking in climate diplomacy in the UNFCCC process. The LDCs, especially from Africa, are increasingly diverging from other developing nations, a trend, though diplomatically complex, is prompting stronger climate action and reshaping the concept of climate justice in the contemporary climate regime. This paper draws from a study that examined the impact of the Paris Agreement’s differentiation on LDCs participation in climate negotiations. However, this paper presents the findings on how the Paris Agreement is inadvertently contributing to the fragmentation of the long-standing unity of developing countries in the UNFCCC process. Specifically, the paper examines how Paris Agreement differentiation architecture is affecting LDCs from Africa in three key areas: negotiation coordination, negotiating positions, and the emergence of informal splinter groups from Group of 77 and China (G77 and China) and African Group of Negotiators (AGN). While the fragmentation of unity of developing countries may be concerning the paper finds that development is a necessary phenomenon powering advocacy for both developed and emerging economies to assume responsibility commensurate with their evolving capabilities while enabling LDCs from Africa to foster progressive partnerships and cooperation and broad-based calls for climate justice. LDCs from Africa have practically demonstrated how the Paris Agreement is ‘catalytic’ and ‘facilitative’ by fostering cooperation with governments and non-state actors while advancing climate action through NDCs (Bocquillon & Maltby, 2024; Hale, 2016; Marquardt et al., 2022).

The paper outlines a methodology used, before presenting results and discussions on disintegration of developing countries negotiation coordination; LDCs from Africa’s divergences from G77 and AGN positions; and Africa’s LDCs new diplomatic friends and eventual impact on the unity and solidarity of developing countries. The paper concludes with recommendations to developing countries and LDCs from Africa in particular on how to make good for themselves of the prevailing dynamics while strengthening the unity of the developing countries in the UNFCCC process for enhanced climate ambition.

2. Methodology

The study is qualitative exploratory research designed to examine the impact of Paris Agreement differentiation on the LDCs from Africa on their negotiations in

the UNFCCC process. The study focussed on tracking the LDCs from Africa conduct in the UNFCCC process through the analysis of their positions, negotiations and systematic observation. The study analysed pre- and post-Paris Agreement positions of the 33 LDCs from Africa to the UNFCCC. The pre-Paris era analysis focused on 2012-2015 while the post-Paris era analysis focused on the period between 2016 and 2020. The study engaged in systematic observation of how LDCs from Africa are engaging in the UNFCCC process. The systematic observation of LDCs from Africa happened at each COP and Subsidiary Body (SB) intersessional meetings from COP26 in Glasgow to COP28 in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE) in 2023. The sample was derived using a Yamane formula to ensure that it reduces the biases and ensures equal representation giving a sample size of 66 climate change negotiators for LDCs (Bhaskar & Manjuladevi, 2016; Jilcha Sileyew, 2020). The following Yamane formula was used:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e^2)}$$

For a 5% margin of error, the target acceptable response rate of 57 responses was expected. The response rate for the questionnaire was 60, representing 90% of respondents which is acceptable when the sample is a census (Baruch & Holtom, 2008; Swarooprani, 2022; Hansen et al., 1955; Rindfuss et al., 2015). The questionnaire targeted the leaders of delegation for LDC countries from Africa.

Other primary data was collected through key informant interviews that targeted international climate policy experts, representatives of think tanks, climate activists, and renowned negotiators from both developed and developing countries. The key informant interviews were carried out at COP26 in Glasgow, Scotland, intersessional meetings in 2022 in Bonn, COP27 and COP28 in Sharm El Sheikh and Dubai respectively. Secondary data was collected through desktop reviews and systemic literature reviews using PRISMA having an eligibility criterion. Data analysis was done using SPSS and the qualitative data was analysed using Nvivo14.0.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. AGN and LDCs Coordination Arrangement Fissures at COPs

Least Developed Countries (LDCs) are the poorest and most vulnerable countries to the adverse impacts of climate change, and Africa is home to 70% of these countries in the world (Wale-Oshinowo et al., 2020). Apart from being the most vulnerable countries alongside SIDS, LDCs face several challenges in the climate negotiation process, which include limited representation and inadequate skill sets compared to developed countries, which also have large delegations expertly supported by skilled research teams (Andrei et al., 2016; Fatou, 2023). LDCs from Africa are the poorest and very vulnerable to the impacts of climate change comparable with other developing countries (Barrios et al., 2006; IPCC, 2014; UNCTAD, 2023). In a self-differentiating Paris Agreement regime, the study found that

interests, negotiating positions, and tactics of the 33 LDCs from Africa are different from those of the richer and diplomatically influential members of the AGN (Andrei et al., 2016; Kaya & Schofield, 2020; Wale-Oshinowo et al., 2020). The same applies in G77 and China Group, where the interests, positions, and negotiation tactics are divergent based on the differentiated responsibilities and accountabilities, creating potential coordination challenges and threatening developing countries' solidarity and unity. The unity of the developing countries is not championed here for its own sake but as a pathway to ensure ambition as outlined in the Paris Agreement, as LDCs have often complained that emerging economies use the solidarity mantra to force them to accept positions that are neither ambitious nor serving the interests of the most vulnerable countries. Common positions are inherently challenging in G77 and China, because the group comprises many smaller groups and countries, is essentially a cooking pot of interests from its members coordinated by experts from different countries. Others have opined that G77, and China should concern itself with advocating for principles to protect developing countries' interests and refrain from technical negotiations as parties have varied positions. In this study, LDCs from Africa point out that under the Paris Agreement, on average, 70% of their original positions are not accommodated as part of the AGN and consequently as G77 and China's position, prompting them to either change their position in favor of influential members of the G77 and AGN during the contact groups and informal-informal meetings or seek alternative ways to champion their interests. Most such positions pertain to economy wide-wide and broad-based mitigation and means of implementation ambition from both developed and emerging economies which this study found that emerging economies directly and indirectly oppose by guising that developed countries are not taking leadership. During the key informant interviews, LDCs from Africa also highlighted coordination difficulties, citing awkward time slots for official strategy meetings, which fettered their ability to engage effectively with other coalitions. Coordination meetings are crucial for negotiating groups and alliances to strategize on their interests and positions daily for the groups. For instance, the AGN, which includes 33 LDCs, meets from 08:00 to 09:00, followed by G77 and China (G77) coordination from 09:00 to 10:00, just before formal negotiations begin at 10:00 am. This schedule leaves LDCs with no time to strategize independently before the negotiations. LDCs hold their coordination meetings from 13:00 to 14:00, during lunch recess for most groups, and only to join the second G77 and China coordination at 14:00. The LDCs would meet again from 19:00 to 20:00, often while negotiations were still ongoing. The study found that LDCs from Africa are bothered by these awkward and unfriendly scheduling as it does not provide them with time to proactively strategize on the agendas rather than react to resolutions of AGN and G77 resolutions agreed before the LDCs substantive coordination meeting of their own. The situation gets worse when LDCs from Africa are influenced or forced to abandon their original position during contact group negotiations by the influential members of G77 and China. If

LDCs from Africa don't bend to pressure to change their positions, these parties seek the support of developed countries, informal alliances, and civil society movements to continue to champion such positions during negotiations and through public campaigns respectively. At COP27 in Sharm El-Sheikh, LDCs led by the Government of Senegal sought to address the coordination challenge and requested for its own morning strategic update session to help understand the LDC's priorities of the day. The strategic morning update meetings were held simultaneously with AGN 08:00-09:00am Coordination Meeting as shown in **Figure 1**. Though this meeting was held as an informal arrangement by the LDC chair, it gives credence to the fact that LDCs lack proper time to strategize for their negotiations. The informal arrangement for the LDC chair to meet coordinators strategic updates continued at SB60 and COP29 in Baku, Azerbaijan.

08.00 - 09.00	African Group	Plenary Ramses
08.00 - 09.00	Independent Association of Latin America and the Caribbean	Meeting Room 11
08.00 - 09.00	Least Developed Countries	Meeting Room 2
08.00 - 09.00	Small Island Developing States	Meeting Room 16
09.00 - 10.00	Environmental Integrity Group	Meeting Room 8
09.00 - 10.00	Group of 77 and China	Plenary Ramses
13.00 - 14.00	Arab Group	Meeting Room 13
13.00 - 14.00	Least Developed Countries	Meeting Room 6
14.00 - 15.00	Group of 77 and China	Plenary Ramses
18.00 - 19.00	African Group	Plenary Ramses
18.00 - 19.00	Like-Minded Developing Countries	Meeting Room 8
18.00 - 19.00	Small Island Developing States	Meeting Room 16

Figure 1. The Meeting schedule from COP27 where the African Group and the Least Developed Countries would hold parallel meetings at the same time (08:00-09:00) Source: UNFCCC COP 27 Daily Calendar.

The request for LDCs to have separate strategic update meetings in the morning at the same time AGN is meeting arose from the realization that they do not have sufficient time to strategize on their own before coordinating with other groups to which they belong. When LDCs hold such strategic update meetings simultaneously with the AGN is meeting, it poses technical and diplomatic challenges for both groups. These technical challenges include alignment of major issues on the agenda and the negotiation tactics to be used by the developing countries as a collective. Firstly, 33 of the 45 LDCs are in Africa, and an AGN meeting without

strategic coordinators from LDCs could underrepresent the interests of LDCs in the AGN though party delegations have divided themselves between two meetings or shortened the LDC strategic update meeting to also attend the AGN coordination meeting. Whichever way one looks at this is problematic. This arrangement poses challenges in the coordination of agenda items, considering that these meetings are happening at the same time. Firstly, lack of real time alignment between what is discussed in two meetings increases the chances of divergence in positions and negotiations tactics. Secondly, the optics could be misinterpreted by developed parties as a sign of diplomatic disunity among the developing country groups, especially when accompanied by divergent positions and coordination fissures between developing country groups. However, the undeniable conclusion from the study is that LDCs from Africa are increasingly becoming self-aware of their national circumstances and unique interests and positions and feel alienated from other developing countries in AGN and G77 and China. This sense of uniqueness is not just typical to African LDCs such as CELAC has recently strongly intimated intentions to morph into a separate negotiating group from G77 and China when at COP27, when the group launched a joint negotiation position and strategy separate from the Association of Independent Latin America and Caribbean (AILAC), the Bolivarian Alliance of the Peoples of our America (ALBA) and Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay (ABU). CELAC is a group of Latin American and Caribbean countries that share the common Spanish language, and their socio-economic status is lower than that of the big economies in the region, such as Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay. The study finds that under the Paris Agreement, LDCs from Africa and other developing countries align based on the closeness of their differentiated interests and not on the account of whether they are developed or developing as would be the case under the Convention and the Kyoto Protocol. From the key informant interviews, LDCs from Africa are increasingly becoming aware of their unique vulnerabilities and challenges as contrasted with other developing countries, and this has been motivated by the preferential treatment and flexibilities extended only to LDCs and SIDS under the Paris Agreement from the Convention and Kyoto Protocol (Kaya & Schofield, 2020; Rajamani, 2012; Streck et al., 2016; Voigt & Ferreira, 2016b). LDCs from Africa decry that when their interests are combined with those of emerging developing countries, they are less likely to exploit the flexibility provisions and exceptions under the Paris Agreement that apply to them alone.

Preferential treatment of LDCs and SIDS under the Paris Agreement has also come with the continued recognition of LDCs from Africa as one of the most vulnerable groups to the impacts of climate change, giving them a sense of agency for more assertive advocacy and lobbying for their interests in the UNFCCC process. The Convention and Kyoto Protocol combined all developing countries as one group, consequently blinding the visibility of the unique national circumstances of individual countries which weakened their ability to negotiate for individual interests. LDCs have negotiated for provisions that would help them advance their

interests such as the Least Developed Countries Expert Group (LEG). LDCs managed to secure the Least Developed Countries Expert Group (LEG), established to provide technical guidance and support to LDCs on adaptation and LDCs work program and recognition of adaptation through the Cancun Adaptation framework and the loss and damage (Ray et al., 2023; Zahar, 2016). The Paris Agreement has somewhat reversed group mentality to climate negotiations raising the need for developing country parties' leadership to explore common interests that would unite developing parties in a self-differentiating climate regime. The study has revealed that under the Kyoto Protocol, LDCs from Africa lacked the courage to demand greater climate ambition from emerging developing countries, they can now hold both developed and emerging economies to account because the Paris Agreement exposes their respective differences. For instance, LDCs were the most affected by the COVID-19 vaccination requirement to COP 26, Glasgow, Scotland, than any other through in the UNFCCC process (Farand & Lo, 2021; Inception Commission, 2022; Nazareth et al., 2024; Scotland, 2021). Almost 68% of questionnaire respondents pointed out that the differentiation in Paris Agreement has given them confidence to demand ambitious climate action even from emerging developing countries, something they couldn't do under the Kyoto Protocol as they were bound by group solidarity mentality as developing countries. The group classification in the Kyoto Protocol and Convention hindered LDCs from Africa to push emerging economies for greater climate ambition, as they were all identified as developing countries.

The Paris Agreement differentiation clearly demonstrates the differences among countries beyond the general classification as developed and developing countries, and the study found that parties are reacting to the changes by prioritizing individual interests in negotiations over blind belonging (Allan et al., 2023; Fialho & Van Bergeijk, 2017; Gupta, 2005; Zhang et al., 2017). To illustrate how interests have become central in the international climate process under the Paris Agreement, one diplomat said, "There is no G77; there are just groups of countries bashing at each other for individual interests". The study found that group interest has waned and is somewhat less powerful in the Paris Agreement regime than under the Kyoto Protocol, forcing LDCs from Africa to prioritize informal alliances and developing countries to support the negotiation of their interests and positions. Though these coordination challenges predate the formation of LDCs in 2000, it is under the Paris Agreement that LDCs started to explore solutions by exploiting the differentiation provisions that subtly separate them from the rest of developing countries. Through this study, LDCs from Africa have highlighted the urgent need for them to self-differentiate in negotiation arising from two main factors. Firstly, African LDCs point to their ever-improving capacity and skills to negotiate for their interests without needing G77 China or AGN, especially when these bigger groups are unwilling to support them. Secondly, African LDCs are convinced that their pursuits for climate justice are urgent and cannot enjoy the comforts of red-tape climate diplomacy, prompting collaborations and partnerships

beyond their traditional groups in pursuit of domestic and collective climate ambition. This need for self-differentiation is not just a strategic move, but a crucial step towards addressing their need for urgent climate action and support through the multilateral process.

Given the foregoing, LDCs from Africa will continue to coordinate with AGN, despite the finding that their interests and positions are better represented by themselves, because there are circumstances when number supporting a certain interest matter in climate negotiations. But with 61% of the AGN feeling frustrated and not satisfied points out to continued rocky coordination between African LDCs and the leadership of developing countries especially the G77 and China and AGN. *Ceteris paribus*, the alternative strategic update meeting that LDCs leadership are carrying out at COPs and SBs are critical in developing positions and devising negotiation strategy and helps to push their interests if G77 China and AGN block the same. African LDCs point out that under the Paris Agreement they have strategically diversified diplomatic allies, controlled their narrative, and strengthened their own influence in UNFCCC negotiations. The three elements are elucidated in the last section of this paper, which deals with the LDCs from Africa and their new friendships and collaboration in the UNFCCC under the Paris Agreement. LDCs from Africa perceive the independence to coordinate as LDCs on all matters of their interest in the UNFCCC process without let or hindrance from emerging developing countries in the G77 and China and AGN is empowering, and sovereign. The opportunity through the Paris Agreement differentiation to hold each other accountable, even within the developing country groups, is viewed by African LDCs as a new form of climate justice in the prevailing climate regime. LDCs from Africa are using lobbying and advocacy targeting developed country parties, non-state actors, including CSOs, and informal alliances as platforms to recruit support for their unique positions where the coordination arrangements in the formal coordination groups are not working in their favor or sabotaging their interests.

3.2. LDCs from Africa Divergent Interest and Positions from G77 and China and AGN

Apart from coordination challenges, which the Paris Agreement differentiation has accentuated, LDCs from Africa are increasingly diverging from the negotiating positions of AGN and G77 and China. In the UNFCCC process, parties decide to organize their coordination meetings as individual member states or as formal alliances to strategize based on shared interests, which becomes complicated when parties have divergent positions. The study finds that under the Paris Agreement, LDCs from Africa feel less represented by AGN and G77 and China leadership to ably carry their interests and positions. When an agenda item is coordinated by emerging developing country, LDCs from Africa feel that their positions are usually not prioritized in the negotiation process.

Parties negotiating positions embody the country's interests in the UNFCCC,

and during the Kyoto Protocol regime, developing countries have had similar positions on responsibility and accountability for climate change commonly as the CBDR-RC principle (Najam et al., 2003; Oberthür & Groen, 2017; Oberthür & Ott, 1999; Rajamani, 2012). The study found that while emerging developing countries adhere to a traditional interpretation of the CBDR-RC principle, LDCs from Africa favor its extension, as framed in the Paris Agreement's phrase "in light of differing national circumstances," urging all, especially wealthier developing nations, to engage in economy-wide climate action and support vulnerable countries.

The G77 and China, the largest bloc, unites over 130 countries, focusing on adaptation and means of implementation. However, the specifics between countries are different, and LDCs exploit the variation situation to run sole negotiations marathons where necessary, especially where their individual interests and positions are at stake (Kasa et al., 2008). The adoption of the Paris Agreement has triggered changes in how parties formulate their negotiating positions and advocate for their adoption in the process. In this study, we further found that African LDCs care less about the alignment with AGN, let alone G77 and China, as they are more vested in pursuing individual interests first and will only align with the group position to the extent it does not threaten individual country interests. As stated above by one negotiator, the essence of a developing country group is waning, and parties are concerned more with individual interests. Particularly for African LDCs, the study found that though 80% of developing countries prioritize adaptation and means of implementation during negotiations, the specifics between different countries are divergent. LDCs from Africa prioritize adaptation and means of implementation with a critical focus on securing multilateral commitments, recognizing their extreme vulnerability and low adaptive capacity, and making resilience "a matter of life and death." Meanwhile, emerging developing countries, with increasing emissions, frame adaptation through the lens of response measures, an agenda item dominated countries whose economies are largely dependent on oil production (Chan, 2021; Höhne et al., 2017; Roberts & Weikmans, 2017). One negotiator invoked an old adage to underscore the urgency of adaptation for African LDCs: "In a race between a lion and a deer, the deer often wins because the lion runs for food, while the deer runs for its life." This divergence in positions lurks most in G77 and China's multilateral engagements. For example, in World Trade Organization negotiations, emerging economies are more focused on infrastructure financing, while LDCs negotiate for more concessional financing and aid to build essential capacities (Pouponneau, 2022; Saidi & Wolf, 2011).

The vulnerability of Least Developed Countries (LDCs) to the adverse impacts of climate change, coupled with their limited capacity to adapt, drives them to prioritize resilience through disaster risk management and social protection. This strategy stands in contrast to that of emerging countries, which not only prioritize response measures but also express high willingness to explore market mechanisms as potential solutions to climate change (Betzold, 2015; Khan & Akhtar, 2015;

Tahiru et al., 2019). Consequently, this study found that with limited delegations LDCs use their negotiators on adaptation-related agenda items and it is for the same reasons that LDCs from Africa have not prioritized some agendas like response measures and Article 6 of the Paris Agreement which has been dominated by emerging economies and developed countries (Eweje, 2006; Pulver & Benney, 2013; Van De Graaf, 2017). In terms of means of implementation, emerging developing countries focus on resources for mitigation and highly industrial-based renewable energies. In contrast, African LDCs focus on resources for adaptation, disaster risk management and humanitarian response. Such diversified focus has potential to bring conflict, especially where negotiations require splitting the difference, and diplomatically less influential countries, such as LDCs from Africa, get the short end of the stick.

Despite the different positions and interests triggered by the Paris Agreement differentiation, this study also found that LDCs from Africa suffer a protracted process before their position can be accepted as part of the G77 and China. For example, Malawi must take her negotiating position through the lens of LDCs and AGN before assuring herself that this position is acceptable as part of the G77 and China. While it is not mandatory for party positions to be accepted as G77 and China for Malawi to pursue it, but a position recognized by over 130 members has high likelihood for its adoption in a system where agreements are adopted by consensus. In the event that Malawi position is challenged, she has an opportunity to pursue this position alone. In the event the position of an LDC from Africa is not accepted into AGN or G77 and China, 60% default to using alliances and developed countries or 75% a combination of advocacy and public campaigns through non-governmental organizations and social movements. LDC from Africa position divergence from AGN or G77 and China are regular occurrences when their interests are threatened but they are ordinarily keen to leverage the support of the 133 members of G77 and China.

In terms of emission reduction ambition, LDCs are amongst the most ambitious countries but the framing of quantum is starkly different from developing countries (Mills-Novoa & Liverman, 2019; Pauw & Klein, 2020). Through the informant interviews, questionnaire responses, and analysis of the position papers from African LDCs, their positions on mitigation ambition differs from emerging developing countries on scope, leadership, and ethos for action. In terms of the scope, LDCs from Africa are ambitious in submitting economy-wide and long-term mitigation plans, though the implementation of such commitment is contingent on international cooperation (Havukainen, 2022; Stephenson et al., 2019). On the other hand, emerging economies' mitigation plans shy away from economy-wide and long-term mitigation commitments (Jiang et al., 2022; Never & Betz, 2014). On leadership, emerging developing countries insist on developed countries taking the lead; whereas LDCs from Africa call for broad-based ambition from all countries, including the developing countries whose emissions are rising. On ethos and purpose, LDCs from Africa believe emission reduction is

critical for survival because of their extreme vulnerability while, emerging countries call for emission reduction from developed countries to equalize or reduce the economic benefits that industrialized countries accrue from fossil fuels. Overall, the study found that LDCs from Africa's position align largely with developed countries, which also call on emerging economies to adopt economy-wide emission reduction efforts and contribute to mobilizing climate finance in line with the Paris Agreement. However, emerging economies are holed on the Kyoto Protocol's differentiation system, which serves as an excuse for limited ambition (Bardhan, 2022; Kuyper et al., 2018; Luomi, 2011; McGee & Steffek, 2016; Northey, 2013). When emerging economies abdicate on this expectation, the developing countries most vulnerable to impacts of climate change have dared to call them out, which has been construed by influential members of the group as 'threatening the unity of the developing countries' because it is developed countries that must take the lead (Amitabh, 2022). During the 2022 climate conference in Egypt, the Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda publicly and unexpectedly asked China and India to make their fair share of contributions to climate finance. The leadership of G77 and China allegedly summoned Antigua and Barbuda to apologize for the embarrassment caused to the group. However, it is uncertain whether such remedial actions will foster continued unity in the coalition.

3.3. Divergence from Group Mentality to Interest-Based Negotiation: Africa's LDCs Position on the AGN's Africa Special Circumstances Agenda

Apart from the diverging from the group positions with AGN G77 and China, the study also observed that LDCs from Africa are increasingly moving away from group mentality-based negotiations, which characterized the Kyoto Protocol regime, to interest-focused negotiations. The divergence in positions between African LDCs and the AGN on Africa's Special Circumstances Agenda typifies interest-based negotiations characteristic of the Paris Agreement away from the group-mentality approach developed countries used in the pre-Paris climate regime (Bernardo et al., 2020; Chin-Yee, 2016). It remains to be seen whether the recent decision of the Africa Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN) that LDCs from Africa support Africa's unique circumstances will bear fruit in the UNFCCC negotiations. This study found that LDCs from Africa are indifferent to the agenda, dreading the fact that a successful outcome will shift focus away from them, benefiting the rest of Africa and powerful parties while leaving LDCs marginalized and worse off.

The lack of enthusiasm to support the agenda is not due to indifference but deep-seated fear. African LDCs dread the potential reduction in resource allocation to their own countries meant for LDCs and SIDS if they share their vulnerability status with middle-income countries in the continent. This fear is a significant factor influencing their negotiation strategies (Chan, 2021; Ciplet et al., 2015;

Roberts & Weikmans, 2017). Recognizing exceptional circumstances can be a problematic agenda to pursue successfully, especially within developing countries. SIDS managed to obtain the status due to concerted efforts of all members in the G77 and China Group making it extremely difficult to prospect a breakthrough for AGN on this agenda, more so when LDCs from Africa are not fully boarded (Ourbak & Magnan, 2018). On negotiating positions, the study concludes that LDCs from Africa's pursuit of individual interests erodes the collective bargaining power of developing country groups. LDCs from Africa express concern that aligning too closely with broader AGN or G77 interests could divert much-needed resources away from their specific vulnerabilities. For the same interests, African LDCs do not want the agenda of Africa Special Circumstances to succeed.

3.4. African LDCs and New Friends and Partnerships under the Paris Agreement

The principle CBDR-RC shaped coalition-building in climate negotiations, initially dividing parties into developed and developing countries and later fostering the formation of smaller, more specialized groups (Rajamani, 2012; Savaresi, 2016). However, the breakdown of the firewall has triggered a quest among LDCs from Africa and LDCs in general to seek collaborations and partnerships transcending the north-south divide that characterized the Convention and the Kyoto Protocol (Bodansky, 2016; Savaresi, 2016). This study found that under the Paris Agreement regime, African LDCs are mingling and mixing with diverse groups and developed country parties more than they did under the Kyoto Protocol. Through a questionnaire response, 64% of the respondents indicated that they collaborate freely with developed country parties, especially when the AGN, G77, and China Group sabotage their interests. More critically, 75% of LDCs from Africa responded that developed countries and civil society movements are more empathetic to their demands than they are to interests of emerging developing countries. This collaboration with developed country parties, non-state actors, and businesses is viewed with suspicion by emerging developing country parties, who perceive these alliances as undermining the solidarity and interests of developing country groups.

3.4.1. LDCs from Africa Engagement with Developed Country Parties

African LDCs are now engaging more actively with developed nations in the UNFCCC process under the Paris Climate Agreement than they did during the Kyoto Protocol era, marking a significant shift in global climate diplomacy. The study reveals three main motivating factors behind this strategic approach. First, the UNFCCC process under the Paris Agreement has become a key platform for LDCs from Africa to lobby and build alliances with influential actors, especially developed countries, to advance their agendas in the UNFCCC process. The developed country parties help them with the in-room negotiations while the alliances and non-state actors support them with outside strategy which comprises campaigns

and lobbying. As LDC from Africa diverge from AGN and G77 positions, these relationships are important to help them secure support for positions that are not enjoying majority of support within the developing country groups. Secondly, most developing countries maintain strong diplomatic relationships with their former colonial masters, who continue to provide international development assistance. The relationship with developed country parties, some of whom are former colonizers, is interesting in many ways. In this study, it was found that LDCs from Africa maintain relationships with developed countries that colonized them and while not by compulsion, they check with these developed countries on particular positions they take at UNFCCC. In the same vein, this study found that 64% of African LDCs reported that their bilateral relations with former colonial powers significantly influence their climate policies, as these developed nations provide crucial support for national budgets, development efforts, and humanitarian aid in response to climate impacts. While 50% of LDCs from Africa are careful not to disappoint China in the UNFCCC process, it is the former colonizers who have a greater influence on these countries' positions in climate change negotiations and outside the negotiations. LDCs from Africa are more bound to be influenced in the negotiations by their former colonizers especially countries that are ambitious. In this study we found that African LDCs believe that developed countries are more receptive to their demands and interests than emerging developing nations hence the reason, 80% resort to lobbying them when their position is unpopular with emerging countries. Developed countries often view many emerging economies as lacking ambition in addressing climate change—a sentiment shared by the majority of LDCs from Africa, as 80% of these countries say that these nations “can do better.” The overlap in perception about emerging developing countries and LDCs from Africa strengthens their engagement to influence laggard emerging developing countries.

This was exemplified when LDCs and SIDS led a diplomatic push and secured the support of European Union, Germany, New Zealand, Canada, and Scotland which was enough despite the opposition from the USA to establish the loss and damage fund at COP27 in Egypt (Admin, 2022; Sneed, 2023). Only after LDCs and SIDS successful advocacy, lobbying, and outreach did the emerging developing economies and the USA joined the movement to support the establishment of the Loss and Damage Fund. African LDCs close collaboration with developed country parties play a critical role in resource mobilization for domestic climate action. In this study we find that whereas the emerging developing countries agenda at the UNFCCC meetings is largely negotiations, LDCs from Africa posit that the annual convening is an important platform to raise resources to implement their NDCs.

Collaboration with developed countries poses diplomatic challenges for African LDCs, as emerging economies often view it as undermining developing country unity. While some accuse LDCs from Africa of sabotage, they emphasize that such partnerships focus on securing support for negotiations and climate action. These

collaborations extend beyond climate issues, reflecting existing strong bilateral ties at the national level.

For instance, LDCs are resource poor and are dependent on international aid which most developed countries are providing either directly or indirectly and any opportunity to strengthen collaboration with developed countries is prioritized over group-based politics on climate (de Vylder, 2001; UNCTAD, 2023). At the core of the engagements are LDCs from Africa focus on pursuing individual interests that enhance their national development goals and the implementation of their NDCs. Notwithstanding, the coziness between LDCs and developed countries, 75% of the LDCs from Africa acknowledge that their partnership with developed country parties is viewed with suspicion which impacts the unity and solidarity of developing countries groups (Wale-Oshinowo et al., 2020). Despite this LDCs from Africa are not bothered and they are determined to continue to engage with developed countries in light of the Paris Agreement differentiation because in the words of one LDC negotiator, “it assures of our survival today and tomorrow”.

3.4.2. African LDCs Engagement with Non-State Actors

While LDC from Africa’s engagement with non-state actors predates the Paris Agreement, this study observed that their participation took a quantum leap after the agreement was adopted. LDC from Africa actively collaborate with non-state actors such as civil society organizations and local businesses who are accredited to join national official delegations. When Guinea was flagged with the largest official delegation to COP 26, our study found that 80% of the delegates were from non-state actors, with 85% drawn from NGOs. LDCs are resource-constrained, given that the UNFCCC secretariat only supports two negotiators are not enough to cover the entire COP agenda. LDCs from Africa default to using experts from civil society, non-governmental organizations, and businesses from their countries and others who have their own support to address the gap, though most of these accredited members of the non-state actors are often inadequately equipped to support their country’s negotiation process. The study found that 90% African NGOs and social movements involved in climate advocacy in the UNFCCC process are foreign funded by the international charity organizations which are based in developed countries. This ferments perceptions that the African CSOs are peddling the interests of western governments from where these international charities are headquartered. In the study, emerging developing countries felt that while the agenda of most Civil Society Organizations and non-governmental organization is pro-poor, the framing of their issues shows bias for LDCs and SIDS/AOSIS and not the wider developing countries groups. The interaction with civil society has threatened the diplomatic standing of the accrediting LDC government as some negotiators from civil society organizations have been spotted actively campaigning, an act not expected of an official negotiator. This is a huge diplomatic gaffe that other developing countries, especially the emerging

economies, have flagged out in the coordination meeting.

This study recommends that LDCs from Africa should carefully manage the process of integrating CSOs into their official delegation to minimize reputation risk, which can compromise their negotiation and professional conduct. Accrediting governments should ensure that delegates on official delegations are adequately trained in diplomacy, negotiations, and COP agenda. This will ensure that all participants in government delegations conduct themselves as diplomats, refraining from campaigning or any other non-diplomatic activities—such as the incident at COP27 in Egypt, where a an LDC negotiator was captured distributing Climate Action Network (CAN) newsletter (**Figure 2**). Where necessary, new negotiators, especially non-state actors should be trained in the whole UNFCCC journey, considering that COP is a buildup event from several past events and negotiations. As the process has been expanded, LDCs require new and additional capacity to help cover the main elements of the UNFCCC process to prevent them defaulting to non-state actors even those that are not properly trained.



Figure 2. A Ugandan negotiator captured at COP27, distributing ECO-Newsletter, an advocacy and campaign from Climate Action Network (CAN).

3.4.2. African LDC's Engagements with Informal Alliances and Coalitions

This study found that though only 3% of LDCs from Africa have participated in the formation of informal climate alliances, 75% of them are involved in one informal coalition or another. In this study, we found that LDCs from Africa, have developed a strategic liking for joining informal climate alliances and coalitions, which offer auxiliary but important support in negotiating their common interests and themes, shared learning and resource mobilization for domestic climate action. Informal alliances have a history in the UNFCCC process of enabling more

considerable outcomes, such as the COP 21, where most of the demands of High Ambition Coalition (HAC) were accommodated in the Paris Agreement though these demands were heavily opposed by the Like-Minded Developing Countries (LMDC) (Bodansky, 2016; Rajamani, 2016; Vanhala & Hestbaek, 2016). LDCs from Africa are active participants in HAC and Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF), which have a history of delivering on their demands in the UNFCCC. In signifying the importance of alliances and coalitions in the Paris Agreement regime, the Republic of Marshall Islands Foreign Minister, Tony De Brum, at the launch of the HAC, said, “....to be clear this is not a negotiating group. It is rather about joining the voices of all those committed to an ambitious agreement and safe climate future—big and small, rich and poor. To do this, we are building personal bonds between us as ministers, forging a joint resolve to fight together” (Suarez, 2015). After achieving monumental success at COP21, this study reveals that HAC continues to drive global climate action with even greater momentum. Most notably, HAC prides itself for successfully influencing parties to double adaptation finance from \$20 billion to \$40 billion annually, successfully urged countries to return with revised NDCs in 2022 and secured the inclusion of fossil fuel subsidies and coal in the COP outcomes of COP26 in Glasgow, Scotland. In parallel, the Climate Vulnerability Forum (CVF) has been a relentless advocate for embedding the 1.5°C target in the Paris Agreement, fearlessly pushing for greater ambition from all nations.

The study found that LDCs from Africa through diversified partnerships, including through informal alliances appropriate support for their positions from developed country parties and non-state actors who are also members of these coalitions. Developed country parties, who are also members of these coalitions are sources for bilateral support for implementing LDCs’ domestic climate action and LDCs from Africa use the platform to negotiate for bilateral funding for their domestic climate action. Under the UNFCCC process, developed countries are mandated to provide funding through multilateral processes, but this study found that 60% of the LDCs from Africa prefer bilateral support from developed countries than multilateral processes due to the strenuous access modalities.

3.5. African LDCs Redefine Climate Justice

LDCs from Africa’s response to the Paris Agreement differentiation has been positive and enabled them to redefine the elements of climate justice in the modern era. For example, this study found that 85% of the LDCs from Africa consider that emerging developing countries commitment to undertake economy wide climate action equivalent to those of developed countries is an important consideration for climate justice. This is in contrast to whether they think the Paris Agreement or Kyoto Protocol is more just, fair and equitable, where the responses are split equally (50%) between the two treaties. Under the Kyoto Protocol, developing countries defined climate justice through the traditional principles of Common But Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC), a

principle that acknowledges the different responsibilities and capabilities of developed and developing countries in addressing climate change and historical responsibility and emerging developing countries have clung to this framing, under the Paris Agreement, regime in their climate negotiation (Mbeva & Pauw, 2016; Pan et al., 2017; Popovski, 2019; Walsh, 2022).

LDCs from Africa s have expanded the definition and practice of climate justice by extending consideration to both historical and current responsibility for climate change as espoused in Article 3 of the Paris Agreement that ‘as nationally determined contributions to the global response to climate change, all Parties are to undertake and communicate ambitious efforts as defined in Articles 4, 7, 9, and 13 to achieve the purpose of the agreement as set out in Article 2’. In this study, LDCs from Africa stressed the importance of collaboration with different stakeholders to advance ambition in resilience and adaptation as an important element of climate justice hence the need for widest partnerships that would elicit such a level of ambition. Article 3 presents the ethos of the Paris Agreement differentiation, where all parties are called upon to develop climate action plans commensurate with their national uniqueness and not just historical responsibility (Mehling, 2019; Savaresi, 2016; Stoett & Mulligan, 2019). LDCs from Africa are ‘red-pilled’ and are demanding ambition from any party, whether they are developed or developing they now collaborate with diverse stakeholders including non-state actors. LDCs from Africa are prioritizing relationships and partnerships that enhance climate action ambition and alliances, such as HAC, have emerged as powerful forces, shaping progressive outcomes during significant climate negotiations. Though such alliances have created apprehension among emerging developing countries, who view broad-based calls for ‘climate ambition for all’ from LDCs as challenging their interests. Emerging economies are particularly wary of the Paris Agreement’s differentiation and argue that developed nations should assume leadership on all matters of climate action in the UNFCCC process (Eckersley, 2020; Hermwille et al., 2017; Jinnah, 2017; Thompson, 2020). Further, as LDCs align with these informal coalitions, influential developing countries fear that such alliances could undermine negotiating strategies of developing countries as LDCs are in constant engagement with developed country parties through these coalitions which are multistakeholder by nature (Hirsch, 2016). For LDCs from Africa, membership in these coalitions is invaluable, as it provides platforms for negotiation, strengthening their positions, and lobbying for their interests. Informal alliances like HAC have developed a formidable reputation for combining lobbying, campaigning, and diplomacy, resulting in significant breakthroughs in the UNFCCC process even in the face of resistance from emerging economies (Hirsch, 2016). Above all, aligning with informal coalitions is helping LDCs from Africa to have a platform to advocate for ambition and solicit support from developed country members of the coalitions. Inadvertently, LDCs from Africa are redefining climate justice by expanding the scope to include participation of emerging economies in a broad-based climate action and diversified partnerships and

collaboration that enhance domestic and global climate action.

4. Conclusion

The Paris Agreement differentiation architecture has contributed to inherent group dynamics in developing country groups, and the fissures between LDCs from Africa with AGN and G77 and China exemplifies the new diplomatic reality in the UNFCCC process. On the other hand, the unintended fissure created by the differentiation architecture has empowered the LDCs from Africa to become strong advocates for ambition for themselves, the developed country parties and emerging developing economies. LDCs from Africa have become self-aware of their vulnerabilities and exceptional circumstances, and the study found that, as a consequence, they aggressively pursue their interests, which work in their favor while contributing to the global collective goals of the Paris Agreement. The study found that diplomatic fissures manifest in the negotiation coordination, negotiating positions, and diplomatic friends and partnerships that African LDCs pursue, which are increasingly divergent from those of the AGN G77 and China. However, the study found that the LDCs from Africa diverge from the position and coordination of AGN G77 and China for strategic reasons. Firstly, African LDCs diverge from the AGN G77 and China for self-preservation in defence of their interests, which would otherwise be overshadowed by influential members of the developing country groups. Secondly, African LDC's divergence from AGN and G77 and China allows them to pursue partnerships that support their negotiations and provide means of implementation for their domestic climate action. Though the new friendships and positions of African LDCs have raised suspicion in the developing country groups, the divisions have incentivized climate action through broad-based advocacy and campaigns for ambitious climate action targeting both developed and emerging developing countries. LDCs from Africa have championed climate action for all, which is the true embodiment of the spirit of the Paris Agreement, by calling out developed and developing countries which are not ambitious. In the process, LDCs have redefined climate justice by transcending the traditional application of CBDRC-RC to include historical and current emissions and polluter pay principles for all while ensuring that developed countries take leadership (Amitabh, 2022). The redefinition of climate justice, as advanced by the developing countries to include both developed and emerging developing countries, aligns with the provisions of the Paris Agreement differentiation for broad-based climate action from all developing countries.

5. Recommendations

The study makes the following recommendations to guide African LDCs, AGN and G77 and China in the UNFCCC process under the Paris Agreement differentiation system:

1) Developing countries should redefine common interests and positions: G77 and China Group and AGN should engage members to redefine the common

interests that represent the priorities for developing countries in the new climate dispensation. G77 and China Group, though a group of developing countries, are at different levels of development, and there is a need for member parties to redefine the common interests and positions in self-differentiating regimes.

2) Strengthening the unity of developing countries: Paris Agreement differentiation has had the unintended impact of encouraging parties to pursue individual and parochial interests at the expense of the interests of developing countries as a collective. Though developing countries are at different stages of development, most of them are still poor, and their collective unity is critical in pushing for their interests in the UNFCCC process. However, this unity should be directed at pushing for ambition, not a mere exercise of political prowess that comes with numbers and has sometimes been used to block ambition. There is, therefore, a need for developing countries to ensure strategic unity on shared priorities while allowing flexibility for individual country positions where necessary.

3) LDCs must leverage their vulnerability and expanded relationships for greater ambition: LDCs from Africa have diversified their collaborations and diplomatic engagements in the UNFCCC. They have made good of these relationships by calling on developed and emerging developing countries for greater climate ambition. LDCs should strengthen these collaborations and raise awareness about their vulnerability to climate change and the need for international mechanisms to improve their resilience and enhanced adaptive capacities. LDCs must continue strengthening their collaboration for negotiation strategy and approaches to manage pressure from influential AGN G77 and China members.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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