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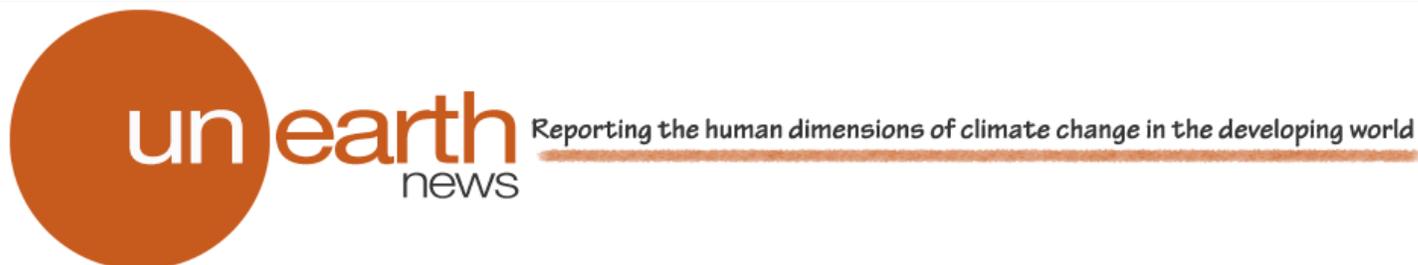
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Divided interests slow progress on climate change

 Posted by: [Cynthia Via](#) | Posted date: [May 28, 2013](#) | In: [Impact](#) | comment : 0

UNITED NATIONS, MediaGlobal News — A new Yale study has found that weak leadership and financial commitments are the underlying reasons deterring successful climate change negotiations for Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

“Assessment of the climate change negotiations,” was developed by graduate students from the [Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies](#) and was presented on May 3 at United Nations headquarters in New York.

Focusing on the [UN Framework on Climate Change](#) (UNFCCC) climate negotiations, the [Kyoto Protocol](#), and the [Ad Hoc Working Group on the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action](#) (ADP), the study group interviewed 40 national diplomats and 40 UN officials about the diplomacy process related to climate negotiations, finance, and ideal outcomes of the last decade.

The overwhelming theme was slow progress and ineffective action due to lack of leadership from the biggest emitters and financial commitments. While climate change agreements can rely on consensus and voluntary commitments, they often take longer to produce results. Legal binding agreements or provisions using international environmental law may be an alternative, as some voiced during the event. Still, linking greenhouse gas emissions to a violation of environmental law is a new concept.

“It’s necessary to examine the actual structure of the negotiations. It happens every year, yet progress is very slow,” Jorge Barbosa, Teaching Fellow of [Environmental Science for the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies](#), tells [MediaGlobal](#).

The study’s goal, explains Barbosa, was to make climate negotiations participatory and transparent, and also to answer some key questions about legal binding agreements, structure, and targets. The group asks for reduction of carbon emission with effective legislation, better negotiation skills, and clear national policies and deadlines.

The Permanent Missions of Palau and Sri Lanka, who helped organize the event, have a vested interest in seeing quick action, as the two small nations are being damaged by climate change.

More than 200,000 Sri Lankans were displaced by weather events last year, according to [Sri Lanka’s Disaster Management Center](#). And Palau, a small Pacific island is suffering from sea-level rise, coastal erosion, and reef damage.

Former United Nations Development Programme, Executive Coordinator of Global Environment Facility, Frank Pinto, tells [MediaGlobal](#), SIDS and LDCs “are the ones who are worst affected, and their voices are being ignored since they are small countries.”



Children in Tebikenikora village, on Kiribati’s Tarawa atoll. In 2011, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon visited Kiribati, located in the central Pacific Ocean, and witnessed firsthand how climate change has affected their small island nation.

Photo credit: UN photo/Eskinder Debebe

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Also the UNFCC should be willing to increase funding to train small delegations and to add representatives during meetings, Barbosa tells **MediaGlobal**.

To improve climate negotiations the Yale study group recommends working through consensus and voluntary commitments. Although Barbosa admits voluntary commitment remains a theory, it can be effective with pressure and involvement from NGOs and domestic civil societies. "There is a responsibility of these parties to actually bring about what they say, because they are out there in the world," Barbosa says to **MediaGlobal**.

Panelist and lawyer Stuart Beck, Ambassador of Palau to the UN, who helped craft the legal argument invoking Transboundary Harm— meaning one nation's territory cannot be environmentally damaged by another nation — argues that consensus is flawed, since the process may avoid "the issues that have to be solved, merely because you can't get an agreement."

When negotiations stall, small economies hang on the edge. [Kiribati](#), another Pacific island facing coastal erosions and damaged vegetation, is being forced to move its people inland, leaving beach areas.

In many of these islands degradation of coral reefs hurt the fishing communities. Darfur and Mozambique, critical areas in Africa, suffer from water scarcity and floods. Extreme temperatures in the region harm crop yields, according to the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), making it less arable to farm by 2080.

In 2011, Palau's President Johnson Toribiong requested an Advisory Opinion from the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to rule on a legal argument to hold the largest emitters responsible for greenhouse gases, according to a [PBS](#), "Need to Know" 2012 article.

In the COP18 Doha Climate Change Conference of last year, close to 200 nations committed to the Kyoto protocol until 2020, including several European Union members, Australia, Switzerland and other industrialized nations. According to a 2012 [Reuters](#) article, the largest emitters such as Japan, Canada, and the US did not ratify. Since China and India are considered still developing, their target emissions goals won't be set until 2020.

While signing legal binding contracts might not be hard for larger nations who are already developed, says Barbosa, it will be less acceptable for smaller nations, who are still developing.

"How do you restrict developing countries from extracting some of the resources to get to that point so they can be sustainable in terms of social works?" he asks **MediaGlobal**.

Despite little binding targets for the largest polluters, developed nations pledged a goal of \$100 billion funds to developing nations during the [Doha conference](#).

More recently, the Australian government made a commitment to the [Secretariat of Pacific Regional Environmental Programme](#) by signing a multi-year agreement with \$10.5 million in funds on May 8, that will support Pacific Island countries including Kiribati, Fiji, and Tonga to fight climate change and aid in development.

While climate change agreements remain non-binding, Ambassador Beck tells the audience: "Everyday that this debate has gone on, our islands are actually being damaged.

"I honestly don't think that the process at the very fundamental level," he says, "is going to do more than to accept the loss of these islands as acceptable collateral damage."



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