

# Beyond COP21: from global agreements to local action

*Most attention has been focused on a top-down solution for climate change but it will only be achieved through action at all levels, particularly at a community level*

By **Helen Clark**, Administrator, UN Development Programme and former Prime Minister of New Zealand

**2**015 presents the global community with a once in a generation opportunity to put in place a transformational architecture to tackle climate change, eradicate poverty and advance sustainable development overall. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, discussions on financing for development, the Sustainable Development Goals, and a proposed new global agreement on climate change are all essential components of this big year.

While negotiations around new frameworks and commitments dominate the post-2015 discussions, the larger question is about being ready to make good on those commitments in January 2016. Tackling climate change alone will require bold action by all. The focus needs to be on how the political will and intentions of the global community will translate into action at regional, national and local levels, and how it supports developing countries to adapt to and mitigate climate change.

For low-income developing countries in particular, meeting global climate-related commitments will require support from the international community, as well as a recalibration of domestic policies and priorities.

At UNDP we are well versed in these challenges. For over a decade, we have been at the forefront of action to tackle climate change. We see it as a major challenge to development and a barrier to poverty eradication if not decisively addressed.

Our current climate change-related portfolio amounts to \$1.3 billion in over 140 developing countries, supporting them to pursue low-emission and climate-resilient development. Through this experience, what has also become irrefutable, and somewhat less publicised, is the great opportunity and potential that climate change action presents for developing countries to spur economic growth, address

inequality, enhance resilience and encourage more sustainable development pathways.

At the community level, innovative action will support resilient and sustainable development. In Sudan, for instance, our work assisting farmers in learning about and using new water harvesting techniques, and with training in the use of irrigation pumps and drought-resistant seeds, has enabled agricultural-dependent communities to adapt their livelihoods to the changing climate.

Similar measures have been undertaken in Uganda, where coffee farmers were sensitised to the possible impacts of even slight climate variation on the quality and quantity of coffee beans – an essential source of income and a major export.

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At the national level, we have supported governments to put in place policies and incentives that facilitate climate-resilient growth. Our support to countries from Bangladesh to Fiji in Asia-Pacific, and from Kenya to Mozambique in Africa, has helped develop strong national policies on climate change and enabled countries to identify climate challenges and opportunities.

In Uruguay, for example, a climate mitigation and energy development project has helped build policies and regulations that incentivise private sector investments in wind energy. As a result, the risks surrounding potential investment in low-emission energy have been substantially reduced, clean energy production is significantly up (340 MW in 2014), and retail tariffs for consumers have dropped.



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Projects such as these require both financial support and an effort by those involved to amend the systems and policies in place to create the necessary enabling environment.

While many countries and communities have demonstrated their will and capacity to make the necessary changes, there does need to be adequate, stable and dedicated climate finance to back them up. The project in Uruguay required initial seed funding, as well as capacity support to amend policies and build infrastructure. The end result is an example of clean, sustainable and economically viable development, which stems from both public and private funding, and support from the international community.

We need to capitalise and create more examples like this. Climate change is an all-of-society concern requiring an all-of-society approach with the involvement of a wide range of actors. Relying on contributions from traditional donors alone will not be sufficient.

As efforts accelerate to reach a climate change agreement in Paris in December, the progress already taking place in many countries reminds us that tackling climate change requires action and that appropriate financing must follow words. By ensuring that all global agreements reached this year are actionable and properly resourced, the big opportunity of integrated action for sustainable development offered by 2015 can truly be realised. ●

▲ Helen Clark visits Freetown in the aftermath of the Ebola crisis. UNDP supports a number of environmental and climate-related projects in Sierra Leone, including its National Adaptation Programme of Action, disaster risk reduction plans and real-time weather forecasting