African Centre for Technology Studies
ACTS
Knowledge for Better Livelihoods

Adaptation Research Alliance

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GEOPOLITICAL LANDSCAPES DYNAMICS

Webinar Report
26 March 2025

1 Introduction

The webinar “Geopolitical Landscapes Dynamics”, held on 26th March 2025, delved into the pressing issues surrounding climate finance, adaptation, and mitigation withinthe context of global inequities. Featuring presentations by Gordon Odhiamboand Vitumbiko Chinoko, the discussions critically examined the structural imbalances in climate finance, the limitations of adaptation strategies, and the challenges faced by Least Developed Countries (LDCs) in accessing climate funds. The webinar underscored the need for systemic reforms, unified advocacy from the Global South, and the integration of climate resilience into broader development frameworks. This report synthesizes the key insights, reflections, and actionable takeaways from the event.

2 The Approach

The webinar featured:

1. **Critique of Climate Finance Inequities**: A presentation by Gordon Odhiambo, examining the disparities in funding allocation, the role of global financial institutions, and the neo- colonial undertones of concessional loans.
2. **Challenges in Defining and Localizing Climate Finance**: A presentation by Vitumbiko Chinoko, exploring the ambiguities in climate finance definitions, governance issues in LDCs, and the imperative of embedding climate action into national development plans.
3. **Strategies for Systemic Change:** A plenary session led by Norah Ouma, where participants asked questions on the discussions had, followed by an interactive Mentimeter session.

3 Presentations

Presentation 1: Who Controls Adaptation Finance? - Gordon Odhiambo

The first presentation was delivered by Gordon Odhiambo, who presented a critical analysis, focusing on the fundamental premise of adaptation and its implications for global climate finance. His argument centered on the notion that adaptation serves as a mechanism that enables industrialized nations, particularly in the Global North, to continue emitting greenhouse gases while shifting the burden of climate impacts onto developing countries. He critiqued the inequities embedded in climate finance, the geopolitical dynamics influencing funding mechanisms, and the limitations of the current adaptation paradigm.

A central component of Gordon’s critique was the **inadequacy of financial resources allocated to adaptation.** He highlighted that developing countries require approximately USD 70 billion annually to build climate resilience, with projections indicating USD 300 billion between 2020 and 2030. Despite these figures, climate finance commitments from developed nations have consistently fallen short, with actual disbursements failing to meet the pledged amounts. This shortfall, he argued, reflects a broader pattern of financial inequity that undermines the ability of developing nations to effectively respond to climate threats.

He highlighted Africa's fragmented negotiation strategies, urging a unified continental stance to strengthen bargaining power in climate finance discussions, going on to stress that; **"There is nothing that is bigger than a force of unity amongst the developing nations."** Geopolitically, he pointed to the marginalization of the Global South in Bretton Wood institutions, where climate finance often takes the form of debt-inducing loans, a dynamic he termed **"neo-colonial."**

To counter these imbalances, Gordon called for consolidated Global South advocacy and stressed the role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in reshaping narratives. He proposed independent platforms for Global South climate finance dialogues. His conclusion underscored the need for a paradigm shift: prioritizing mitigation over adaptation, unifying African negotiations, and challenging the dominance of Global North financial governance. The full presentation can be viewed here.

Key Insights

1. **Accountability -** Climate finance must hold industrialized nations accountable rather than shifting the burden to developing countries.
2. **Unified advocacy strengthens negotiation power -** Africa and the Global South must adopt a collective stance to secure fairer climate finance deals.
3. **Grant-based loans -** Funding mechanisms must move away from debt-inducing loans to equitable, grant-based support.
4. **Systemic reform is necessary -** A paradigm shift is needed to prioritize mitigation, challenge financial governance imbalances, and empower developing nations.

Presentation 2: Climate Finance, Experiences from LDCs from Africa – Vitumbiko Chinoko

Vitumbiko's presentation shed light on the persistent challenges in establishing a universal definition for climate finance. His discussion was particularly insightful in unpacking the complexities of climate finance, highlighting the different stakeholder perspectives, the blurred boundaries between climate and development finance, and the structural barriers faced by Least Developed Countries (LDCs). The presentation underscored the importance of localized climate finance and the necessity for reforms in global financial architecture to ensure equitable access to funding.

Why do we have difficulties in defining climate finance?

Vitumbiko began by emphasizing that defining climate finance remains a contentious issue due to several key factors. He outlined the reasons behind this difficulty, explaining the competing interests, definitional ambiguities, and political influences that have shaped global climate finance discourse:

1. **Diverse Stakeholder Interests**

Vitumbiko highlighted how different stakeholders all have distinct priorities, contributing to differing interpretations of climate finance. This lack of consensus has made it difficult to reach a universal agreement, even within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) framework.

2. **Blurred Boundaries between Climate and Development Finance**

A significant point of contention, Vitumbiko noted, is the overlap between climate finance and development finance. Developed countries often categorize bilateral and OECD funding as climate finance, while others argue that only funds channeled through institutions like the Green Climate Fund (GCF) should be considered as climate finance.

3. Disagreement on Funding Sources

Vitumbiko stressed the ongoing debate regarding the sources of climate finance. While NGOs and activists often advocate for public funding, others argue that any financial flows addressing climate change, whether public or private, should be considered climate finance. Vitumbiko stressed that **"Any money has been set aside to address the problems of climate change, that is considered climate finance."**

4. Loans vs. Grants: The Equity Debate

A particularly contentious issue Vitumbiko highlighted is the classification of loans as climate finance. Many developing nations, particularly Least Developed Countries (LDCs), express concerns that climate finance in the form of loans exacerbates their debt burden (while already burdened by climate impacts), rather than provide real financial relief and aid. He pointed out that while loans do contribute to climate action, they raise ethical questions - **should countries already facing climate vulnerability be further indebted to address a crisis they did not cause?**

5. Measurement and Tracking Challenges

Vitumbiko underscored the inconsistencies in how climate finance is measured and tracked. Different standards for measuring climate finance are currently in place, from those used by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to frameworks under the UNFCCC. These differences make it difficult to accurately assess whether countries are meeting their climate finance commitments. He emphasized the urgent need for a standardized approach to measuring climate finance flows.

6. The Role of the Private Sector

Another key challenge is the involvement of the private sector. While private investments such as those from banks are crucial for scaling up climate action, Vitumbiko noted that coordination between public and private finance remains weak. He posed a question, **"how can we ensure that resources from the private sector easily blend with those from the public sector?"** Ensuring effective coordination between public and private finance remains a challenge for advancing climate resilience, emission reduction, and addressing loss and damage.

Localizing Climate Finance

A crucial yet often overlooked aspect of climate finance, according to Vitumbiko, is its localization. He stressed that development in the current era cannot be considered separately from climate considerations. To address this, climate resilience must be mainstreamed into national development planning. Drawing inspiration from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report which talks about the linkage between climate change and sustainable development, he pointed out that localizing climate finance involves embedding climate adaptation and mitigation strategies within national budgets, long-term strategy plans and Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). By ensuring financial flows are directed towards localized climate priorities, governments can move beyond treating climate finance as an isolated agenda and integrate it as an essential component of sustainable development.

LDCs’ Experiences with Climate Finance

Vitumbiko provided a critical analysis of how LDCs interact with the global climate finance system, highlighting the specific challenges they face:

1. **Bilateral Funding Over Multilateral Processes:** LDCs favor bilateral climate finance, such as direct government-to-government or government-to-business funding, over multilateral mechanisms due to the bureaucratic hurdles associated with accessing multilateral funding. Vitumbiko highlighted developing countries' calls for reforming climate finance access modalities.
2. **Rising Climate Finance Needs Outpacing Funding:** Despite increased global climate finance flows, they remain insufficient to meet the rapidly growing needs of LDCs. Vitumbiko noted the mismatch between available resources and the scale of climate challenges on the ground, and emphasized that climate finance commitments must be scaled up to match the realities of climate impacts on the ground.
3. **Governance Challenges:** Climate finance in LDCs is often undermined by governance issues such as corruption, inefficient systems, and inadequate institutional capacity. These structural weaknesses limit the effectiveness of climate investments and reduce accountability. Vitumbiko stressed the need for stronger governance frameworks to enhance transparency and accountability.
4. **Data-Driven Decision-Making:** Effective climate finance requires robust scientific data to guide investments. Vitumbiko highlighted the need for LDCs to strengthen climate science access, capacities and integrate climate projections into policy planning, emphasizing that LDCs need better access to the latest climate science to inform adaptation planning, project future risks, and allocate resources strategically.
5. **Integrating Climate Finance into Development Planning:** A key point brought out by Vitumbiko is that climate finance should be framed as a development issue rather than a standalone challenge. Addressing climate impacts requires sector-specific investments, such as in agriculture, health, and infrastructure, in order to ensure that national planning and budgeting align with climate resilience goals. Vitumbiko stressed that Africa’s continued reliance on exporting raw materials limits its ability to generate revenue for climate action and that strengthening value addition and securing fairer market rates is crucial.

“At the end of the day, a blanket requirement or call for climate finance without necessarily saying where you need it for, it is not a very wise call.”

He cited advocacy for financial architecture reform as an example of ongoing efforts to address these systemic barriers.

Key Insights

1. **Climate-proof development plans:** LDCs must take proactive measures to integrate climate resilience into their development strategies by coming up with climate-proof national budgets and long-term development plans, ensuring that climate considerations are embedded across all sectors.

2. **Investment in climate-resilient infrastructure:** long-term investments in adaptive infrastructure. such as roads and bridges, will be crucial to withstand both current and future climate challenges.
3. **Strengthen the political standing of climate ministries:** this will enable them to influence national planning processes and ensure that climate-proofing is effectively implemented across government sectors.
4. **Intensify advocacy for reforms in multilateral climate finance mechanisms:** Simplifying access to multilateral funds, while maintaining accountability, will be essential in securing the resources needed for climate adaptation and resilience.

4 Plenary

Following Vitumbiko's presentation, a plenary sessionwas held by Gordon, to further unpackthe complexities of defining climate finance. During the session, participants posed critical questions that sparked deeper discussions:

Why is adaptation finance for Africa fragmented? What are we as Africans doing wrong, and what should we do to change this?

Gordon explained that before 2023, each African country primarily focused on its own interests. However, the realization of the interconnected nature of climate change has led to a more unified approach. He highlighted the importance of treating climate change as a regional challenge, likening it to a disease that affects an entire community. Gordon emphasized that for Africa to address climate finance effectively, it must consolidate its efforts and speak with one voice in global negotiations.

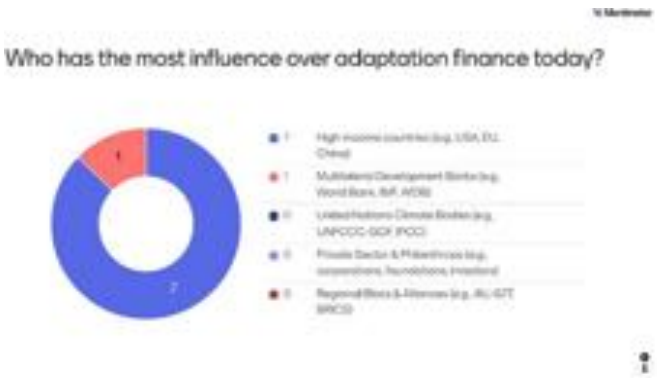
What strategies can nations develop to negotiate climate financing mechanisms?

Gordon suggested strengthening the voices of civil society organizations (CSOs) and employing both track one (state-to-state) and track two (CSO-led) diplomacy. He noted that CSOs have been particularly effective in pushing agendas,as demonstrated by their opposition to the OECD model in 2023. Gordon emphasized the importance of governments supporting CSOs to ensure a coordinated and strategic approach to climate finance negotiations.

To foster engagement and collective reflection, a Mentimeter activity was conducted. This participatory exercise allowed participants to visually position themselves along a spectrum of opinions on critical climate finance issues. Questions posed included:

"Describe the relationship between Africa and global climate finance in one word"

Figure 1



“Who has the most influence over adaptation finance today”

Figure 2

“What alternative financing mechanisms can Africa use”

Figure 3

“What’s the one missing ingredient for successful adoption financing in Africa to reduce dependence on Foreign aid”

Figure 4

5 Reflection Points

1. **Structural Inequities in Climate Finance**

    - **Funding Shortfalls:** Developed nations have repeatedly failed to meet their climate finance commitments. Funding shortfalls place LDCs in an impossible position where they face escalating climate risks with inadequate resources to implement sustainable solutions. As climate disasters intensify, failure to meet these climate finance commitments exacerbates inequalities, reinforcing global imbalances in climate resilience and adaptation.

    - **Neo-Colonialism Critique:** Many existing climate finance mechanisms, such as concessional loans, place financial burdens on developing countries, increasing their debt burden rather than empowering them to implement climate solutions. This mirrors historical patterns of economic exploitation, where the Global South remains dependent on financial structures controlled by the Global North. Without grant-based climate financing, developing countries risk falling into deeper debt cycles, undermining their ability to invest in long-term climate resilience.

2. **Fragmentation and Power Dynamics**

    - **Unified Advocacy:** Developing countries often enter climate negotiations with fragmented positions, weakening their collective bargaining power. Given that climate finance is largely shaped by political negotiations, a more unified approach could enhance their influence. Without a consolidated strategy, wealthier nations set the terms of climate finance, reinforcing existing disparities.

    - **Role of Global Institutions:** Bretton Woods Institutions (World Bank, IMF) are primarily controlled by developed nations and, as such, dictate the flow of climate finance, often sidelining the priorities of LDCs. This imbalance results in financial mechanisms that reflect donor interests rather than the needs of vulnerable countries/communities. Without structural reforms, climate finance will continue to be distributed inequitably, limiting LDCs' access to fair and sufficient funding.

3. **Localizing Climate Finance**

    - **Integration with Development:** Climate resilience efforts in LDCs are often treated as standalone initiatives rather than being integrated into broader development plans. When climate finance operates in isolation from national budgets, long-term strategies, or Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), it fails to deliver long-term impact. Integrating climate strategies into economic planning ensures long-term sustainability and reduces dependency on external funding.

    - **Governance Challenges:** Corruption, bureaucracy, and data gaps hinder effective climate finance utilization in LDCs. Addressing these governance issues and focusing on data-driven approaches is essential to ensuring that climate finance reaches the communities that need it most.

4. **Strategic Actions for LDCs**

    - **Climate-Proofing Policies:** As climate impacts intensify, LDCs must ensure that infrastructure and development projects are resilient to future climate risks. Incorporating climate adaptation into policy frameworks can reduce long-term impacts and enhance sustainability. Without such measures, LDCs will face repeated loss and damage from climate-related disasters.
    - **Advocacy for Reform:** The process of accessing multilateral climate funds remains complex and bureaucratic. LDCs must push for simplified access to funding, greater transparency in disbursements, and accountability in financial flows to ensure that pledged funds are delivered and used effectively. Without these reforms, many vulnerable countries will continue struggling to secure the resources they need for climate action.
    - **Public-Private Partnerships:** Given the scale of climate finance needs, leveraging private sector investment is essential. Governments must establish clear policy guidelines, frameworks, and incentives to align private investments with national climate priorities. This includes offering incentives for green investments and holding private entities accountable for environmental impacts.

5. **Civil Society and Systemic Change**

    - **Amplifying Marginalized Voices:** Civil society organizations (CSOs) play a critical role in advocating for fairer climate finance mechanisms, ensuring that vulnerable communities are not left behind. Strengthening the role of CSOs in climate finance discussions and negotiations, ensures more inclusive and equitable policy outcomes.
    - **Alternative Platforms:** Many climate finance negotiations and decision-making platforms remain dominated by the Global North. Establishing independent forums where LDCs and Global South stakeholders can set their own climate finance agenda will create more balanced frameworks. Without such platforms, developing countries remain at the mercy of Global North financial architecture and systems that often do not prioritize their needs.

6 Conclusion

This webinar reinforced the urgent need for strategic financing mechanisms to address climate-related challenges amid shifting geopolitical realities. As climate change intensifies resource competition, exacerbates loss and damage, and disrupts economies, climate finance must evolve to meet these growing demands. Discussions underscored the importance of increasing financial commitments, ensuring equitable access to funding, and strengthening mechanisms for transparency and accountability.

To advance meaningful climate action, stakeholders must prioritize innovative financial instruments, such as blended finance, while fostering stronger collaboration between governments, financial institutions, and local communities. Bridging the climate finance gap will require not only mobilizing new investments but also ensuring that funds are directed toward impactful, scalable, and locally driven solutions.

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