

The Narrative Position of the Like Minded Developing Countries in Global Climate Negotiations: A Policy-Oriented Narrative Approach to IR

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Abstract

Yamin and Depledge (2004) argue that the UNFCCC regime is characterised by formal and informal coalitions, alliances, and political groups. Blaxekjær and Nielsen (2014) have demonstrated how new groups since COP15 have transformed the narrative positions and negotiations space in the UNFCCC, creating bridges as well as new trenches between North and South in relation to the principle of Common But Differentiated Responsibility. As the UNFCCC regime readjusts after COP21, these new narrative positions and negotiations space should be re-examined. Through original data such as official statements from groups, observations at UN climate conferences (2011-2015), and interviews with delegates and experts, the paper analyses the narrative position of the Like Minded group of Developing Countries (LMDC), an influential political group under the UNFCCC established in 2012. Following Blaxekjær and Nielsen's (2014) policy-oriented narrative approach to IR the paper analyses LMDC's *identity*, the *problems* identified by LMDC and the *solutions* to these problems, and the paper identifies five central characteristics of the dominant LMDC narrative. The analysis also touches upon what narrative techniques are used in constructing the LMDC identity. This framework reveals the embeddedness of narratives in practice as they unfold in the formation of new alliances and ruptures in old ones. This paper contributes to the emerging Narrative in IR research agenda with a policy-oriented model of analysis. The paper also contributes to the broader research agenda on the post-Paris UNFCCC regime, and argues that as long as CBDR/RC is a major unresolved issue – an essentially contested concept – as long will the LMDC play a prominent role in the UNFCCC regime.

Keywords: UNFCCC, LMDC, narrative policy analysis, IR,

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1. Introduction

From the inception of the UNFCCC, developing countries' participation in climate change negotiations has been fundamentally shaped by their alliance as a 'Southern collective' (Najam 2005) through the Group of 77 and China (hereafter G77). Now comprising 133 countries, the G77 is marked by large and growing heterogeneity in terms of factors such as prosperity and political power, as well as GHG emissions and vulnerability to climate change. This heterogeneity has given rise to many claims about an inevitable fragmentation or 'split' within the G77 (Kasa, Gullberg, and Heggelund 2008; Roberts 2011), and the last five years of negotiations has indeed seen a proliferation of groups and alliances among developing countries in UNFCCC negotiations (cf. Blaxekjær and Nielsen 2014). Throughout the history of multilateral climate change negotiations, most developing countries have pursued a strategy of multiple, overlapping alliances; i.e. they have combined membership of the G77 with membership in regional groupings such as the African Group, or more interest-based groupings such as OPEC or AOSIS.

Prior to COP15, the UNFCCC organizational landscape was relatively static in its North–South divide. Annex I groups included the European Union (EU), the Umbrella Group² and the Environmental Integrity Group. These groups had many disagreements on issues such as binding targets, and Annex I was rather fragmented. The non-Annex I groups included the African Group of Negotiators – the only active regional group, the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA in Spanish), the Central American Integration System (SICA in Spanish), Central Asia, Caucasus, Albania and Moldova Group (CACAM), the Coalition for Rainforest Nations (CfRN), the League of Arab States, sometimes Arab Group (LAS), the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), the Group of 77 and China (G77), the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and the Small Island Developing States (SIDS). For in-depth discussion of these groups, see Yamin and Depledge (2004, pp. 32-48). Since COP15, the landscape has included the BASIC group, the Climate Vulnerable Forum, the Cartagena Dialogue for Progressive Action, the Durban Alliance, the Mountainous Landlocked Developing Countries, the Like-Minded Developing Countries (LMDC) and the Association of Independent Latin American and Caribbean Countries (AILAC) (Blaxekjær and Nielsen 2014).

In 2012, a group of 'like-minded developing countries' held its first official meeting on 18–19 October, hosted by China (IISD, 2012a). This was in the aftermath of the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action in which all of the parties recognized the need to draw up the blueprint for a universal, legal agreement to deal with climate change beyond 2020. A key element in the LMDC narrative in relation to LMDC identity is that universality is not the same as uniformity and that CBDR/RC should remain, as it is also a key pillar for the Convention. The LMDC membership consists of an intrinsic part of G77, but the parties behind the group's statements and submissions are not completely fixed. The LMDC is a

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very vocal group with an increasing number of submissions and statements. Similar to BASIC, it promotes itself as unifying and strengthening the position of developing countries in the UNFCCC. It presents itself as being closely aligned with G77 but appears to use a more direct approach in its criticism of the lack of action undertaken by the developed countries. It should be noticed that Brazil and South Africa have not joined LMDC.

The emergence of the LMDC is an important part of this picture, and with participants such as China, India, and Saudi Arabia, understanding the LMDC is key to any policy analysis of the UNFCCC leading up to the 2015 deadline in Paris. Based on interviews with experts and country representatives, our research suggests that the emergence of the LMDC may be understood simultaneously as a sign of increasing fragmentation and divergence of interests and positions within the G77, *and* as an expression of the identity and historical experiences that contributes to a continued, and perhaps surprising, cohesion among Southern countries in increasingly different economic and political circumstances. The LMDC does not have a formal list of members, and statements and submissions only occasionally list countries by which it is supported, Figure 1 shows the number of times different countries are listed. The total number of ADP submissions and statements we have found is 35, but only seven of those list supporting countries. The most recent country list is from the CRP dated 2014-06-03 by Malaysia and includes Algeria, Argentina, Bolivia, Cuba, China, Dominica, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, India, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Nicaragua, Philippines, Qatar², Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka and Venezuela. In addition, Mali, Sudan, the DRC, Pakistan and Thailand have been included in at least four out of the explicit country lists the LMDC have provided in submission, and have also tabled submissions or statements on behalf of the LMDC, except for the DRC and Sudan³. Finally, Jordan presented LMDC submissions and statements at ADP 2-6, so we include it as a central country, despite being listed only three times. Other countries that have been associated at least one submission or statement are Libya, Paraguay, Syria, Yemen, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Somalia, Tunisia, Ghana, Lebanon and the Maldives. We consider these to be peripheral countries – some might even be included in the statement as a misunderstanding, e.g. the Maldives. The numbers of explicit mentions per country are shown in Figure 1.

² Qatar has been mentioned in the two lists that have been presented in 2014, but not in lists from previous years.

³ The other statements and submissions we have got hold of were presented by Philippines (6), Venezuela (5), Nicaragua (4), Pakistan (3), Egypt (3), Argentina (2), Saudi Arabia (2), Malaysia (2), Algeria, Bolivia, Cuba, Dominica, Ecuador, India, Mali, Sudan, and Thailand. These figures include two statements presented by multiple countries, and five statements to the SBs. On how countries are selected to present, one interviewee said it is usually based on willingness and suitability, but sometimes just random selection.

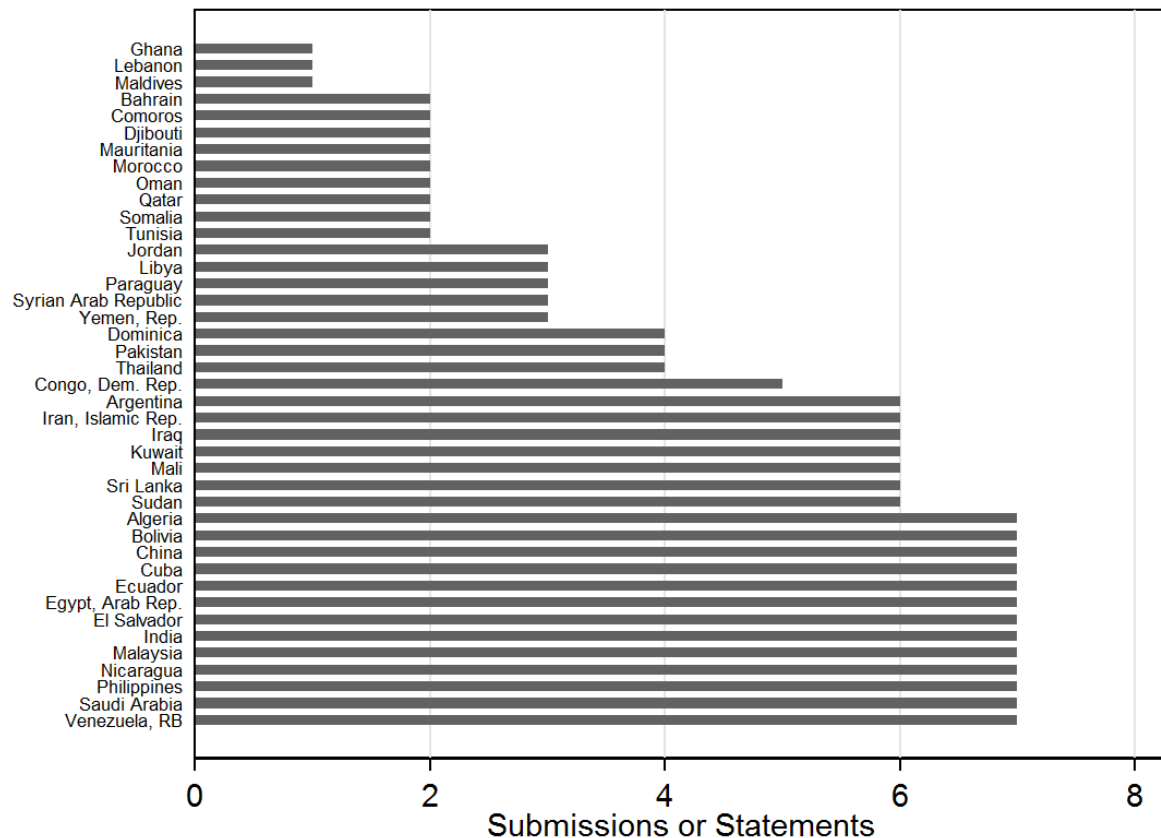


Figure 1: Number of explicit mentions in LMDC submissions, statements, and conference room papers in ADP negotiations 2012-2014.

2. Theoretical approach: Narrative policy analysis and narrative positions

The paper draws on Hendrik Wagenaar’s (2011) narrative approach further developed by Blaxekjær and Nielsen (2014) to identify the dominant narrative of the LMDC in order to map its position in the UNFCCC negotiations landscape. The basic assumption is that language, through e.g. frames or narratives, profoundly shapes our view of the world and reality instead of merely being a neutral medium mirroring it (cf. Fischer and Forester, 1993; Wagenaar, 2011). Hence, meaning is not given by a phenomenon in itself; instead, it is established through intersubjective, linguistic practices, such as narratives. Climate change does not imminently produce (or call for) certain patterns of social change. Instead, actors’ interpretations of climate change problems and proposed solutions – in our case, in UNFCCC negotiations – are the outcome of political deliberations on climate change and are being shaped by linguistic dynamics (cf. Demeritt, 2001; Pettenger, 2007; Nielsen, 2014).

We define narratives as means by which actors make sense of the world, a ‘mode of knowing’, ‘providing distinctive ways of ordering experience, of constructing reality’, such as an organization’s origin and identity (Wagenaar, 2011, p. 209). This way of ordering is further understood in a simple but recognized template given by Aristotle, where the narrative brings ‘unity of action ... from the linear sequence that runs from a beginning, in which the protagonist of the story is faced with a challenge or puzzle, via a middle section in which the events develop, to a final section in which the initial challenge is met or puzzle solved’

(Wagenaar, 2011, p. 210). Narratives also serve a ‘larger purpose of allowing humans to affirm and reaffirm identities’ (Cobley, 2001, p. 222), which is why it is relevant to apply a narrative analysis to new political groups, because narratives then allow us to understand the arguments (strategic rhetoric) of these political groups and examine how these arguments are also expressed and reaffirmed in narrative form as identity through the very organization of the political group, thus also reinforcing an identity-based imperative for certain action. This leads to the development of the concept of *narrative position*, which allows us to combine argumentative and organisational practices in the same analysis of a political landscape.

Narrative can mean many things, as it has also gained popularity in everyday language and political analyses, and in many cases it is interchangeable with rhetoric or story. However, in a more strict academic sense, narratives are understood as the way stories are told – not the stories themselves and not the mere rhetoric or arguments used, but more than that. A story can be told in many different ways, but narratives are also ways of making sense of the world – ways of thinking, and ways of giving actors identity and purpose. Narratives bring focus to characters, their relations, progression through time; past, present, and future; problems and solutions. In other words, a narrative is a way of making a coherent connection between identities and action. Strong narratives build on a series of techniques and practices like using familiar templates (e.g. Good versus Evil or other cultural templates like fairy tales, love stories, tragedies, epic battles, etc. often involving questions of justice and appropriate behaviour) and/or using enactment and story-telling; i.e. narratives have to be iterated, reiterated and remembered by (many) actors to work effectively as identity formation. Following Wagenaar (2011, p. 218), we focus on ‘the work that stories do in a particular political or administrative context’ in order to ‘bring out the story’s impact on policy making’. Thus, narratives also imply the taking of certain actions (Wagenaar, 2011, p. 215) or, we might add, narratives imply a certain action space. The emergence of new narratives shapes new understandings of what the goals of the UNFCCC negotiations ought to be and ways of reaching them.

Theoretically, there are different types of narratives. Important for our analysis is the distinction between dominant narratives and alternative narratives, which will help us understand the fluid character of LMDC. Narratives can be strong and coherent, but also emerging and more fluid. Dominant and alternative narratives also function at different levels, i.e. the overall UNFCCC field and at the level of actor. In the overall UNFCCC field there are several alternative narratives about climate change and negotiations, but none has become the dominant narrative unquestioned by the majority of actors – except maybe the narrative of “science has told us climate change is real and we have to act”. Here we focus on the LMDC’s narrative about negotiations. In the UNFCCC negotiations, the LMDC is just one actor telling stories about the global South (the G77), the North (Annex I countries), and how these characters are faring in climate negotiations; other actors (e.g. the USA, EU, or Japan) tell the same story, but differently: With a different beginning, middle, and possible endings; with different characters playing different roles (e.g. hero and villain or the innocent victim and perpetrator). A narrative policy analysis seeks to identify the characters, their roles, and projected endings, how the stories are told – what is emphasised and what is left out, how are the discrepancies, that “reality” is full of dealt with – and, if any, the cultural

templates they are framed in – applied in a specific policy context focusing on specific policy issues and decisions.

3. Model of analysis, methods and data

We seek to identify the dominant way that LMDC countries understand the LMDC, what kind of identity they project and speak about, and what policy problems and solutions they speak about. Getting direct access to observe and record the LMDC practices has not been possible for this study, firstly because of the time and geographical span of the LMDC, and secondly, because LMDC meetings and other activities are closed to observers and media. As with other studies of diplomacy, practices need to be interpreted from and through other sources. “The rationale is that, even when practices cannot be ‘seen,’ they may be ‘talked about’ through interviews or ‘read’ thanks to textual analysis.” (Pouliot 2013, 49). We have applied a mixed methods approach based on observations, text analysis of first hand LMDC sources and second hand descriptions of LMDC, and we have conducted several interviews with LMDC and non-LMDC delegates as well as other UNFCCC observers and experts. See also appendix.

We have approached this task from a social constructivist or post-foundational perspective in International Relations emphasising “the mutually constitutive dialectics between the social construction of knowledge and the construction of social reality”, where “postfoundationalism is a metatheoretical commitment to the notion that, in the absence of ontological foundations of knowledge, the best way forward for social science is to build on the social facts that are already reified by agents”. Pouliot further helps differentiate between methodology and methods: “while the same methods may be shared by various methodologies, a methodology comprises a set of epistemological and ontological requirements ... that formulates its own scientific standards and truth conditions.” (2007: 360).

“[C]onstructivism is conceived as a “metatheoretical commitment” based on three tenets: first, that knowledge is socially constructed (an epistemological claim); second, that social reality is constructed (an ontological claim); and third, that knowledge and reality are mutually constitutive (a reflexive claim). Accordingly, the social construction of knowledge and the construction of social reality are two sides of the same coin.” (2007: 361).

In this study we rely heavily on interviews, but not as objective representations of “big-T” truth. This does not mean interviews are not valuable or useful. Interviews or informants’ answers are used as subjective expressions of the extent that informants are willing to let us know how they relate to different issues in UNFCCC negotiations or how they perceive LMDC to relate to these issues.

We gained access to informants through network and sometimes direct contact (Bonn sessions in 2014). We used several semi-structured interview guides (updated accordingly) for all interviews with a focus on getting interviewees to describe the LMDC history and purpose, as well as how LMDC functions throughout the year and during UNFCCC sessions. Generally, it is our understanding that informants were very open. When issues were too sensitive to talk about, they said so. Interviewees emphasized different aspects relating to

their personal experiences, which indicate that answers were not rehearsed and officially sanctioned. We argue that interviewing is one of the best ways of getting access to knowledge and stories about the LMDC and LMDC views of UNFCCC negotiations. This is because of lack of access to LMDC internal documents and meetings. Through interviews with LMDC representatives and other observers of UNFCCC negotiations, we can try to get information from which we can then create narratives of and by LMDC. These narratives are created using triangulation with other sources such as LMDC statements, submissions, and press releases as well as other publicly available sources like interviews. By identifying patterns in answers we create the coherent parts of narratives. We also identify alternative narratives, so as to include other interpretations than the “dominant view”.

4. Narrative analysis of the LMDC

4.1. What are the problems according to the LMDC narrative?

Understanding key policy issues central to LMDC begins with analysing how the LMDC speaks about the problems and solutions of UNFCCC negotiations. Many of these views are not unique to LMDC, but have been made before by G77. However, they should be seen as different from other emerging views of NA1 Parties from e.g. AILAC or Cartagena, and problems and solutions are naturally tied to the LMDC identity put forward in the main narrative (cf. Blaxekjær and Nielsen, 2014). A key problem frequently cited in the LMDC statements is the global North’s historical responsibility and lack of actions in terms of commitments and actions to reduce GHG emissions. LMDC often refers to the *scientific evidence* that A1 countries bear, by far, the heaviest responsibility (Claudia Salerno, Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs and Presidential Delegate Ministry of the Peoples Power for Foreign Affairs, High level segment 20.11.13).

“The Annex division is not out-dated, but based on scientific assessment of the historic responsibilities. Although the world has changed in a number of ways during the past two decades, the historical responsibilities of developed countries for causing climate change remain unchanged.” (LMDC submission 24.09.13).

The firm stand on historical responsibility is also echoed in the LMDC view on Loss and Damage, in which developing countries are portrayed as victims of climate change. A second part of the problem is the broader theme of lack of leadership of developed countries. This is often expressed through criticism of ‘inadequate’ or ‘extremely disappointing’ efforts to reduce emissions (mentioned by several interviewees from LMDC delegations, but also by NGOs and other representatives of developing countries). The point is that developing countries have yet to see A1 countries live up to their commitments, both in terms of emissions reductions under the Convention and KP and the finance promised to support developing countries in their efforts.

“It is not about aid, it is not about donations. It is about obligations. The developed countries have not fulfilled their obligations about the deep cuts they needed to take; they need to live up to those. And on top of that, they haven't fulfilled their obligation

of providing the support.” (Interview with large international NGO representative 06.06.14).

A recurring argument is that if A1 had lived up to their original commitments (or the 40% reduction by 2020 discussed in Durban) NA1 would not have had to adapt to climate change and there would be no ‘emissions gap’ (Interview with high-level LMDC negotiator 24.10.14). Moreover, LMDC has often pointed out that several LMDC Parties are already doing their part through climate change action at the domestic level. Even as they bear the disproportionate burden of the impacts of climate change and continue to struggle with the challenges of poverty eradication and achieving sustainable development (cf. LMDC submission 04.06.14 for a list of country efforts). Indeed, the argument brought forward is that the current pledges by NA1 countries are higher in terms of absolute tonnes of GHG avoided than that of A1 countries is that NA1 Parties have signed up to (Gore and Jarju 2013). Furthermore, lack of leadership means that A1 Parties are evading their own responsibilities and shifting them towards NA1 Parties (cf. high level segment COP 19 interventions by Saudi Arabia, Venezuela and Malaysia amongst others). This argument is also central in LMDC maintaining a need for annex-differentiation (CBDR/RC). Hence, removing the annexes or ‘re-interpreting the principle of CBDR/RC is a way for A1 parties to ‘backtrack’ on their obligations and leave the post-2020 framework toothless with Parties having little and very vague obligations (interview high-level LMDC negotiators on 24.10.14 and 25.10.14).

A third part of the problem relates to the principle of equity. The LMDC have stressed that its member populations, half of which live on less than US\$ 2 a day, face severe development challenges (Gore and Jarju 2013). The argument is that social and economic developments and poverty eradication are still the first and overriding priorities of many LMDC countries (LMDC submission 24.09.13). Developing countries, especially those who are struggling to eradicate poverty and to pursue social and economic development, must be given the opportunity to pursue development and not be hampered by mitigation obligations. The principle of equity is (together with CBDR/RC) seen as an absolute precondition for a future successful climate regime (Jayanthi Natarajan, Minister for Environment and Forests, India, High Level Segment COP 19, 21.11.13). Equity ties together with another key issue, vulnerability. The LMDC claims to speak on behalf of some of the most vulnerable countries to climate change; countries where the impacts of climate change have killed thousands of people and set back poverty eradication and sustainable development efforts (LMDC submission 24.04.13; see also High-Level Segment 20 November 2013, Laila Rashed Iskander, Minister of Environment, Egypt – who proposed the UNFCCC establish a list of the most vulnerable countries).

4.2. What are the solutions according to LMDC narratives?

The LMDC has stated that it aims to find equitable and durable “win-win-win” solutions for the people, the climate, and sustainable development under the Convention (LMDC Submission 24.09.13). This will only be reached if certain actions are taken, including (in no particular order) keeping the ADP negotiations being under the Convention and following the

CBDR/RC and equity principles as well as continuing the four pillars set out in the Bali Roadmap. LMDC interviewees are all very clear on this.

“The work [on ADP] must now focus on the Convention’s four pillars for enhanced action, i.e. mitigation, adaptation, finance, technology transfer, and the two other elements that have been agreed to, i.e. capacity building and transparency of action and support, which are also related to the four main pillars.” (LMDC submission 24.09.13).⁴

One interviewee was very critical to what he perceived as attempts from other groups/parties to elevate the mitigation agenda over other issues such as: adaptation, finance capacity building and technology (High-level LMDC negotiator 24.10.14).

For the LMDC, the basic structure of the (2020) climate framework is to continue the route of the Convention and in particular the Bali Roadmap and the Kyoto Protocol (KP). The continuation of the Kyoto Protocol’s ‘system’ is the preferred option and is seen as a

“top-down science and rules-based mitigation regime for enabling ambitious emission reductions in developed countries... Climate change requires global solutions arrived at through a robust multilateral process. Strengthening the implementation of the Convention allows us to do so.” (LMDC Submission 18.11.13).

There are concerns that moving away from the Convention and the KP system will significantly reduce successfulness of a future climate regime.

“What we have seen, especially during the past few years, is a pledge-and-review system that has even worsened after Warsaw, where we are now talking about contributions instead of commitments for all countries. That’s dangerous because we need legally binding agreements, legally binding targets, that countries must pursue.” (Interview with high-level LMDC negotiator 05.06.14).

One remark made is that developing countries have put faith in the process (the Convention) believing that what was originally agreed on would be respected and implemented (Mary Ann Lucille Sering, Vice-Chairperson and Executive Director of the Climate Change Commission, Philippines, High-Level Segment November 20, 2013).

CBDR/RC and equity are core elements of the solution, according to the LMDC perspective. In the ADP, the LMDC has been very vocal on this matter with all of its submissions and statements mentioning this issue. The ADP (Paragraphs 7 and 8 of decision 1/CP.17) does not specify that efforts to enhance ambition should be differentiated between

⁴ Other central issues include: capitalisation of the GCF, no unilateral trade measures or trade measures disguised as climate change action, such as aviation emissions issue (strongly against IMO and ICAO); the use of non-market approaches to the reduction of emissions; establishment of a loss and damage mechanism; addressing the economic and social consequences of response measures; and addressing the issue of vulnerability to climate change (c.f. The Hindu interview with Jayanthi Natarajan, Union Environment and Forests Minister, India).

developed and developing countries, but rather call for “the highest possible mitigation efforts of all Parties”. The LMDC has been particular vocal in arguing for CBDR/RC as the bedrock of the ADP process, and against shifting responsibility for increasing mitigation efforts from developed to developing countries. Hence, the primary means of raising ambition should be through increased commitments of A1 Parties to the second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol, with parallel efforts by developed countries that are not Parties to the second commitment period under the Ad Hoc Working Group on Long-term Cooperative Action (AWG-LCA). LMDC notes that the total emissions reductions pledged by developing countries linked to the Cancún Agreements are greater in absolute terms than the reductions pledged by developed countries, and that if all developed countries increased their 2020 pledges to 40 per cent below 1990 levels, this would close the emissions gap entirely.

As such, CBDR/RC can be seen as a safeguard against binding commitments from NA1. A key recurring argument of the LMDC is that universality is not the same as uniformity, as is evident from one of their earliest submissions (Argentina ADP submission 25.05.12). Hence, when agreeing to the term “applicable to all” in reference to the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action, LMDC argues that this means it is applicable to all Parties in a similar way to how the Convention and the Kyoto Protocol are applicable to all Parties. However, this term does not mean that the outcome must be such that all Parties undertake uniform or similar types and levels of obligations. LMDC emphasises that the ‘contributions’ made by NA1 as a result of COP 19 should not be subjected to review or the so-called two-step for review of efforts of developing countries. The reasoning is that any framework, which seeks to determine for developing countries what they should contribute in any future regime, is not acceptable and goes against the principles of equity, CBDR/RC, and historical responsibility (LMDC submission ADP 2-3 18.11.13). Instead developing countries have the right to prioritise development (poverty eradication, access to utilities etc.) over emissions reductions. One observer also pointed out that some LMDC countries might have severe difficulties in implementing a review process and thus do not want this added obligation (interview with representative of large NGO 23.10.14).

The LMDC wishes to stay with the Convention. Not ‘only’ to preserve the principles of CBDR/RC and Equity, but also to secure proportionality (historical responsibility) in a future agreement. LMDC argues that altering the Convention risks hampering developing countries’ ability to combat climate change.

“It’s still very relevant, and we think it should be protected. If it is set aside, we have nothing, and what we will have is a hugely disproportionate or biased agreement. It will be something that will prejudice the interests of the most vulnerable nations on Earth because the Convention is something we have not even fully implemented.”
(Interview Yeb Sano, Philippines delegation, EENEWS).

This ties together with the LMDC’s firm stand against supplementary initiatives outside of the UNFCCC – the “international co-operative initiatives”. The criticism is that previous attempts to go outside the Convention have failed, that such new initiatives are no substitute

for actions under the UNFCCC and the KP, and if they are considered as solutions they must be consistent with UNFCCC principles (RTCC interview Claudia Salerno Caldera, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela 2013).

For the LMDC, the provision of finance, technology transfer and capacity-building are also core aspects of the solutions to climate change (LMDC ADP Submission 13.03.13). Actions on climate change by NA1 Parties must be supported by A1 through them. The contributions by NA1 Parties (such as those made at Cancun, COP 16, 2010) depend upon the support of A1. As such, the LMDC again stresses the leadership and responsibilities of A1 as the *sine qua non* of a future climate regime. For LMDC countries in the African Group, finance in particular is paramount, as it determines the level of ambition for these countries (Vincent Makonga, Minister of Environment, Nature Conservation and Tourism, DRC, High-Level Segment November 21, 2013). Regarding finance, the LMDC frequently echoes the language of ALBA members in stressing the need for non-market mechanisms (LMDC submission 24.09.13) and that the role of the private market in GCF is only subsidiary (LMDC submission 18.11.13). Last but not least, LMDC is echoing other developing countries and call for developed countries to do more on Loss and Damage. LMDC demands that NA1 parties pay for developing countries' necessary actions. A1 parties' mitigation and climate related finance should not be seen as a service, but as A1 repaying their carbon debt.

4.3. The dominant narrative and LMDC identity

We have identified five characteristics of the LMDC that form the coherent LMDC identity: 1) The LMDC is the true and natural representative of G77 interests. 2) The LMDC sees itself as a guardian of the Convention and its principles, especially CBDR/RC and equity. 3) The LMDC is not a formal negotiation group, but its existence is closely tied with the G77. 4) The LMDC is not a "blocker". And 5) Developing countries are the victims not the culprits.

1) The LMDC's self-understanding and self-projection is couched in references to the global South – particularly to the G77 group – and to the Convention as the common ground. The Elders might have played a central role in getting the LMDC together, but the image the LMDC portrays is that a common identity based on common interests and solidarity has existed for a long time. Furthermore, one Chinese interviewee (expert from NCSC) even sees LMDC as "a formally organized coalition under the G77. It is a sub-group." The image of LMDC formally under G77 and based on common interests is a way of constructing the LMDC as a natural and legitimate developing country community, thereby making it stronger internally and externally, i.e. protecting it from attacks on its fluidity or the image of it as consisting of blockers or hardliners.

2) The LMDC sees itself as protecting the Convention from being dismantled. In LMDC participants' view, developing countries agreed to agree on a post-2020 framework, but not a re-negotiation of the Convention (high-level LMDC negotiator 25.10.14). In the LMDC narrative the 're-interpretation' of especially CBDR/RC towards 'universal applicability' in the Durban Platform is a critical break with what they agreed to. Instead all agreements must fall within the Conventions' principles. In the view of the LMDC, changing the rules of the Convention will pre-empt the outcome of the post-2020 framework. This will deflate the responsibilities of A1, and dilute the whole UN process as such. "Parties would

then do what they want, when they want, how they want" (high-level LMDC negotiator 24.10.14).

3) The LMDC states that it is not a negotiation group, i.e. G77 is the formal negotiation group. Again, this is a narrative technique that makes it difficult to attack the LMDC, because it only exists informally in negotiations. The LMDC might have been inspired by how the Cartagena Dialogue works – another new political group with a narrative of not being a group. The technique allows these “groups” to move and act more informally, which makes it difficult to pinpoint individual contributions to statements, submissions, etc. However, whereas Cartagena is almost silent in terms of direct submissions and statements, the LMDC is very active and vocal. This can be partly explained by the need to crowd out others, so that it appears that the LMDC really represents G77. One informant said the LMDC also applies this tactic of crowding out other perspectives within G77 meetings, but the statement has not been confirmed. Over time, the organization and coordination of LMDC have grown. One senior AILAC delegate said LMDC negotiators receive messages on their screens during Plenaries to coordinate their statements. As evident from their regular coordination meetings, LMDC statements and submission, they appear more and more as an official political group.

4) The LMDC does not see itself as a “blocker” and reacts strongly to being called so. As a counter-argument, LMDC is trying to portray itself as able to come up with solutions. Despite different backgrounds and motives for participation, LMDC participants can all subscribe to the elements of securing and strengthening the G77 unity and the Convention. Their perspectives on climate negotiations are influenced by what they see as a lack of A1 action and issues of poverty and vulnerability to climate change on a domestic level. LMDC solutions begin with the general issues in negotiations (see section on solutions below).

5) Lastly, in the LMDC narrative, developing countries are seen as *victims* of climate change, having less (or no) historical responsibility. The character of victim also features strongly in the narrative about neo-colonialism. As such, LMDC participants were less economically developed and have contributed less to atmospheric CO₂ concentrations (at least on a per capita basis). Furthermore, several of our interviewees indicate that in many of the LMDC participating countries there are clear neo-colonial connotations in the domestic debate on climate change, which sometimes spills over into UNFCCC negotiations. In this context, climate change politics is yet another example of the developed countries determining what the developing countries should do. Developed countries are seen as running away from their own responsibilities and instead hampering efforts on poverty reduction and development, thereby breaching developing countries’ sovereign rights.

4.4. Alternative narratives in and about LMDC

We also explore some alternative narratives or variations in the main narrative. LMDC is a diverse group of countries and participating countries do come with different foci and interests. In this section, we first investigate various views expressed on differentiation within the NA1 category (through statements, submissions and interviews). We then discuss questions relating to LMDC identity and action as a group of blockers or whether or not LMDC identity and action are based on genuine and legitimate developing country interests.

Differentiation may be approached in a hierarchical fashion. At the first (and top) level LMDC highlights the need to uphold a strong differentiation between developed and developing countries. The LMDC is very vocal on this, and it takes many forms in almost all sub-negotiations with references to the Convention, CBDR/RC and equity, A1 countries' historical responsibility, and that further burdens (i.e. because of the emissions gap) should not be placed on developing countries. LMDC submissions and statements take a clear stand in defence of the current binary differentiation, with frequent references to historical responsibility and equity (see above). LMDC wants to see developed countries show the way forward and live up to their obligations (not deflect them onto NA1) before they can commit to any form of climate action. Moreover, it is often pointed out that developing countries are indeed already doing much to combat climate change, despite the relative lower capacities to do so, and have pledged greater emissions reductions following the Cancun Accord.

Now, and only after A1-NA1 differentiation is recognised, some LMDC members include a second level of differentiation. There can be differentiation between developing countries – and/or within a developing country with (great) differences in income distribution. This approach is based on a narrative of “a distribution of the right to development.” Or what is sometimes referred to as “the greenhouse development rights approach” (Interview with Yeb Saño, Philippines delegation EENEWS). Interestingly, some of the countries where we find this alternative narrative are China and India – and of course the members of LDC and AOSIS. More research needs to be done on OPEC countries. We do not expect Saudi Arabia to work for this type of differentiation, but a country like Qatar might be more open to it as evidenced by Qatar's investments in renewable energy and participation in green growth cooperation with Denmark, etc.

A Chinese negotiator said “we cannot treat China the same way as a Least Developed Country. We cannot treat bigger developing countries, emerging economies like this. So, first we would like the Nordic countries to admit the differences between developed and developing countries, but it is also ok with us that the Nordic countries to agree that, to recognize the differentiation between developing countries.” (Interview with Chinese negotiator 10.06.14) (Personal communications with another Chinese negotiator supports that differentiation among non-Annex I countries is acceptable provided the distinction between Annex I and non-Annex I is maintained.) The principle of equity would still need to be acknowledged and reflected, as well as the right to ‘inclusive growth’, but it could be that the negotiations could look at a methodology by which NA1 also share some of the burden. The focus would be more on the capacity of some developing countries to act than on their historic responsibilities (Interview with high-level LMDC negotiator 05.06.14)

The LMDC has often been seen by others, especially developed countries, as a group of blockers in the climate negotiations. This section takes a deeper look at this and discusses the actions of the LMDC – are LMDC participating countries blockers or do they represent a core narrative in the negotiations?

“Now, the role is clear. We want to preserve the convention. We also want to put forward a very strong developing country voice, because, after all is said and done, we arrive at a compromise...So if there is no strong developing country voice, we will arrive at something that is disadvantageous to the poorest people in the world. We

don't want that to happen. So that's why we endeavour to constantly build a strong developing country voice in the negotiations on every front.” (Interview with high-level negotiator for the Philippines, 05 June 2014).

This quote suggests that there is a strategic agenda at play. From this view, the LMDC was formed for a specific purpose – to keep a strong and unified NA1 position in the negotiations. This can be seen as a reaction: to conflicting views on CBDR/RC amongst developing countries; to a concern that the post-2020 framework will bring binding obligations to NA1 Parties; and to NA1 critique of BASIC not being inclusive enough.⁵ This view gives the impression of a more reactive than proactive group (Conversation with NGO representative with close ties to LMDC negotiators, 05 June 2014).

The LMDC can be seen as a powerful negotiation tool. They “spearhead the attack” for the G77 on various issues in particular CBDR/RC and equity (Interview with India-based NGO representative of large international NGO network, 5 June 2014). LMDC is a sort of BASIC (plus) where a powerful group of countries set the agenda while less powerful countries provide legitimacy (Interview with India-based NGO representative 05.06.14). Indeed, the LMDC appears, to some extent, to have taken over the role of BASIC as a group of powerful developing countries putting pressure on A1 Parties (Blaxekjær and Nielsen 2014). From this view the LMDC does not represent the views of developing countries at large, but mainly the hardliners and is a platform for them to keep a firm rhetoric on core issues.

On the other hand, LMDC appears to capture an existing rhetoric and views held by several members of the G77 (when listening to their statements) indicating that the LMDC rhetoric is not purely a strategic or reactive imperative, but also a movement that captures a certain core narrative amongst developing countries. Amongst several of the interviewees there was a sense that the LMDC did not emerge in response to or in reaction to the Durban Platform, but that they have been there for a while, and can perhaps be more connected to a general dismay with A1 parties not living up to their commitments. Indeed, interviews with non-LMDC members have stated that the LMDC does represent a voice that needs to be there, and LMDC is not just a blocker (interview high-level AILAC negotiator 24.10.14). In this view, the LMDC represents a forum and a platform that is based on a couple of sensitive issues that strike a chord amongst several NA1 countries as well as other stakeholders. This includes frustrations with a lack of leadership by A1 Parties

“We are by no means a nay-sayer. We only object to any prescriptive policies that are dictated to us by others who are actually not doing anything to combat climate change.” (Interview by The Hindu with Jayanthi Natarajan, Union Environment and Forests Minister, India, 11 November, 2013).

⁵ Notably former Sudanese Ambassador to the UN (lead G77 negotiator) Lumumba Di-Aping spoke out against the exclusion of Africa from the final negotiations and compared the Copenhagen Accord to the Holocaust (Nicaragua, Cuba, Venezuela, Bolivia, and Tuvalu were also vocal opponents) (Penetrante 2011).

There seems to be a general concern amongst the LMDCs that A1 Parties have not fulfilled their obligations and instead now want more action from NA1 Parties.

“You can’t go down and say look I know I am not doing as much as I claim to do but you better start doing more.” (RTCC interview with Nitin Desai, WWF).

LMDC members regard themselves as standard bearers of fairness and equity, holding rich nations to account for their historical responsibility.

Furthermore there are indications that LMDC is engaged in active dialogue with other NA1 groups. The LMDC has regular meetings with the LDCs, and even has bilateral meetings with AILAC (e.g. in the Bonn session, October 2014). Another indicator is that both AILAC and LMDC countries are listed in the recent ‘Education Submission’ (ADP 2-6, October 30). One senior LMDC delegate stated that he was happy to see more conversions amongst NA1 groups recently. He stated that there were some disagreement between especially AILAC and LMDC earlier, but that things are changing and he emphasized that there is not a big divide amongst NA1 groups as some people are proposing (interview 25.10.14). However, we cannot rule out that this is part of LMDC strategy to portray itself as a natural and legitimate group representing the “true” interests of G77.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the identified problems and solutions of UNFCCC negotiations seen from the LMDC’s perspective, must be understood in relation to what we have identified as the core of the LMDC narrative or the LMDC identity: 1) The LMDC is the true and natural representative of G77 interests. 2) The LMDC sees itself as a guardian of the Convention and its principles, especially CBDR/RC and equity. 3) The LMDC is not a formal negotiation group, but its existence is closely tied with the G77. 4) The LMDC is not a “blocker”. And 5) Developing countries are the victims not the culprits. Furthermore, the LMDC is portrayed both internally and externally through dominant narrative, however, an alternative narrative have also been identified. The dominant narrative is a story about the LMDC as the strategic spearhead of attack for G77 on especially CBDR/RC. The alternative narrative is a more value-based story where the LMDC is seen to capture a certain long-lasting critique of A1 not living up to their commitments and preventing them from further backsliding on their responsibilities, and which has found common ground amongst a diverse set of developing countries. The LMDC itself acts in ways that are consistent with both narratives and certainly some countries may see either of these LMDC characters as more prevalent. Any policy analysis of the LMDC leading up to COP21 in Paris needs to critically reflect on these different perspectives on the LMDC’s narrative position in UNFCCC negotiations.

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Appendix

Table 1: Overview of Observations and Interviews

Name of event	Place of event	Time of event	Name of observer
COP 17 CMP7	Durban, South Africa	28 November – 9 December 2011	Lau Blaxekjær, Tobias Nielsen,
COP 18 CMP8	Doha, Qatar	30 November – 7 December 2012	Lau Blaxekjær
COP 19 CMP9	Warsaw, Poland	13–21 November 2013	Lau Blaxekjær, Tobias Nielsen,
ADP 2.5	Bonn, Germany	4-15 June 2014	Lau Blaxekjær
ADP 2.6	Bonn, Germany	20-25 October 2014	Tobias Nielsen
COP20 CMP10	Lima, Peru	1-13 December 2014	Lau Blaxekjær, Tobias Nielsen

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