

Capacity building, beyond training

Reflections on the ecbi Training and Support Programme 15 years after it was initiated



ANJU SHARMA

In 2009, Gebru Jember Endalew, an experienced meteorologist from Ethiopia, attended an ecbi Regional Training Workshop for climate change negotiators in Addis Ababa. He later **identified** this experience as the “starting point” for his path as a climate negotiator. His own commitment was evident and in 2011, Endalew received an annual ecbi bursary to support his participation in the climate negotiations under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), as a member of his national negotiating team.

Six years later, in 2017, Endalew was appointed Chair of the **Least Developed Countries (LDC) Climate Group**. Attending subsequent ecbi Regional Training Workshops in his new role of trainer instead of trainee, Endalew would recount his story to other aspiring negotiators. He was generous in recognising the role of ecbi support at the start of his career as a negotiator, and during his tenure as LDC Chair. His story, and the stories of other negotiators who similarly put their training to good use to strengthen the voice of vulnerable but under-represented countries in the UNFCCC negotiations, has since inspired many trainees. Like Endalew, many of the trainees are now regular trainers in the ecbi Workshops.

When the ecbi Training and Support Programme (TSP) was initiated in 2005, the UNFCCC process was waking up from the hang-over of negotiating the Kyoto Protocol and its rules, and making sure that it came into effect with sufficient ratifications. The Kyoto Protocol was heavily mitigation-focused, and many developing countries had played a somewhat ringside role in its negotiation, since they were exempt from taking on mitigation commitments by the

Berlin Mandate. As the discussions on the future of the Kyoto Protocol were initiated by the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the UNFCCC in Montreal in 2005, however, it was time for developing countries to take on a more active role – not only in deciding the future of mitigation action, but also in ensuring that dealing with the impacts of climate change received its due attention from the global community.

However, one of several layers of inequity in the UNFCCC negotiations was (and is) that of representation. Developed countries had large delegations, with members with varied specialisations that are necessary in the technical and complex climate negotiations. Many developing countries, particularly least developed ones, however, were represented by one or two member delegations, many without any background in either climate change or negotiating in a UN forum. The TSP was created to level this playing field.

Since 2005, about 45 Regional Training Workshops and Pre-COP Workshops (and one Training Webinar) have been organised, to train well over 1000 new negotiators from climate vulnerable countries in Africa and Asia (a few workshops were also held in Latin America and the Caribbean). National Focal Points are engaged in nominating participants to the workshops, to ensure they are attended by negotiators who have the backing of their national delegations. The two-day Regional Training Workshops focus on giving negotiators a deeper understanding of thematic issues, and practicing negotiating skills. The Pre-COP workshops, held before annual COPs, are shorter and focus on familiarising newcomers to the agenda of the COP, key priority issues for developing countries that will be discussed at the Conference, and more practical information like how to source information and how to organise themselves to be more effective. The LDC Climate Chairs, who have all participated in the Regional Training Workshops and in Pre-COP Workshops, usually present the priorities for the Group.

Initially, funding was sought separately for each workshop. However, this resulted in uncertainty and lack of continuity, as workshops could not be held during some years when funding wasn't available. Programmatic funding was sought and obtained for a five-year period in 2015, enabling a longer-term view and focus on improving effectiveness. Promising candidates, for instance, could be offered the chance to participate in more than one training.

Support was also provided to developing country negotiators during the negotiations. At first, this was done informally – the two founders of the ecbi, Saleemul Huq and Benito Müller, would set up “shop” in a prominent place at negotiating venues, and made sure their growing network of negotiators knew where to find them. They also advised the LDC Climate Group, which was formed in 2001 at Huq's urging. Over time, this role was formalised – the [International Institute for Environment and Development](#) (IIED), where Huq then headed a climate change team, has formally provided support to the LDC Group Chair and its members, and worked with the Group to institutionalise elements like Group meetings before negotiating sessions, and the appointment of thematic leads for the Group.

Although the trainees were nominated by National Focal Points (NFPs), it became clear that their inclusion in national negotiating teams could not be guaranteed. ecbi introduced a limited number of bursaries to support the participation of outstanding trainees in 2011, to ensure their participation at least over the period of a year, and give them time to prove their worth to their national delegations.

While the Regional Training Workshops were focused on thematic areas of key concern to developing countries initially, over time, practical sessions were included in the agenda, to familiarise trainees with the formal negotiating procedures of the UNFCCC, and to give them a chance to practice making interventions, formulating group positions, and networking to win support for their positions.

Background papers on thematic topics were produced to familiarise trainees with the history and status of each topic, and the practice of engaging negotiators in the production of the background papers as a further capacity building measure was adopted. As these tended to get out of date quickly, they were replaced by a series of [Pocket Guides](#), which are updated regularly. (The Guides also found an audience outside of the Workshop trainees, and are popular with seasoned and novice negotiators from developing and developed countries alike).

Another form of inequity in the UNFCCC negotiating process is the imbalance among male and female negotiators. Efforts were therefore made to get NFPs to nominate women trainees, and a decision was taken to offer the bursaries exclusively to women delegates. The inclusion of a session on gender in the agenda of the Training Workshops, and

closer ties with the [Women's Environment and Development Organization](#), has strengthened the contribution of the TSP to addressing this imbalance.

A key strength of the ecbi has been its network of senior negotiators, the focus of the trust-building ecbi Fellowship Programme led by [Oxford Climate Policy](#). We have been able to call upon this network of experienced negotiators to participate as trainers in the Workshops, to mentor promising trainees, and to provide them with opportunities to grow. This important mentoring element is now being further developed – ecbi piloted formal mentorships for new women negotiators in 2018 and 2019, and is working to make this a longer-term programme. Senior women negotiators from developing and developed countries are asked to take younger colleagues under their wing, to guide and inspire them in the negotiations. Resource people are also at hand during the negotiations to provide support, including through legal expertise provided on demand by ecbi partner [Legal Response International](#). This helps us ensure that the capacity development process for new negotiators continues beyond training workshops.

While these evolving elements have helped us strengthen the Programme, the one consistent element that has been our biggest strength from the start is the trust of developing country negotiators, that the training and advice we provide will be led by their priorities and concerns.

More information on the Training Workshops:

- [South and South East Asia Training Workshops](#)
- [Anglophone Africa Training Workshops](#)
- [Francophone Africa Training Workshops](#)
- [Pre-COP Training Workshops](#)
- [Miscellaneous Training Activities](#)
- [Support Activities](#)