

# Meeting expectations on transparency and more:

how strengthening capacity for climate reporting is benefitting Mauritania and Malawi

Case study

March 2022



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## More on this case study

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Camara, IF, Jallow, AAK, Jallow, BZ and Swaby, GSA (2021) Towards a low-carbon climate-resilient future. Developing The Gambia's 2050 Climate Vision. IIED, London.  
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Ayalew, MM, Gebreyes, BY and Tenzing, J (2020) Transitioning to a low-carbon economy. Lessons from Ethiopia's progressive climate policy. IIED, London. [pubs.iied.org/17768IIED](https://pubs.iied.org/17768IIED)

Swaby, GSA and Sokolowski, A (2020) Long-term planning for climate and development. Ideas from and for the Least Developed Countries. IIED, London. [pubs.iied.org/17759IIED](https://pubs.iied.org/17759IIED)

Namgyel, T, Gebreyes, BY and Tenzing, J (2018) From global ambition to country action. Low-carbon climate-resilient development in Bhutan. IIED, London. [pubs.iied.org/17477IIED](https://pubs.iied.org/17477IIED)

## Produced by IIED's Climate Change Group

Working in collaboration with partner organisations and individuals in developing countries, the Climate Change Group has been leading the field on adaptation to climate change issues.



Published by IIED, March 2022

Aragon, I, Alcobé, F, Idriss, YJD, EL Wavi, SM, Oumar, F and Dah, S (2022) Meeting expectations on transparency and more: how strengthening capacity for climate reporting is benefitting Mauritania and Malawi. IIED, London.

<http://pubs.iied.org/20706iied>

ISBN 978-1-78431-942-7

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# CONTENTS

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Mauritania: using international standards to spur national change</b>	<b>4</b>
Create a reporting structure equal to ambition	5
Embed a learning culture: prepare, try, reflect, refine	7
Use international cues to evolve national systems	7
<b>Malawi: taking a holistic approach to achieving transparency</b>	<b>10</b>
Leverage international support	10
Establish an integrated approach to data	11
Think across global agendas	11
Ensure new systems work for domestic agendas	11
Invest in people as well as systems	12
<b>Conclusion and transferable lessons</b>	<b>14</b>
Learn by doing: across levels, across borders	14
Seek political buy-in	14
Design 'future proof' whole-system solutions	14
Apply for targeted support	15
Looking ahead	15
<b>Notes</b>	<b>16</b>

# 01

## Introduction

The Paris Agreement, the climate regime the world adopted in 2015, relies on transparency. With countries deciding their own contributions to the global effort to address climate change, transparent reporting is crucial to identify whether nationally determined targets are being met and to incentivise increases in ambition. Transparency is not a new notion in this area — Paris' Enhanced Transparency Framework (ETF) builds on an existing transparency system under the United Nations Framework Convention (UNFCCC) — but achieving it can be a challenge.

While developed countries have engaged in transparency arrangements under the UNFCCC for decades, reporting often and in detail, developing countries have accrued substantially less reporting experience, particularly the Least Developed Countries (LDCs). These countries have not had the opportunity to strengthen their institutions, human resources and data collection to the levels required by the Paris Agreement's 'enhanced' transparency system, which calls for more frequent and comprehensive reporting than ever before.

The clock is ticking: the first transparency reports under the ETF are due in 2024, and every two years thereafter. In preparation for reporting, countries can use the interim years effectively by: assessing their overall readiness to comply with the ETF; looking at reporting experience so far and existing arrangements; and identifying gaps, challenges and capacity-building needs.

Malawi and Mauritania are both using the evolving reporting expectations under the United Nations Framework Convention on

Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Paris Agreement to strengthen national institutions to implement transparency. Their efforts reveal some of the opportunities and benefits that arise from preparing to nationally implement the ETF. Both countries model a forward-looking vision that can support others — particularly fellow LDCs — to embark on similar journeys.





Production of biomass briquettes in Malawi as alternative renewable energy source for cooking produced from crop and biomass residues using screw machines.

# 02

## Mauritania: using international standards to spur national change

Mauritania is a coastal country in northwest Africa covering 1,03 million km<sup>2</sup>. Two-thirds of the country is desert, with approximately 0.5% of land defined as arable and 14% as pastoral.<sup>1</sup> The majority of Mauritania's population — approximately 4.5 million people — live in cities in the south of the country. The national economy is based primarily on agriculture, livestock, fishing and minerals.<sup>2</sup>

Despite facing many development challenges, Mauritania has earned its reputation as a frontrunner in national climate reporting:<sup>1</sup>

- In 2016, it was the first LDC to submit a biennial update report (BUR), accompanied by a national inventory report (see Box 1)

- At time of writing, it is the only LDC to have submitted two BURs and four national communications.

This impressive performance is based on the development of a simple but solid monitoring, reporting and verification (MRV) structure which integrates a wide range of national and local-level government agencies. Here, we explore how Mauritania achieved this and is now looking beyond it.

### Box 1. Biennial update reports (BURs)

These reports are required by the UNFCCC from 'non-Annex I' countries — developing nations — and the core elements include:

- An update on national Greenhouse Gas (GHG) inventories;
- Information on mitigation actions taken and the effects; and
- An outline of constraints, gaps, needs and support received.<sup>3</sup>



## Create a reporting structure equal to ambition

Having set the goal of submitting a BUR in 2016, Mauritania began by creating an MRV structure able to support this ambition (see Figure 1). This MRV — the country's first and still in use — brought together three core elements:

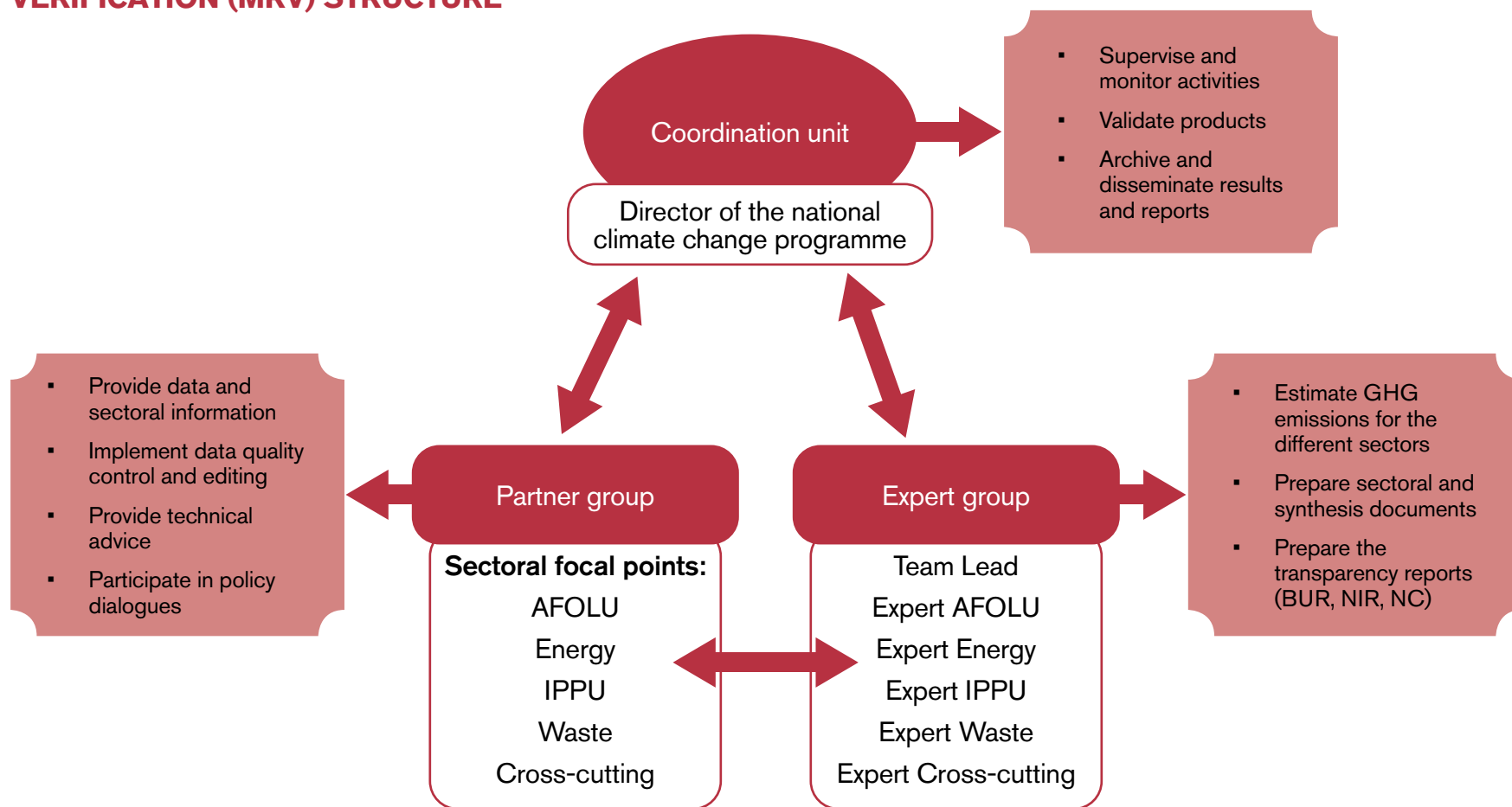
- A **coordination unit**: under the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development
- A **partners' group**: a network of representatives of ministries and other regional governmental agencies producing and collecting climate-related information
- An **experts' group**: a team of independent consultants.

With data provided by the partner's group, and oversight and guidance from the coordination unit, the experts' group prepares the national GHG inventory and BUR. The reports are then reviewed by the partner's group and ultimately published and disseminated by the coordination unit.



Livestock, such as cows, are a significant part of Mauritania's economy.

**FIGURE 1. MAURITANIA'S CURRENT CLIMATE MONITORING, REPORTING AND VERIFICATION (MRV) STRUCTURE**



AFOLU: agriculture, forestry and other land use; IPPU: industrial processes and product use; NC: national communication; NIR: national inventory report; GHG: greenhouse gas.

Adapted with permission from: Mauritania (2021) Biennial update report (BUR). BUR 2. <https://unfccc.int/documents/271309>



## Embed a learning culture: prepare, try, reflect, refine

**Learn by doing.** Preparing national communications and BURs gave Mauritania a deep understanding of its technical and institutional gaps and needs at national level. Going through the BUR's technical analysis – receiving feedback and exchanging views with other experts from developed and developing countries – was vital in identifying the country's next step: moving from the simple institutional arrangement of the current MRV to a more complete and formalised domestic system. In the years working on consecutive reports, Mauritania not only improved its reporting, but also developed a proposal for a new national MRV system: one both adapted to the country's circumstances and able to meet the testing requirements of the ETF (see Figure 2). It is due to launch by the end of 2023.

### Engage and coordinate stakeholders.

To prepare national communications and BURs, different types of information must be collected from multiple sources on a regular basis and then processed into a useful form. This proved challenging for Mauritania's early reports, which exposed a gap: there was no formal process to engage all the sectoral institutions that develop and gather climate-related information (these include ministries and other levels of government, agencies, universities, industries, civil society and others). To enable the necessary data

sharing, Mauritania developed and formalised a coordination mechanism among the relevant ministries. It also established an online knowledge management platform that supports the process of defining and assessing the effects of mitigation action.

**Deliver continuous training.** Like many LDCs, Mauritania lacked the civil service experts needed to meet international climate reporting criteria and has experienced high staff turnover. The country sought to overcome these barriers through frequent training and awareness-raising activities at the national level, and by supporting Mauritanian experts to join regional workshops and other capacity-building opportunities. Continuous training has proven key in retaining a good number of sectoral experts who are able to support various stages of the reporting process, such as compiling information, making estimations and improving data quality. As a complementary activity, Mauritania has developed and maintains a database of trained professionals – a useful tool to keep track of expertise and get them involved in the process.

## Use international cues to evolve national systems

**Design systems fit for the future.** By applying the learning described above, Mauritania is preparing to deliver its first enhanced transparency report. The redesign of Mauritania's MRV structure in

line with the ETF rules (see Figure 2) was undertaken by the Directorate of Climate and Green Economy, based in the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development. The revised workplan was developed in 2019; the Ministry aims to launch the proposed MRV system by the end of 2023. The main objective of the proposed MRV structure is to guide the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the country's climate change programme and the implementation of Mauritania's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC).

The redesigned MRV structure incorporates thematic groups under a national network of sectoral focal points; this will allow Mauritania to report on all the information required by the upcoming 'biennial transparency reports' (BTRs). The set of proposed working groups (Finance, Mitigation, and others detailed in Figure 2) will increasingly be staffed by invested local experts. As part of the government structure, they will be able to cover new and/or more detailed reporting elements such as adaptation and mitigation actions and support needed.

But to implement the proposed MRV and to continue developing sound institutional arrangements that meet international reporting standards, Mauritania must:

- Undertake adequate and ongoing capacity-building action
- Access international support.

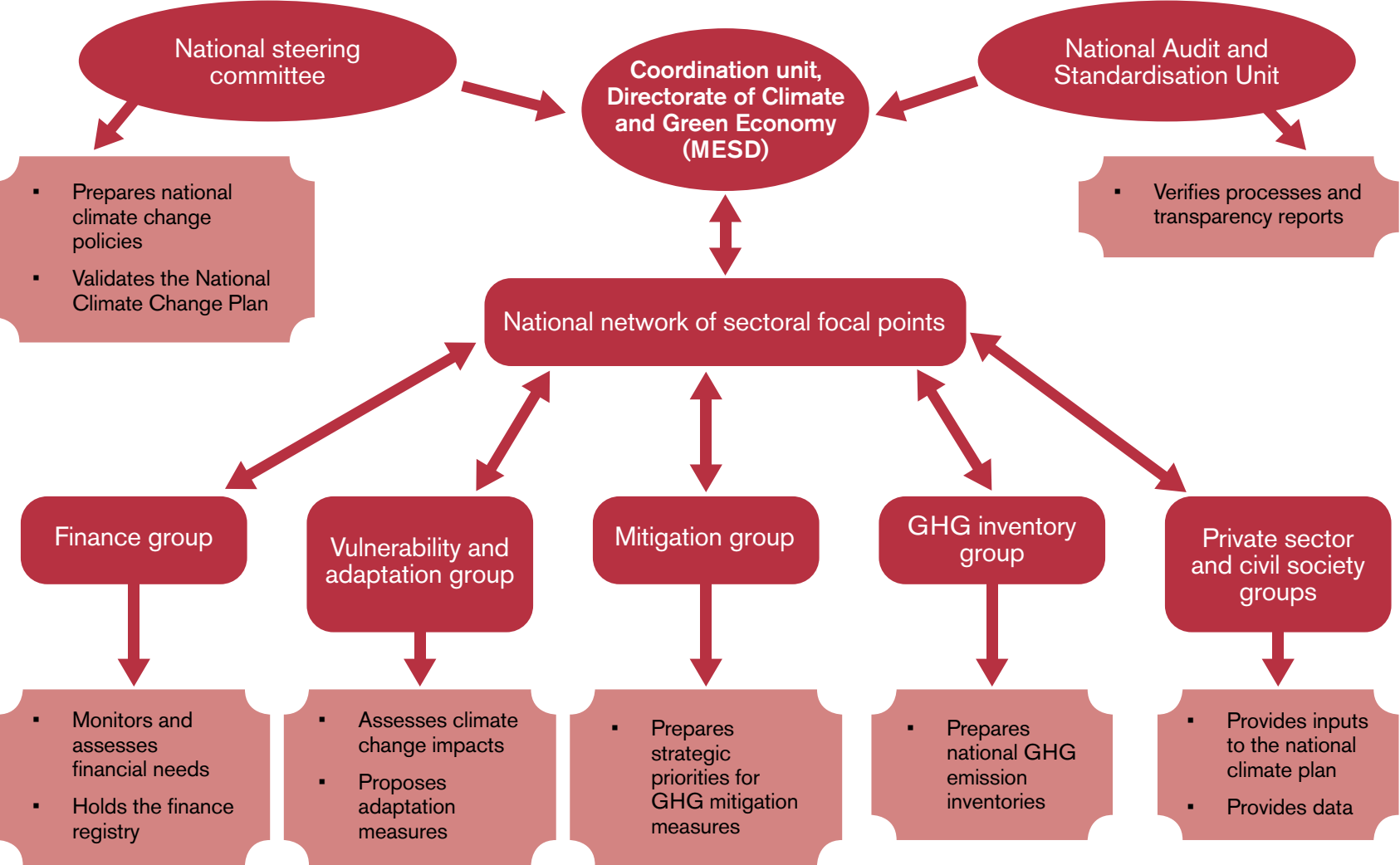
**Increase technical capacity.** Mauritania still faces challenges in terms of technical capacity to increase the quality and completeness of its reports. Greater expertise is needed, for example, to undertake mitigation and support assessments; collect and manage relevant data; apply methods for estimating GHG emissions; and monitor the implementation of mitigation measures. Moreover, the ETF introduces new reporting requirements, demanding even more technical know-how. To overcome this challenge, Mauritania will increase its capacity-building efforts through a recently approved project supported by the Capacity-Building Initiative for Transparency (CBIT, see Box 2 on page 11).

**Seek political buy-in.** Mauritania is working to increase political buy-in by bringing visibility to international expectations for transparency within climate reporting at high-level governance. The country is also integrating planning for reporting into other national planning processes, such as the National Strategy for Food Security and the current Strategy for Accelerated Growth and Shared Prosperity (SCAPP) — the country's development vision for 2020–2030.



Camels in the desert, Mauritania. Two-thirds of the country is desert, with approximately 0.5% of land defined as arable and 14% as pastoral.

**FIGURE 2. MAURITANIA’S PROPOSED MONITORING, REPORTING AND VERIFICATION (MRV) STRUCTURE, DUE TO LAUNCH IN 2023**



MESD: Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development.

Adapted with permission from: Mauritania (2021) Biennial update report (BUR). BUR 2. <https://unfccc.int/documents/271309>



# 03

## Malawi: taking a holistic approach to achieving transparency

Malawi is a narrow, landlocked country in Southern Africa, covering 118,500 km<sup>2</sup>.<sup>4</sup> It is considered one of the sub-Saharan African countries most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change,<sup>5</sup> largely due to its dependence on rain-fed agriculture. Overall, 80% of the approximately 18 million population depends on some form of agriculture.<sup>4</sup>

Malawi has very low GHG emissions, just 0.04% of global emissions in 2015. But despite its limited contribution to the climate crisis, Malawi has been a strong advocate for ambition: its updated NDC, submitted in July 2021, reaffirms the country's commitment to play a role in cutting global GHG emissions while also increasing resilience through adaptation.

Malawi's ambition is reflected not just in terms of its goals, but in how it plans to track and report on them. Here, we will explore the transformational capacity-building project that Malawi has embarked on to implement the ETF.

### Leverage international support

Alongside Mauritania, Malawi is one of the LDCs to access project funding from the CBIT (see Box 2). The overall objective of CBIT-supported 'Malawi Climate Transparency Framework' project is to strengthen the capacity of national institutions and national experts to meet the requirements of the ETF; it runs from January 2021 to June 2023.

Two key factors in the project proposal's success were:

- That all key stakeholders were involved in its development
- The gaps the country needed to fill to effectively implement the ETF were well identified and articulated from the outset, namely:
  - Weak institutional arrangements
  - Lack of data collection and storage system
  - Lack of tools of data collection, analysis and archiving resulting in inadequate availability of data

- Lack of expertise for reporting
- Inadequate finance.

## Establish an integrated approach to data

A core part of the project is establishing an online platform for climate change data management. The data collected on this integrated platform will enable Malawi to track NDC implementation, GHG emissions, climate actions, and support needed and received. The platform will be able to support the entire data management lifecycle: from collection and analysis, to publishing and archiving. This will be fundamental to meeting ETF reporting requirements.

When operational, the platform will mark a significant departure for Malawi. At present, climate-relevant data at sectoral level is barely collected, and where it is collected, is not compatible with the requirements of the ETF, requiring a huge manual investment to adapt it for use. A high-functioning and coordinated data management system will be a great innovation for the country, representing a meaningful transition from fragmented processes to an organised and permanent approach.

## Think across global agendas

At the same time as seeking to implement the Paris Agreement, developing countries are also advancing the 2030 Agenda for

Sustainable Development. Malawi's data management platform will improve availability of climate change data not only for reporting under the Paris Agreement but also for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This effort to build greater synergy across the climate and SDG agendas will reduce duplication and support more integrated and informed decision making. This speaks volumes about Malawi's interest in contributing effectively and actively towards global commitments and meeting the development needs of its own people.

## Ensure new systems work for domestic agendas

For Malawi, meeting global transparency standards is about more than contributing to international reporting. The CBIT-supported project is about realising a vision of effectiveness that offers concrete national-level benefits: notably, improving access to and use of data, and ensuring that it is available for national planning in support of climate-sensitive sectors such as land use and agriculture.

The online data management platform will inform community actions and local development plans, as well as external responses that seek to support Malawi to develop in a climate-compatible way. For example, the platform could inform community actions or local policies to support smallholder farmers improve methods of

## Box 2. The Capacity-building Initiative for Transparency (CBIT)

The Paris Agreement established the CBIT to assist developing countries to meet the requirements of the ETF; countries seeking support apply through the Global Environment Facility (GEF).

CBIT projects should enable countries to establish or strengthen their in-house capacity to track progress on national commitments made under the Paris Agreement and to produce more comprehensive and accurate reports.

Project activities supported by CBIT include training for public institutions (including universities), inter-institutional coordination, regional cooperation and knowledge sharing, the enhancement of national systems and frameworks to improve quality of GHG data, to track climate finance and to monitor adaptation progress.

farming to reduce methane (CH<sub>4</sub>) and carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions from livestock and crop production respectively. Over time, this will allow the tracking of environmental sustainability — one of the enablers identified in Malawi's national vision, published in 2021 ('Malawi 2063: An Inclusively Wealthy and Self-reliant Nation').

## Invest in people as well as systems

The Malawi Climate Transparency Framework project has a strong emphasis on developing human resources: it seeks to build the capacities of individuals and institutions and to ensure that gains are retained long after the CBIT funding ends. Moreover, Malawi's emphasis on developing people tackles one of the core challenges to gaining buy-in for meeting Paris goals from government authorities: low awareness of the Paris Agreement and lack of appreciation of the ETF and the need for investment to deliver on international climate reporting.

The training and capacity-building elements of the project will include:

- Training for national experts from all key sectors, including district level experts, to enhance technical knowledge in data collection, analysis and use and archiving
- A training of trainers' programme that allows national experts to share knowledge with each other – across their different sectors or specific areas
- Support for national universities to participate in the reporting process, through research (for example, developing country-specific emission factors) and relevant training for students
- A peer-exchange programme for government officials and experts that will encourage South–South learning, to enable best practice from other states to be applied in Malawi and reduce the country's reliance on hiring external experts over time.

This comprehensive approach to capacity development will not just grow the skills and awareness of many individuals — it will shape more sustainable frameworks for local capacity building, hugely reducing the expertise lost through high turnover of government staff.





Tea farmers in Malawi. The Ethical Tea Partnership (ETP) trained some Malawi tea farmers to become more resilient to climate change.

# 04

## Conclusion and transferable lessons

The LDCs keen to report under the Enhanced Transparency Framework (ETF) face multiple challenges: stronger national institutions, human resources and data management are all needed. While developing all or any of these would also support national climate ambitions, significant resources are necessary to do so. Meanwhile, many developing nations rely on expensive foreign consultants to fill the gaps in national expertise and just ‘keep up’, creating a drain where investment is needed. This pattern must change.

The examples we have explored here offer some transferable lessons for other developing countries keen to be ready to meet the requirements of the ETF.

### **Learn by doing: across levels, across borders**

In Mauritania, a country-owned approach involving national experts, multiple

stakeholders and continuous training delivered a reporting process that has led LDC submissions over a number of years. This experience, alongside learning gained at international level (through the technical review process), was a crucial factor in enabling Mauritania to propose a revised domestic MRV system — one capable of meeting the upcoming ETF requirements.

### **Seek political buy-in**

Mauritania’s experience also shows us that improving technical expertise is not enough. A high-level political commitment is fundamental to ensure that climate change reporting is high on the agenda of the public and private sectors. In Mauritania and Malawi, buy-in was achieved in part by integrating planning for climate reporting into other critical national processes, including the national visions and delivery of the 2030 Agenda.

### **Design ‘future proof’ whole-system solutions**

Malawi’s approach illustrates the value of creating solutions that encompass different actors and build an enduring basis for evolving gains, rather than single sector or one-off fixes. The country’s ‘future proofing’ took the form of:

- Looking ahead to design systems for data collection and storage that are comprehensive, long-term and able to evolve to future needs, whether driven by national or international ambition
- Building and retaining in-country human resources from the bottom-up, over time: increasing coordination across national institutions; empowering local universities; investing in increasing the pool of local experts; and encouraging South-South learning exchanges



- Taking a broad view to include other international commitments (such as the 2030 Agenda) in ETF- driven solutions, both avoiding national-level duplication and increasing the effort's political value.

## Apply for targeted support

In both examples we have explored, the countries made winning proposals for support from the CBIT (see Box 3). They are not alone: in September 2021, GEF reported CBIT projects in 28 LDCs,<sup>6</sup> including Burkina Faso, Laos, Sierra Leone, Togo and Uganda. This support can play a significant role in enabling developing countries to increase national capacity for international climate reporting, and to meet their own climate goals:

- Countries involved in CBIT-supported activities can access valuable opportunities for cross-border knowledge sharing and peer-to-peer learning; they may even gain access to whole new areas of focus (as where one country's project might concentrate on adaptation and climate finance tracking, another's may focus more on mitigation and GHG inventories).
- Incentivising this kind of exchange among CBIT project countries can add considerable value on top of the original project funding, which will encourage more countries to seek support.

## Looking ahead

The ETF is introducing important new themes to national climate reporting, such as loss and damage, and is bringing others to a more exacting reporting level, including adaptation and mitigation. Reporting under the ETF is a significant opportunity to better reflect the reality of the climate crisis for LDCs, capturing both actions and needs, and to strengthen national systems. It is also a significant ask: embedding transparency reporting at different national levels and within different institutions is a big ask for poorly resourced countries, no matter how ambitious.

It follows that an enhanced system for transparency requires enhanced support. If LDCs are to improve upon the low submission rate of transparency reports so far, a boost in assistance is needed. In 2021, official COP26 outcomes<sup>7</sup> noted the need for increased technical and financial support, requesting that financial institutions increase support for developing countries to implement the ETF. But ambitious LDCs need not wait. Malawi and Mauritania both harnessed available internal and external resources, strengthening national institutions to implement transparency, and can act as inspiration for others.

### Box 3. A winning proposal: learning from Malawi

A key factor in Malawi's successful bid for CBIT support was the high degree of buy-in from top management during the entire process of project proposal development and approval. A team of national experts was assembled to lead the proposal development and complete the work; this team was further supported by the African Sustainability Centre (ASCENT) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), as the country implementing partner.

It was also important that during the proposal development process, all key stakeholders (including those from critical government ministries and departments, civil society organisations, academia and youth networks) were involved through a series of consultations. These meetings helped identify the needs and gaps that could prevent Malawi from effectively implementing the ETF, leading to a well-informed and well-articulated project proposal.



# Notes

- 1 CILSS/CSAO/SWAC, Profil securite alimentaire Mauritanie. [www.oecd.org/fr/pays/mauritanie/41642759.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/fr/pays/mauritanie/41642759.pdf)
- 2 United Nations Climate Change, Mauritania. National communication (NC). NC 4. <https://unfccc.int/documents/200088>
- 3 See <https://unfccc.int/process/transparency-and-reporting/reporting-and-review-under-the-convention/biennial-update-reports-and-international-consultation-and-analysis-non-annex-i-parties/biennial-update-reports>
- 4 The Commonwealth, Malawi. <https://thecommonwealth.org/our-member-countries/malawi>
- 5 As rated by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Report (HDR, 2007), in: Malawi CBIT proposal, January 2022. [www.cbitplatform.org/projects/malawi-climate-transparency-framework](http://www.cbitplatform.org/projects/malawi-climate-transparency-framework)
- 6 Global Environment Facility, Capacity-building Initiative for Transparency (CBIT). [www.thegef.org/what-we-do/topics/capacity-building-initiative-transparency-cbit](http://www.thegef.org/what-we-do/topics/capacity-building-initiative-transparency-cbit)
- 7 UNFCCC (2021) Guidance for operationalizing the modalities, procedures and guidelines for the enhanced transparency framework referred to in Article 13 of the Paris Agreement. <https://unfccc.int/documents/310499>

## Image credits

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The Paris Agreement relies on transparency. With countries deciding their own contributions to the global effort to address climate change, transparent reporting is crucial to identify whether nationally determined targets are being met and to incentivise increases in ambition. Transparency is not a new notion in this area — Paris' Enhanced Transparency Framework builds on an existing transparency system under the UNFCCC — but achieving it can be a challenge.

Malawi and Mauritania are both using the evolving reporting expectations under the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement to strengthen national institutions to implement transparency. Their efforts reveal some of the opportunities and benefits that arise from preparing to nationally implement the Enhanced Transparency Framework. Both countries model a forward-looking vision that can support others to embark on similar journeys.

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## Climate change; Governance

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### Keywords:

Capacity building, least developed countries (LDCs), transparency, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Paris Agreement



Funded by:



This document is an output from a project funded by the UK Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) for the benefit of developing countries. However, the views expressed and information contained in it are not necessarily those of or endorsed by BEIS, which can accept no responsibility for such views or information or for any reliance placed on them.



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