



ADAPTATION FUND

New Adaptation Fund Board Chair: ‘Fund’s Effective Work Changing Lives of Vulnerable Populations at Local Level’

Hopes to Help Fund Reach New Heights in Building Resilience to Climate Change

Bonn, Germany (March 22, 2018) -- The opening of the 31st Adaptation Fund Board meeting this week on the UN Campus in Bonn, Germany featured a changing of the guard in the Board’s leadership.

Victor Viñas, of the Dominican Republic, officially began his one-year term as the Board’s newly elected Chair. Viñas has served as the Board’s member representing the Group of Latin American and Caribbean countries since March 2017, and as Vice-Chair of the Board for the last year. He assumed the Chair seat from Michael Kracht, of Germany, who completed his one-year term as the previous Chair. The position rotates between developing and developed country Board member representatives each year.

In an intersessional decision, the Board also elected Sylviane Bilgischer as its new Vice-Chair. Ms. Bilgischer is from Belgium and is a climate policy advisor for the Walloon Regional Government’s climate ministry. She represents Annex I Parties (developed countries) on the Board and has been a Board member for a year.

Mr. Viñas brings a wealth of experience to the Chair position, having worked in the public and private sectors developing environmental, climate change, agricultural and economic projects and initiatives, as well as holding several climate change leadership positions. His posts in the Dominican Republic have included climate change director for the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources, policy analysis division chief for the National Agricultural Council, environmental economics advisor for UNDP and GEF, technical director for Hispano Dominicana Consulting International and since 2016 Advisor and Vice-Presidency Cabinet Coordinator of the National Council for Climate Change and Clean Development Mechanism. He also served as executive director of the Pro-Nature Fund, and sectoral specialist at the Inter-American Development Bank office in Guyana, among other posts. He has published several scientific papers, was a Watson International Scholar of the Environment, and has been closely involved in the UNFCCC negotiation process as a delegate of the Dominican Republic since the Bali COP13 climate change conference in 2007. He previously served as a Board member of the Green Climate Fund.

He holds both an MS (North Carolina State University) and PhD (Texas A&M University) in agricultural economics, and has been a professor, director and Dean of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources at the Universidad Nacional Pedro Henríquez Ureña in the Dominican Republic.



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The Adaptation Fund Board Secretariat interviewed Mr. Viñas earlier this month to ask his thoughts, hopes and vision for the Fund, as well as its challenges over the next year.

Question: The Adaptation Fund had one of its best COPs in Bonn, Germany last November with a landmark decision by Kyoto Protocol Country Parties (CMP13) agreeing that the Fund ‘shall serve’ the Paris Agreement. The Fund also broke its single-year resource mobilization record with US\$ 95 million pledged, and had a successful 10th anniversary event featuring speeches from international climate change leaders and the release of a special publication on the Fund’s dynamic projects and innovations from staff and myriad partners and stakeholders. What were your initial reactions and what do these successes mean for the Fund going forward (as well as challenges)?

Answer: Obviously, with Fiji hosting the COP 23 climate change conference last November and a special focus on the most vulnerable, the COP indeed was a good-to-excellent one for the Adaptation Fund. What a wonderful way to celebrate our 10th anniversary by achieving a record fundraising total of US\$ 95 million, thanks to our partners and supportive countries plus the further step of the approval of the CMP decision, in that the Fund shall serve the Paris Agreement. This decision represents remarkable progress in the design and forward movement of the global financial structure of the landmark 2015 Paris Agreement, which would support the world’s fight against climate change, benefiting the most vulnerable at the community level in the countries that are served by the Adaptation Fund.

Both of these accomplishments were achieved thanks to the common and supportive efforts of all Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Kyoto Protocol members, plus the dedicated and hard-working efforts of the Adaptation Fund Board members and the Secretariat staff, which do not waste any opportunity to raise the issue and request support for the Fund’s work. These successes are the result and provide a vote of confidence of the Fund’s work, including its many concrete, tailored adaptation actions that are making a positive difference in vulnerable countries now, as well as its groundbreaking Direct Access modality, which is building capacities and empowering countries to adapt to climate change directly through accredited National Implementing Entities (NIEs). The efficiency of the NIE projects and their implementation success histories, and the fact they are country-led and inclusive helps ensure their high flow of work and effectiveness while providing valued checks and balances in a highly transparent process.

But these successes, while necessary, are not sufficient to guarantee for a stronger, operationalizing financial structure for the Fund, given the record demand it has received for projects over the last few years as the urgency of climate change has continued to rise. It helps re-affirm the Fund’s existence and acknowledges its ongoing contributions to operationalizing the Paris Agreement through its concrete projects and innovative features, and its growing portfolio level in the long run of the Fund, post-2020 and so on, for the benefit of the most vulnerable and affected developing countries. So, the Fund needs to work hard to seek additional new fresh capital and I plan to work



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together with other members of the Board and Secretariat to achieve this in the shortest time possible.

The challenges that the Fund faces for the next few years are: how to make it to fully operationalize the Fund's portfolio level to fulfill the demand for funding, although that will not be known completely before COP 24 this coming December when follow-up decisions are expected by country Parties to the Paris Agreement (CMA) on the Fund formally serving the Agreement based on preparatory work that has already progressed on governance, institutional arrangements, operating modalities and safeguards. CMP will also decide later, by COP 25 in 2019, whether the Fund will serve the Agreement exclusively under CMA. Thus, it is equally important for the Fund not only to seek and obtain new contributor pledges in its current state, but as guided by the CMP to find ways and mechanisms to encourage more and diverse developed country Parties to make further voluntary pledges so that the pipeline of projects can be advanced. This should occur without abandoning the pursuit of working arrangements such as further collaboration and coherence with the Green Climate Fund (GCF) that could enhance the use of financial resources across Funds.

Nevertheless, the overwhelming positive here is that the Fund will continue to grow and it is foreseen to become a stronger international funding institution to support exclusively the adaptation needs of developing countries, especially the poorest and most vulnerable ones with the least capacity to adapt to the climate impacts they are already facing.

Q: The Adaptation Fund Board adopted a decisive Medium-Term Strategy in October 2017 focused on the pillars of Action, Innovation and Learning & Sharing that responds to the urgency of climate change, the Paris Agreement and UN Sustainable Development Goals by accelerating high quality adaptation actions, along with targeted support for rolling out proven adaptation innovations and disseminating effective lessons from the field. It also calls for more aligned fundraising targets to meet demand. How do you see this strategy influencing the Fund's work over the next few years?

A: *Like any organization, the Adaptation Fund was in need of such an overarching strategy going forward, and this strengthens what the Fund has been doing so well for its first 10 years. By following its roadmap to formally serve the Paris Agreement, it has initiated building complementarity and coherence with other climate funds, among other strategic foci for the 2018-22 period, thus making more efficient use of Fund efforts and resources. In this regard, the Fund should encourage and promote its 28 NIEs (and growing) to take advantage of the available additional resources that are out there and to seek GCF accreditation, as well. Many have been fast-tracked already. This will also allow building stronger ties with the GCF to avoid duplication of work and bring synergy in adaptation financing.*

Obviously, the Strategy will build on the Fund's successes and will support the replication and scaling up of its innovative actions that are often breaking ground in adaptation in vulnerable places around the world for the first time and creating the valuable experiences and lessons that can be expanded



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upon. The Fund's pioneering Direct Access modality has proven a win-win situation and represents a trademark of its work; other financial institutions are trying to adopt it. Fostering more decision-making by the countries on specifically what adaptation program they want to request and implement is going to be encouraged during the horizon of the strategy, thus adding attractiveness to the Fund's clients, the developing countries it serves that are most vulnerable to climate change.

All told, the Strategy will serve as a strategic blueprint and tool for what the Fund needs to do in the next several years to come. But let me stress the following point, without the continued support and backing of key stakeholders, including fellow Board members, Secretariat Staff, Parties not present on the Board, among others, it will be more difficult to succeed on the challenges we have in front of us.

Q: What is your vision of what you'd like to see the Fund continue to accomplish, or do differently over the next year? What would you like to see the Fund achieve longer term, such as over the next five years?

A: As I have said before, the Adaptation Fund is doing the right things right, and all sources support this perception. The independent evaluation of the Fund has confirmed that it has grown up as a relevant, efficient and effective institution. The demand for adaptation projects and programme funding is ever-increasing, especially as climate change impacts are impacting vulnerable countries more often and harder, thus creating a tremendous fiscal strain on their national budgets. While the current single-country limit of US\$ 10 million may be a relatively small amount, it is not for the communities that have nothing to begin with. I believe the Fund's projects need to serve as leverage for higher and more ambitious investments and programmes from different sources.

I would envision that the Fund can make an even more significant contribution and help a higher number of the projects' beneficiaries benefit from education and capacity building to increase climate change resilience. Again, we must strengthen seeking out enhancing its cooperation and linkages with other funds and institutions to facilitate the up-scaling of its high-quality projects and programmes. We must work not only from the Adaptation Fund side, but many of our colleagues on the Board serve as UNFCCC process negotiators and can lend a hand on attempting to obtain the support necessary for future COP decisions to be stronger and benefit the Fund's work and also potentially come faster.

With the Fund's experience and trust earned over these past 10 years, its well-received concrete projects, experiences and innovations and its vast and growing supportive network, this can help to encourage and accelerate the dissemination of innovative, proven and effective adaptation solutions. The Fund is well-positioned to look into further innovative approaches to adaptation action. It is also important to better harvest this experience and knowledge generated through project activities and to disseminate them as selling points to seek additional and future support among stakeholders. I'd like to foresee more and deeper education activities within the projects funded by the Adaptation Fund.



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Q: What do you like most about the Adaptation Fund and its work?

A: *It is quite an honor to be trusted in being a member of the Board, as it supports and helps alleviate the impacts of climate change on the affected vulnerable populations of developing countries, including my own country, the Dominican Republic and the Latin America and Caribbean region. As its specific mandate for adaptation calls for addressing specially the main weakness in combating climate change for these countries, their high vulnerability, this is due to the huge gaps on financial resources to assist and provide the basis to build resilience and relief from the impacts from climate change. I am thrilled and motivated to serve in this respect, since in the Board's meetings we come in direct contact and learn firsthand through the project approval process how the Fund's programs are changing the lives of populations at the local level.*

The straight-forward and highly transparent modality of conducting business, added by its practical but rigorous approach to the analysis and approval of the project proposals as well as the absence of politicking, are to me what make the biggest differences in the Adaptation Fund's work. Additionally, it is a quite enjoyable and satisfying experience when dealing with projects that are not within areas of your professional background, and is a stimulating educational and learning experience.

Q: As the Adaptation Fund Board member from the Dominican Republic, and with the country also being a small island developing state (SIDS), as well as serving as the Adaptation Fund Board representative for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), what does it mean for you to represent these countries on the Board?

A: *Obviously, being from a SIDS and LAC country provides me with a special opportunity to reach out and increase the sensitivity of the needs of developing countries to my fellow colleagues from Annex I (developed) countries on the Board.*

Being a representative on the Board for a region has an added responsibility and commitment, as you have to think beyond your national borders and self interests. Furthermore, this responsibility and challenge allows me to do my absolute best to push forward together with other Board members as well as the unsurpassed support by the technical work provided by the Secretariat Staff on the Adaptation Fund agenda in order to reach even higher ground for the Fund's work.

ABOUT the ADAPTATION FUND

Since 2010, the Adaptation Fund has committed US\$ 462 million to support 73 countries, with nearly 5.5 million direct beneficiaries.

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