



Climate Governance Commission

Strengthening the Current Climate Governance System: Mapping Leading States and Initiatives

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**“I don’t want this to be
a column arguing for
despair.... But to the
immediate question
– how to force the
political system to do
enough, fast enough,
to avert mass suffering
– I don’t know the answer
even if there is an answer.”**

Ezra Klein



Executive Summary

This research project began with several broad questions: Is the current ad hoc, voluntary, and decentralized climate governance landscape working to increase ambition and incentivize real progress? And which countries and climate initiatives are leading the way? The level of ambition reflected in countries' nationally determined contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement, given the remaining entire carbon budget, still fall far short of what is required. In short, the lion's share of the key actions needed that would be sufficient to tackle accelerating climate change and to avoid catastrophic global warming, have yet to be taken. The world is not on track to deliver on the commitments made under the Paris Agreement. Nonetheless, even under the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Paris Agreement, along with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, still provide a solid universal framework to guide multilateral cooperation on climate. Yet, the climate governance landscape is not equipped to implement the Paris Agreement.

From October 2020 to July 2021, 16 experts were interviewed for this report, including high-level UN and government officials and policymakers, academics, and representatives from global climate initiatives. An array of informal and confidential discussions also informed the research. In addition, a mapping of 41 countries and 35 initiatives was conducted. The countries and initiatives were selected based on several criteria—emissions levels, economic capacity, and climate action—while also taking into consideration geographic balance and levels of vulnerability to the effects of climate change. The initiatives selected are all rooted in the multilateral arena, have a multi-actor approach, and tackle an array of sectors connected with climate.

The goal of this report is to better understand the existing decentralized climate governance landscape. It seeks to identify states ([see section 6](#)) and multi-actor initiatives ([see section 5](#)) that are at the forefront of international governance innovation for climate action, and that may therefore be seen to be advancing international climate governance. It also identifies a number of key bottlenecks and barriers to effective state and global action ([see section 2](#)). Finally, the report offers recommendations on how to increase ambition and delivery ([section 7](#)). According to this research's conclusions, the most urgent actions are:

- To promote change in the general, global public perception of the climate crisis, framing it as a challenge for the present and not only for the future, by, among others, encouraging news outlets and journalists to connect issues such as droughts and air pollution to climate change;
- To ensure that national laws addressing climate are protected from electoral cycles. This would give climate policy some degree of stability, both domestically and internationally, allowing other countries to have confidence that their counterparts will not suddenly change course on climate policies when a new government comes to power;
- To push for the reform of multilateral institutions leading the climate discussions. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) needs to become much more open, inclusive, and dynamic. This effort should be led by the UN Secretary-General, who has the mandate to initiate such a reform, along with the President of the General Assembly;
- To radically shift the dynamics of the climate finance system from being a burdensome, slow, and disempowering mechanism to providing more direct access. Funding should be quickly available and should include investment in local capacities;



- To reduce overlap and duplication among international climate initiatives. There is a need to “launch less and implement more,” with global initiatives focused on supporting concrete delivery at the domestic level and providing funding, particularly on adaptation projects that do not attract private sector investment;
- To use regional mechanisms as a lever for greater climate action. To facilitate regional action, UN agencies, special political missions, and regional commissions should be more involved in addressing the cascading impacts of climate change and more explicitly mandated to carry out this work;
- Finally, to push for a climate-proof global solidarity on COVID-19. Countries in the Global South and North are being forced to revisit their climate pledges to address COVID-19. Instead of being at odds, the response to COVID-19 should address climate. The UN’s President of the General Assembly (PGA), who is also from the Maldives, is well placed to initiate a global campaign to tackle both crises simultaneously.



Introduction

This research project began with several broad questions: Is the current ad hoc, voluntary, and decentralized climate governance landscape working to increase ambition and incentivize real progress? And which countries and climate initiatives are leading the way? While there is no simple answer, all experts interviewed believe that the climate governance system, in its present configuration, is not working and that stronger, more consistent, and more coordinated leadership is needed to address the climate emergency. They also felt that many of the current ad hoc initiatives and practices—often based on loose “coalitions of the willing” – have weak or no accountability mechanisms for their members, and their impact remains at a knowledge-sharing level, at best, and at a superficial or negligible level, at worst. Further, they expressed grave concern that global climate finance has not reached the levels needed and remains largely inaccessible to the most vulnerable peoples and countries.

The level of ambition reflected in countries’ nationally determined contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement, in the light of the remaining entire global carbon budget, still falls far short of what is required: current commitments would reduce emissions by only 12% from 2010 levels by 2030, compared to the 45% needed to avoid catastrophic climate change.¹ This clearly signals that the world is not on track to deliver on the commitments made under the Paris Agreement. Nonetheless, even under the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Paris Agreement, along with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, still provides a solid universal framework to guide multilateral cooperation on climate. Yet the climate governance landscape – a large group of structures, institutions, states, and non-state actors working in different ways and at different levels (local, national, regional, and global) – is not equipped to implement the Paris Agreement.

There are currently a multitude of multilateral climate initiatives.² Some are specialized, focusing on issues like solar energy,³ while others are more general, for example, by serving as platforms for knowledge exchange on sustainable development.⁴ While there are many multilateral initiatives focused on climate action, it is difficult to track and assess their impact. In fact, after every UN Conference of the Parties (COP), or at other international summits, several new climate alliances are formed, but just a few can show practical results and/or focus on accelerating delivery and unlocking finance. There are many initiatives that duplicate what already exists, and most initiatives analyzed do not focus enough on direct access to finance and capacity building for developing countries.

To understand the international community’s current approach to climate governance, it is important to locate these ad hoc initiatives within the global multilateral system, which has evolved over a long period of time. After 1945, key institutions such as the United Nations and the World Bank became the bedrock of multilateralism. In decades following, the number of relevant players with regional and global influence has increased. To date, with a few exceptions, all countries are interconnected and belong to multiple multilateral groups and initiatives at every geographic level. Of the 41 countries mapped for this research, 18 belong to at least five multilateral climate initiatives, and nine countries belong to at least ten.⁵

The urgency of the climate crisis creates a major dilemma for existing multilateral institutions. These institutions usually do not have “top-down” mandates or strong accountability mechanisms for participating states; most decisions made at the global level are not mandatory and are suggested



through resolutions and global agreements implemented by countries in good faith, making it difficult to hold countries to their commitments.⁶ Multilateral institutions are also often slow to act, jeopardizing the fast, ambitious, and concerted action required to address climate change. Moreover, diplomats and international civil servants are used to working in specific areas or “silos,” whereas the climate crisis needs a cross-cutting and holistic approach that connects with social, environmental, economic, and peace and security fields.

The current climate crisis also requires a dynamic governance system where top-down policies better connect with bottom-up movements and the evolving needs of communities on the ground. National-level political swings can dramatically change climate ambition, as seen with the former US administration (2017–2021) and the current governments of Brazil, Mexico, and Australia. Although these countries have shown climate leadership in the past, this has changed erratically, depending on who is in power. If climate action becomes a higher priority for the majority of citizens worldwide, and domestic constituencies see its benefits – including job creation and improvements in overall quality of life – it will become harder for political leaders to drastically change climate policies.⁷

In addition to these governance challenges, the COVID-19 pandemic has been a major global disruptor. Causing widespread loss of life and setting back the world economy, it has also destabilized climate governance. The pandemic has forced countries to rethink their policies and priorities, leading some to reassign funding away from climate action. While economies have shrunk, countries are struggling even more with the tension over what to prioritize: the economy or ecology, the short term, or the longer term. In some exceptional cases, the pandemic has triggered greater ambition on climate action, but in many others, it has triggered a reversal to non-environmentally friendly, business-as-usual models of growth, including stimulus packages that include subsidies and bailouts for the fossil fuel sector.⁸

With the return of a US administration committed to climate action, and greater ambition from the European Union, more international discussion and action on climate governance can be expected. The current US administration is promoting multilateral dialogue on climate change and is applying its international commitments domestically, with ambitious, climate-friendly stimulus packages approved by the US Congress. It is also promoting a “whole of government approach” by including climate as a priority in all government departments.⁹ The European Union has recently proposed increasing its commitment under the Paris Agreement to a 55% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, forging a path toward carbon neutrality by 2050. This is an opportunity that cannot be missed: having these developed countries converging on climate policies can build momentum for higher ambitions and concrete plans from other major global economies. Smaller countries are also showing increased leadership and are paving the way for others to follow; for example, Barbados and Morocco have committed to becoming carbon neutral by 2030, which is a much shorter timeline in comparison to that of the developed countries.



Report Objectives

The goal of this report is to better understand the existing decentralized climate governance landscape. It seeks to identify states ([see section 6](#)) and multi-actor initiatives ([see section 5](#)) that are at the forefront of international governance innovation for climate action, and that may therefore be seen to be advancing international climate governance. It also identifies a number of key bottlenecks and barriers to effective state and global action ([see section 2](#)). Finally, the report offers recommendations on how to increase ambition and delivery ([section 7](#)).

From October 2020 to July 2021, 16 experts¹⁰ were interviewed for this report, including high-level UN and government officials and policymakers, academics, and representatives from global climate initiatives. An array of informal and confidential discussions also informed the research. In addition, a mapping of 41 countries and 35 initiatives was conducted. The countries and initiatives were selected based on several criteria—emissions levels, economic capacity, and climate action—while also taking into consideration geographic balance and level of vulnerability. The initiatives selected are all rooted in the multilateral arena, have a multi-actor approach, and tackle an array of sectors connected with climate. At least five events that the authors hosted or participated in also contributed to the research¹¹.



1. Perceptions of the Climate Crisis at the National Level

The UN's world survey for its 75th anniversary concludes that the immediate priority for people everywhere is improved access to basic services, healthcare, safe water and sanitation, and education. For the medium and long term, the overwhelming concern of the over 1 million respondents all around the world is climate change.¹² This reveals that in people's minds, climate change is not necessarily linked with immediate priorities such as health and safe water. This public perception that climate is a challenge for the future that is not connected with the most pressing priorities of today thus influences heads of state and ministers, contributing to a distorted climate governance landscape. Moreover, for many leaders, climate change is solely an environmental issue, rather than a challenge that encompasses all areas of life.

Fortunately, this perception is rapidly changing. Scientists are clearly stating that the climate emergency is now, as reflected in the most recent report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).¹³ Mainstream international actors such as the International Energy Agency are also increasingly communicating the gravity of the crisis and calling for the immediate transformation of the economy, of energy sources, and of technologies.¹⁴ The urgency to address climate is also having a positive impact on policy. Of the 41 countries analyzed, 21 have plans for reaching net-zero emissions by 2030—well ahead of the 2050 target that many countries are aiming for ([see Figure 1](#)).

National governments are also starting to change their structures to better address climate change. Of the 41 countries assessed for this research, only 16 still delegate climate to environment ministries. The other 25 have a cabinet or ministry and/or the head of state or government directly involved in climate policymaking. In addition, 15 of the 41 have a national climate council¹⁵ composed of recognized experts in the field ([see Figure 1](#)). Of the 41 countries analyzed, 21 have plans for reaching net-zero emissions by 2030—well ahead of the 2050 target that many countries are aiming for ([see Figure 2](#)).¹⁶

Countries that still delegate climate to the environment ministry are more likely to have weak, or even contradictory policies both for and against climate. For example, India's policies are both “clean and dirty.”¹⁷ The country has pro-climate policies, like its leadership on solar energy, but it still heavily relies on and invests in coal. Another example is the Republic of Korea, which is a member and leader of several global initiatives and a rising climate finance donor, but continues to support new coal power construction both domestically and internationally.¹⁸ In countries such as Grenada, where the cabinet is fully aligned on prioritizing climate, or Costa Rica, where the head of state is directly involved in climate policy, the risk of contradictory policies is lower (though these are also smaller countries with little to no coal as part of their energy mix). Yet, even some countries with governance structures aligned around climate have recently increased their support for fossil fuel subsidies, as seen in Norway.¹⁹



Figure 1. Who leads on climate policy?

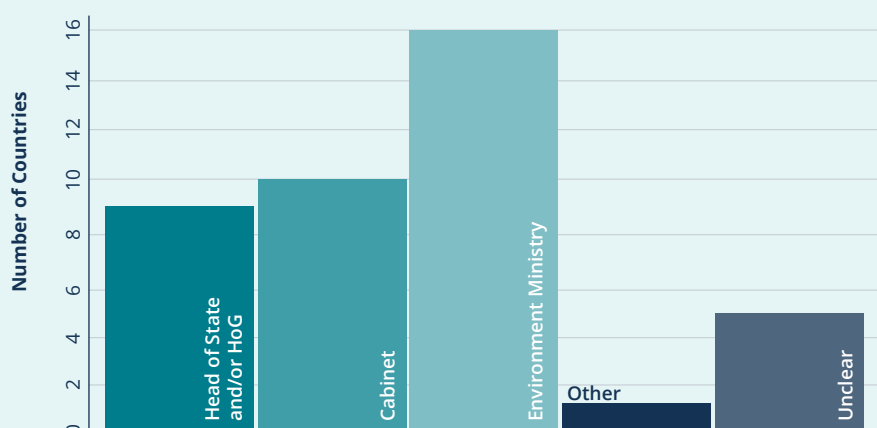
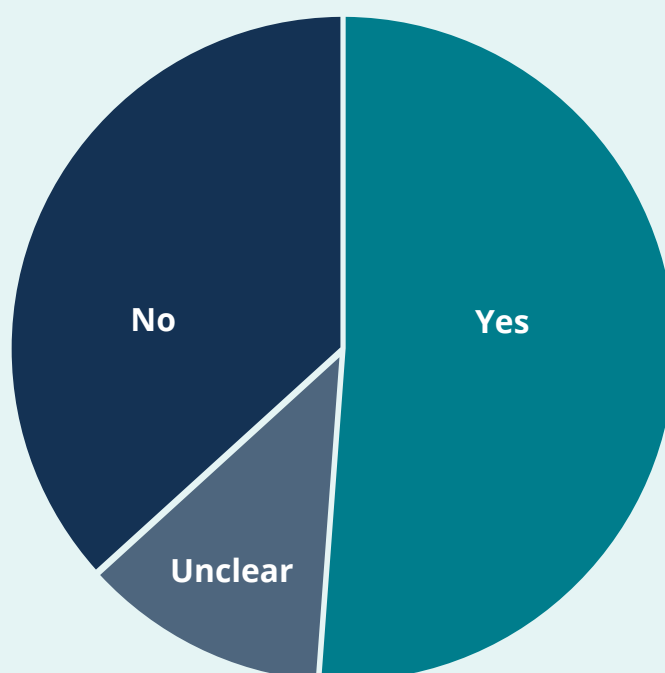


Figure 2. Does the country have long-term strategies such as the Carbon Law, which includes a vision to achieve net zero by 2050 while halving emissions every decade?





2. The Design of the International Climate Governance Landscape

This distorted perception of the climate crisis is also present at the global level, where international climate forums do not always attract the level of attention or multi-sectoral leadership required. Instead, there is commonly a “climate bubble,” such that other issues, sectors, and actors, even those closely related to the climate crisis such as energy, biodiversity, sustainable development, and food security, penetrate only on an ad hoc basis.

On paper, the post-Paris climate regime of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) recognizes non-state actors as important partners in implementing the agreement.²⁰ But in reality, youth, scientists, and committed business leaders have a difficult time “entering this space” and are not placed on an equal footing, giving them little power to influence decisions. Similarly, at the national level, many countries still do not have inclusive processes towards designing and implementing Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) such as in Costa Rica.²¹ From the UNFCCC to the UN General Assembly and Security Council, climate policies are primarily made by government representatives (e.g., foreign service diplomats), excluding not only other national officials but also municipal authorities, civil society, and the private sector. Moreover, the decision-making process for these climate discussions remains behind closed doors, hindering the prospects of a transparent, strong and rapid delivery.

Fortunately, these dynamics are changing. The Climate Summit convened by the UN Secretary-General in 2019, for instance, reveals a new level of engagement, as national governments, municipal authorities, and civil society, including youth and businesses, were invited to participate and cooperate from the outset.²² The UN Secretary-General is also helping to open climate forums to youth through his Youth Advisory Group on Climate Change.²³ The Climate Ambition Alliance,²⁴ which includes Race to Zero, is a campaign by the Climate Champions to rally investors, businesses, and local governments to lead and support climate action. This multi-actor coalition is a new voluntary/ad hoc climate governance model, where a broader group of actors cooperate. Such coalitions are raising awareness of the climate crisis and bringing different leaders into the climate policy world.

Yet while many climate initiatives and forums are emerging at the global level, few dare to propose reforming the largest and only universal climate negotiation forum, the UNFCCC.²⁵ This despite the fact that, for many experts, the UNFCCC is becoming obsolete. While the UNFCCC is slowly opening up to national governmental ministries across sectors, such as transport, and is hosting biennial high-level meetings for finance ministers, its problem with the rule of consensus continues to fester, often blocking viable pathways forward, rather than increasing ambition. Given its relevance, the UNFCCC needs to take bolder steps to evolve into a more dynamic global platform to deliver on the Paris promise.²⁶ While the decision-making process needs to remain primarily of an intergovernmental nature, the interface between government and non-state actors needs to be significantly strengthened and their collaboration less ad hoc and more systematized. Some experts believe that the UNFCCC will not change its current dynamics unless other processes within UN headquarters also become more open and inclusive, such as the High-Level Political Forum that follows-up progress on the 2030 Agenda. Most importantly, some of the biggest issues



that will pave the way for a decarbonized world are not discussed nor decided in the UNFCCC, such as the trade regime, and overall alignment of global financial markets to climate priorities, as mandated by Article 2(c) of the Paris Agreement. As an expert suggested, “we are living in a hybrid governance world where the UN and the Bretton Woods institutions no longer make the rules” – yet we need to ensure that all decisions in the global economy are aligned with climate and this necessity will require the highest levels of leadership integrity and discipline, across countries and the international system.²⁷

Moreover, while there is an abundance of initiatives showcasing climate leadership, there are only a few that focus specifically on supporting delivery, capacity building, and funding to developing countries.²⁸ There is also very little coordination and collaboration among initiatives. The most successful initiatives seem to be those that are focused on a specific topic, have reliable funding available for delivery, and/or are designed as a space for peer-to-peer learning (examples in [section 5](#)). Moreover, most initiatives lack the accountability needed to assess if their members are truly implementing what they publicly announce; if insufficiently monitored, an illusion can be created that more is being done on the ground than is the case.²⁹

Even if the current climate governance system evolves to become more inclusive, dynamic, and aligned, the question remains whether this would be enough to generate the level of ambition needed to keep global warming under the threshold of 2 degrees Celsius and closer to the 1.5 degrees goal. Most likely it would not, but it could at least pave the way for stronger cooperation, more creative solutions, and innovation. But if the climate finance system were to evolve as well, then the combination of advances in governance and finance could potentially accelerate progress in ways that are currently deemed very difficult.



3. The Global Climate Finance System

International climate finance is a cornerstone of climate discussions and is critical to building momentum and generating trust between developed and developing countries. Climate finance is also tied to the capacity of developing countries to achieve their NDCs: of the 41 countries studied, 14 have NDCs that provide for a higher level of ambition if international support is provided.³⁰

In the Paris Agreement, developed countries committed to taking the lead in providing financial assistance to countries that are vulnerable to the effects of climate change, with the goal of mobilizing \$100 billion USD per year by 2020. But according to a recent OECD report, those commitments will likely not be reached: developed countries provided only about \$80 billion in climate finance in 2019.³¹ And, according to Oxfam estimates, those countries will reach only \$93 billion to 95 billion USD per year by 2025, five years after the established goal should have been met.³² This has increased tension and eroded trust between developed and developing countries.

It is not only the quantity of funding that is problematic; the quality of funding also exacerbates tensions. Countries often lack direct access to funding, and face burdensome requirements to apply for and receive the resources needed, such as countries in the CARICOM and Pacific Island Developing States (PSIDS). For example, the Maldives, one of the most vulnerable countries in the world, has difficulties accessing concessional funding despite its vulnerability, because it is a middle-income country.³³ This reflects the strong donor/recipient mentality in the climate finance landscape: donors impose stringent requirements on funding flows to developing countries, rather than empowering local constituencies or strengthening local governance mechanisms.³⁴ This makes the recipient country more dependent on the donor, reinforcing a negative cycle. Small developing countries that are highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change end up having to allocate most of their time figuring out how to access funding, instead of implementing actual adaptation and mitigation measures.

Additionally, many developed countries channel their funding through bilateral channels, employing their nationals and external consultants to work in developing countries rather than building the institutional capacity of the recipient country. For example, in the Dominican Republic in a readiness project that took over eighteen months to negotiate, out of the \$2.6 million USD provided, \$1.2 million USD was for foreign consultants.³⁵ Even for multilateral funds, access to direct funding remains elusive. For example, only two out of 15 projects supported by the Green Climate Fund provide direct funding to developing countries.³⁶

What these countries require is supportive financing mechanisms that bolster their capacity to take ambitious and sustained climate action. For instance, many African countries such as Nigeria have strong NDCs and are eager to act but have little capacity and expertise to put the climate agenda into action.³⁷ In such countries, international climate finance and development, and civil society organizations could provide mentoring and foster networking to promote coordination on climate action among ministries at the national level, to also instigate action in at subnational levels and in local communities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further increased the need for climate finance: the world now faces the worst economic crisis since the Second World War, causing a loss of revenue and raising debt, especially in the countries that are most in need.³⁸ Developed countries need to help these countries recover from



the COVID-19 pandemic with financing that will spur a green recovery and a holistic approach. Scaling up and accelerating the delivery of international public financing is now of the utmost importance.³⁹ Fortunately, many countries, such as France, Germany and the United Kingdom, have promised to increase their ambition in providing finance. Yet without changing the (hierarchical) dynamics of current financing practices, those promises may have little impact on climate action on the ground. Moreover, while discussions are still taking place on how to fulfill the 2020 financing commitment, the date to fulfill that commitment has passed; countries should now start discussing the financing goal for 2025, and start proactively and swiftly exploring a range of innovative options for the levels of global climate finance needed.⁴⁰



4. The Elusive Linkages between Peace, Security, and Climate

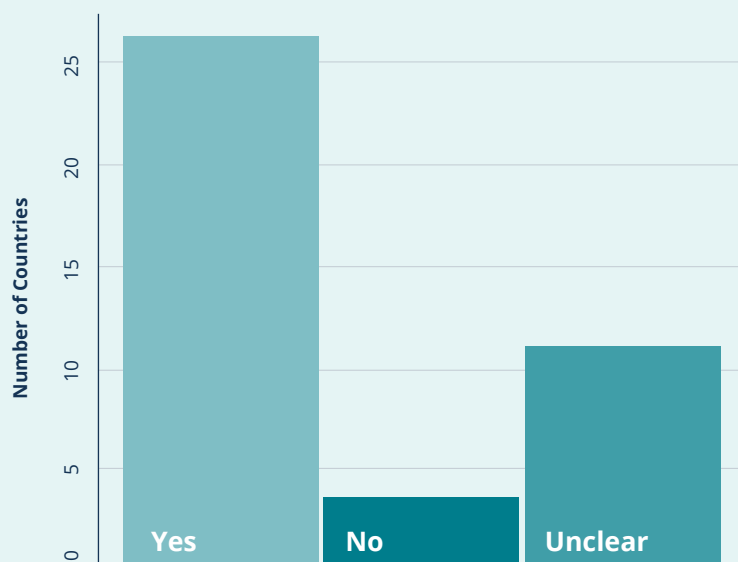
Despite growing evidence of the risks that climate change poses to peace and security, the linkages between these areas remain deeply contentious.⁴¹ However, because the UN Security Council remains the only global body with the capacity to create “hard” law, its mandates are the only ones that create quick and effective legislation at the global level.⁴² This power is a double-edged sword when it comes to climate and the politics within the Council. Some perceive the Security Council as possessing a very narrow and specific mandate, focused on the most urgent traditional international peace and security threats, while others believe that the Council can increase attention and support on the ground for climate action, well beyond the limited number of conflict-affected countries that are in its agenda.

Over the past several years, diverse countries like the Dominican Republic, Germany, Ireland, Niger, and Sweden have used their seats on the UN Security Council to voice their views on the relevance of the accelerating effects of climate change to peace and security. Yet the policy narrative on climate security is complicated. While many Western countries speak of climate change as a “threat multiplier,” countries such as Niger and India refer to climate as a “risk multiplier.”⁴³ This distinction is important, as seeing climate change as a risk links it more closely with development and adaptation, while viewing it as a threat could “securitize” the climate agenda, with a prejudice towards militarized conceptual frameworks and/or responses.

To avoid an overly securitized approach, an option is to have discussions on climate security led by the countries that are the most vulnerable, such as in recent years with Niger and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.⁴⁴ While the connection between peace, security, and climate is still weak at the global level, many countries are also making this link domestically. Of the 41 countries studied for this research, 26 have linked climate and security within their governance structures ([see figure 3](#)).⁴⁵ To operationalize this link, countries such as Mali, Niger, and other countries in the Lake Chad region will need more support to understand the connections between peacebuilding and climate adaptation and to learn how best to address them in a holistic manner.



Figure 3. Is climate policy featured in the peace and security agenda in the country?





5. Case Studies on Climate Initiatives

Over 30 multilateral climate initiatives were analyzed in this research to better understand how climate governance policies are created, how ideas are shared, and how concrete action is promoted. These climate initiatives can be divided into three main types: (1) government-only initiatives (vertical); (2) hybrid but government-dominant initiatives (both vertical and horizontal); and (3) multi-actor initiatives (horizontal). These different types of initiatives serve different purposes. Initiatives that are government-only, and hence “vertical,” seem to work best as platforms for peer learning and candid exchange. The hybrid model is a useful “in-between” that allows greater interaction between governments, the private sector, and civil society, placing each on an equal footing while keeping governments in the majority. The last model is a horizontal approach where various levels of governments (national, state, local, etc.) interact with the private sector and civil society. This latter model provides more room for creativity and innovation, increased ambition, and accountability from all its members. Recently, there has been a growing trend toward such multi-actor initiatives.

Below are a few examples that serve to illustrate these findings:

5.1 Government-Only (Vertical)

Coalition of Finance Ministers for Climate Action: The Coalition of Finance Ministers for Climate Action is chaired by Finland and Indonesia and has 63 members in total, representing 63% of global GDP and 39% of global CO₂ emissions.⁴⁶ It provides a platform for national finance ministers to learn how to mainstream climate in their decisions and budgets at the domestic level. With a practical approach, the coalition aims at convincing finance ministers to abide by the “Helsinki Principles,” a set of six principles that promote national climate action, especially through fiscal policy and climate finance, in the pursuit of low-carbon and climate-resilient growth. The coalition ensures its members show a strong commitment to integrating climate action into their financial decisions. In fact, unlike many other multilateral initiatives analyzed in this research, the coalition shows a cautious approach to expanding its membership, as its priority is to have all its members truly engaged with the initiative’s goals. The coalition has a system in place where it regularly meets to exchange views on specific topics related to climate finance.

5.2 Hybrid but Government-Dominant (Vertical and Horizontal)

Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI):⁴⁷ With a membership including 26 countries and seven multilateral organizations, CDRI is led by India and, by working as a platform for networking and knowledge sharing, aims at ensuring infrastructure is climate-resilient. The organization currently focuses on power, telecommunications, and transport and is working toward adding social infrastructure (sanitation, water, health, and education) as another focal area. The multilateral alliance has a governance system in which two thirds of the members must be governments to guarantee that requirements and guidelines



on infrastructure resilience are applied domestically, while one third can be from the private sector or civil society. While governments still have the majority under this model, the private sector and civil society are placed on an equal footing with them, which is a positive development.

5.3 Multi-Actor (Horizontal)

Leadership Group for Industry Transition (Lead It):⁴⁸ Led by Sweden and India, this initiative provides a space for discussion and collaboration among governments, investors, and business leaders to catalyze leadership on the climate agenda in relation to industry transition. With a membership composed of 16 countries and 19 companies, the hybrid composition of the organization makes it a hub for knowledge-sharing.

The Climate Ambition Alliance:⁴⁹ With its Race to Zero⁵⁰ campaign, this is perhaps the largest horizontal initiative on climate, with a membership of 924 governments (national, municipal, and regional), 3,067 companies, 173 investors, and 622 higher education institutions. With the leadership of the UK and Chile (the current and former COP presidents), this initiative is becoming an umbrella organization that unifying many efforts on climate and rallying support for carbon neutrality.

NDC Partnership:⁵¹ With more than 180 members, the NDC Partnership aims at having governments and multilateral initiatives work together to ensure countries receive the support they need to achieve ambitious climate and sustainable development targets. Currently, the NDC Partnership is supporting 73 countries through its Country Engagement Strategy, its main platform for engaging with member states. Despite its effective efforts to mobilize resources to help countries enhance their NDCs, the initiative has made a bigger difference in smaller countries, which has less impact on global emissions. Moreover, many of the countries being advised by the initiative have not presented more ambitious NDCs.



6. Case Studies on Countries and Regional Blocs

This research also analyzed 41 countries⁵² and regional blocs' NDCs, participation in multilateral alliances, compliance with climate finance commitments, and overall climate action, especially vis-à-vis their COVID-19 stimulus packages, to understand the gap between what countries are promising and delivering. Some of the case studies shared below illustrate positive action, while others reveal a mix of pro- and anti-climate actions, and several reveal inaction.

6.1 Country Blocs Leading the Way

The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) deserves special attention with regard to its ambition and concrete action on climate change. With a legacy of coordination and cooperation on the climate agenda, the bloc, composed of 15 countries, has a strong regional approach to capacity-building despite the challenges of complying with the cumbersome requirements imposed by global climate finance institutions.⁵³

While the level of ambition varies within CARICOM, many of its members are taking significant steps to address climate change, even with the limited fiscal capacity they have. These include Antigua and Barbuda, which created a policy for a just transition to a green economy; Barbados, which is leading the push for renewable energy and has committed to climate neutrality by 2030; and Trinidad and Tobago, which is strengthening its domestic institutions and mechanisms to implement the Paris Agreement. While these countries are facing debt crises and the impact of COVID-19, they remain committed to accelerating the transition toward climate neutrality. They have also benefited from a UNFCCC regional office in the Caribbean, which has supported these efforts.

The Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) has also been a critical voice advocating for urgent climate action, and for many of its members, climate change is an existential threat. This group, with a membership of 39 countries, is a strong leader in climate discussions and has been issuing a clarion call to bring attention to the climate emergency. Another political group that has at times coalesced with AOSIS is the Least Developed Countries Group on Climate Change (LDC Climate Change), composed of 46 states. Greater connections and alliances between AOSIS and the LDC Group could increase pressure on developed and emerging economies, particularly in the lead up to the COP in Glasgow and beyond to the next COP in Africa. An alliance between those two blocs that was beneficial to the negotiation of the Paris Agreement took place in 2011: in that year, in the lead up to the Paris Agreement, the AOSIS and the LDCs, together with the Independent Alliance of Latin America and the Caribbean (AILAC), advocated for the conclusion of the Paris negotiations by 2015, whereas major economies preferred to start those negotiations in 2015 and conclude them by 2020. Thanks to this multi-country coalition, “we have the Paris Agreement today.”⁵⁴

6.2 Leading Developed Countries: The Cases of Germany and the United Kingdom

Germany is a strong leader on the climate agenda. Aiming at becoming greenhouse-gas-neutral by 2045, it is one of the few countries that has “enshrined



the goal of climate neutrality by or before 2050 in its national law,” in line with the European Union’s plans.⁵⁵ The country also has a “green diplomacy” agenda. It is not only a member of at least 14 multilateral or multi-stakeholder climate alliances and a leader of at least two, but is also a major donor in climate finance, contributing to climate action,⁵⁶ in countries in Central and South America, Africa, the Middle East, and Central and Southeast Asia.

The United Kingdom is another example of a leader in climate action. The country has promised one of the “deepest cuts in greenhouse gas emissions in the Group of 20 nations,” with a target of reducing its greenhouse gas emissions by 68% by 2030.⁵⁷ Climate is a pillar of efforts to “build back” the economy in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The UK is not only a member and leader of several climate multilateral initiatives, but is also a major climate finance donor.⁵⁸ It has also established the Climate Finance Accelerator program, an international initiative to help countries transform their NDCs into “Climate Investment Plans.”⁵⁹

6.3 India’s Rising Ambitions as a Renewable Energy Leader

India leads two major multilateral initiatives on climate that have shown positive results: the International Solar Alliance (ISA) and the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI). As an “emerging power” aspiring to become a key international player in pushing the climate agenda, the country has especially positioned itself as a leader in discussions around solar energy.

But while India has a strong track record on green diplomacy in the multilateral sphere, it also supports the fossil fuel industry domestically. In fact, most of India’s coal power plants are government-owned, which shows a disjunction between what is shown and promoted in the international arena and what is implemented at the domestic level. Under India’s federal system, greater buy-in is needed at the state level to accelerate the country’s transition to a green economy.⁶⁰ Also, a greater convergence between the interests of the private sector and the government could accelerate India’s transition toward renewable energy.⁶¹

India is not the only country that is supporting both dirty and clean energy sources. Countries such as Norway, the Republic of Korea, and Nigeria are also supporting fossil fuels through their COVID-19 recovery packages. They are not alone, as many more are also continuing subsidies for fossil fuels.

6.4 Outliers: The Case of Brazil

Acting “against the spirit of the Paris Agreement,” Brazil, with its science-denialist government under President Jair Bolsonaro, has reneged on previous climate commitments.⁶² The administration has also amended environmental legislation and cut environmental funding to undo prior achievements. Added to that, civil society mobilization in support of climate action has received a strong backlash from the administration. The case of Brazil shows how a change of government can have a significant negative impact on a country’s approach to the climate agenda.



7. Conclusions and Recommendations

This research aimed to better understand the current (fragmented) global climate governance system, including its achievements, bottlenecks, and challenges. Although some progress has been made since the signing of the Paris Agreement in 2015, the lion's share of the key actions needed, that would be sufficient to tackle climate change and to avoid catastrophic global warming, have yet to be taken.

To achieve the goals set out under the Paris Agreement, countries need to address climate change holistically. All cabinet members or ministers should be involved in climate action to ensure that the decision making of every sector of the government is guided by the climate agenda. For climate change to be a cross-government priority, heads of state also need to take strong leadership and ownership of the matter. A positive example is the United States, where the president and cabinet have been taking climate into consideration on every policy that is created or proposed, from security and immigration to finance and energy.

It is also important to ensure that laws on climate are immune to electoral cycles. This would give climate policy some degree of stability, both domestically and internationally, allowing other countries to have confidence that their counterparts will not suddenly change course on climate policies when a new government comes to power. One example is the European Commission's proposal of the first European Climate Law, which aims to write into law the goal set out in the European Green Deal: climate neutrality by 2050. The objectives of the law are to set a long-term roadmap for climate neutrality, create a system for monitoring progress, provide predictability for investors, and, most importantly, "ensure that the transition to climate neutrality is irreversible."⁶³

Moreover, society should more broadly understand the importance and urgency of climate action. Without pressure from the people, elected officials will not focus their policies on climate. People's perception of climate needs to be changed, by framing it as a challenge for the present, not only the future. Local news outlets and reporters should connect issues such as droughts, fires, and air pollution to climate change. Youth movements need to continue to demand accountability from their leaders.

On a more global scale, commitments to climate finance need to be met and new commitments and funding arrangements made. Climate finance remains at the heart of increasing trust. Developed countries must provide adequate financing to developing countries, make requirements to direct access this financing less burdensome on the countries that need it the most, and empower and build the capacity of local governance mechanisms. Governments should also use climate finance to facilitate a green recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. International and regional financial institutions need to help and provide support and alleviate rising debt. Moreover, the UN's climate finance envoy should initiate a process to discuss how to overcome the major barriers experienced by the most vulnerable countries in accessing funding.

There have been few efforts to address climate change at the regional level. While CARICOM and the EU present useful and exceptional examples, with many of their members committed to climate change, doing more at the regional level in other parts of the world could increase the aggregate impact of climate action. To facilitate regional action, UN agencies, special political missions, and regional commissions should be more involved in addressing the cascading impacts of



climate change and more explicitly mandated to carry out this work.

As for multilateral climate initiatives, it is important that they become a platform for targeted and efficient discussions and for the planning of concrete actions. While necessary as a mechanism for dialogue and exchange, climate initiatives that do not deliver concrete results risk wasting time and resources instead of strengthening climate action.

Also, overlap and duplication among climate initiatives needs to be reduced. There is a need to “launch less and implement more,” with initiatives focused on supporting concrete delivery at the domestic level and providing funding, particularly on adaptation projects that do not attract private sector investment.

Ultimately, there is a need for a change in the decision-making process of the main multilateral climate forum: the UNFCCC. The UNFCCC needs to become a more dynamic global platform whose policymaking involves not only environmental experts, but also other relevant ministries, actors such as civil society, companies that are aligned with climate, and youth should have a larger voice and role, particularly at the national level. However, the current dynamics of the UNFCCC are unlikely to change unless other processes within UN headquarters also become more welcoming to the participation of other parties. The open and inclusive process for negotiating the Sustainable Development Goals can serve as a model, in which the process remained intergovernmental, but buy-in and consultation from other actors was seriously taken into account. As the only universal platform on climate, the UNFCCC needs to be protected and valued. The Secretary-General, with the support of the President of the General Assembly, should start a consultation process on steps to reform the UNFCCC.⁶⁴ The role of the Executive Secretary of the UNFCCC should be more influential and be able to rally the needed leadership towards greater climate action at the global level.

Finally, COVID-19 and climate action are being treated in separate forums. However, action on both need to be better aligned, coordinated, and supported. To increase climate ambition, global solidarity on COVID-19 must go hand in hand. Countries in the Global South and North are being forced to revisit their climate pledges to address COVID-19. Instead of being at odds, the response to COVID-19 should be climate-proof. The UN’s President of the General Assembly (PGA), who is also from the Maldives, is well placed to initiative a global campaign to tackle both crises simultaneously.



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Endnotes

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- 2 This research mapped 35 different multilateral initiatives across a variety of sectors, based on their level of visibility, impact and effectiveness, and their multi-actor approaches. These include: 2050 Pathways Platform; Adaptation for Smallholder Agriculture Programme (ASAP); Renewable Energy Initiative; Belt and Road Initiative; Blue Growth Initiative; C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group; Carbon Neutrality Coalition; Carnegie Climate Governance Initiative (C2G); Central African Forest Initiative; Climate Ambition Alliance; Climate and Clean Air Coalition; Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI); Cool Coalition; European Green Deal; Forest Carbon Partnership Facility; Glasgow Financial Alliance for Net Zero (GFANZ); Climate Change Alliance Plus (GCCA+); Global Fuel Economy Initiative (GFEI); Initiative on Protection of Cultural and Natural Heritage from Climate Change; InsuResilience Global Partnership Vision 2025; International Solar Alliance; IRENA's Initiatives; Leadership Group for Industry Transition; Mission Innovation; National Adaptation Plan (NAP) Global Network; NDC Partnership; Partnering for Green Growth and the Global Goals 2030 (P4G); Partnership on Transparency in the Paris Agreement; Powering Past Coal Alliance; The Bonn Challenge; The Coalition of Finance Ministers for Climate Action; The Friends of Fossil Fuel Subsidy Reform; Three Percent Club for Energy Efficiency; Under2 Coalition; and World War Zero.
- 3 The International Solar Alliance, led by France and India, is an example. See: International Solar Alliance. 2021. *International Solar Alliance*. <https://isolaralliance.org> (Accessed 14 August 2021).
- 4 2050 Pathways Platform is a multilateral initiative that focuses on helping countries develop sustainable development pathways. See: 2050 Pathways Platform. 2021. *2050 Pathways Platform*. <https://2050pathways.org> (Accessed 14 August 2021).
- 5 The countries studied were: Argentina, Australia, Barbados, Brazil, Cambodia, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ethiopia, European Union, Fiji, Finland, France, Germany, Grenada, India Indonesia, Iran, Israel, Japan, Jordan, Kenya, Madagascar, Marshall Islands, Mexico, Morocco, Nepal, New Zealand, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Republic of Korea, Russia, Rwanda, South Africa, The Gambia, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, and United States of America. The countries selected were based on criteria developed which includes emission levels, economic and development levels, and climate ambition, taking into account geographic diversity and vulnerability.
- 6 Compliance is difficult to assess even for the decisions of the UN Security Council, one of the most powerful international bodies. For example, the UNSC resolution on youth (S/RES/2250), albeit very important, is hard to implement on the ground without the necessary focal points and dedicated staff to follow up.
- 7 Herndon, A. and Davenport, C. 2021.
- 8 Evans, S. and Gabbatiss, J. 2021.
- 9 Stern, T. 2021.
- 10 The experts interviewed were Aditi Maheshwari (Director for Climate Action in the UN Secretary General's Executive Office), Adriana Abdenur (Executive Director, Plataforma CIPÓ), Amanda Ellis (Executive Director, Hawaii & Asia-Pacific and Director of Strategic Partnerships at Arizona State University), Ambassador Luis Alfonso de Alba (Mexican diplomat and former Assistant Secretary-General and Climate Envoy for the Secretary-General), Arunabha Ghosh [founder-CEO of the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW)], John Heermans (Senior Country Engagement



Specialist, NDC Partnership), Oliver Johnson [Head of the Leadership Group for Industry Transition (LeadIT) Secretariat], Ralien Bekkers (Senior Country Engagement Specialist, NDC Partnership), Ruenna Haynes (Senior Legal Advisor and AOSIS Support Team Lead, Climate Analytics), Sandeep Poundrik [Director-General, Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI)], Selwin Hart (Special Adviser and Assistant Secretary-General for Climate Action at United Nations), Sofie Sandstrom (First Secretary at the Second Committee, Sustainable Development, for the Permanent Mission of Finland to the United Nations), and Taryn Fransen [Senior Fellow, World Resources Institute (WRI)]. Three experts asked to remain anonymous.

11 Some of those events were: Visionary Leadership for System Change, 22 June 2021, hosted by the Climate Governance Commission; Narratives that shape the world we live in, 24-26 June 2021, hosted by the Foundation for Global Governance and Sustainability (FOGGS); Latin America and the Caribbean: The Road to Glasgow, 09 September 2021, hosted by the International Peace Institute (IPI); Moving away from rhetoric: how to systematically include youth in peace and climate action, 20 April 2021, co hosted by the International Peace Institute (IPI) and the Global Challenges Foundation; Youth, Peace and Climate Action, 22 October 2021, hosted by the International Peace Institute (IPI); From UNGA to COP26 & Beyond, 23 September 2021, hosted by the Stimson Center.

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17 Interview with Ghosh, A. (11 February 2021).

18 The “Green New Deal” announced in July 2020 by President Moon Jae-In did not include what South Korea’s ruling party promised during the general election campaign: i.e., it included no net zero emissions target by 2050, no carbon tax, and no commitment to end financing coal power plants overseas. The government continues to support new coal power constructions both domestically and internationally, and recently financially rescued a major coal plant manufacturer. See: Chowdhury, S. 2021.

19 Norway’s Covid-19 economic recovery stimulus package includes tax relief for oil and gas companies, which economists warn could lead to Norway extracting oil and gas for a longer period than previously expected. Only a small part of the recovery package is reserved for green measures, including research and development of green technologies. See: Climate Action Tracker. 2021b. Norway. <https://climateactiontracker.org/countries/norway/> (Accessed 28 April 2021).

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21 Costa Rica uses a “whole-of-society approach when developing and implementing climate solutions, where young people are a key stakeholder group”. The country co-chairs, together with the Netherlands, the Youth Task Force (YTF) to foster youth involvement in climate action. See:

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23 See: United Nations. 2021b. The Youth Advisory Group on Climate Change. <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/youth-in-action/youth-advisory-group> (Accessed 15 July 2021).

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27 Kyte, R. 2021.

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32 Oxfam America. 2021.

33 Anonymous Maldives high-level official. Meeting on 23 September 2021.

34 Most officials interviewed referred to the negative dynamics in the funding cycles.

35 Interview Anonymous UN official. (15 April 2021).

36 Direct funding means that the government received the funding directly and not through a third party. Alayza, N. and Brown, L. 2021.

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42 Interview with anonymous former UN Security Council diplomat. (29 September 2021).

43 Interview with anonymous UN official. (1 April 2021).

44 Interview with anonymous UN official. (1 April 2021).

45 The countries are: Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, European Union, Fiji, Finland, France, Germany, Grenada, Iran, Israel, Jordan, Kenya, Morocco, Nigeria, Norway, Republic of Korea, Russia, South Africa, The Gambia, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, and United States of America.

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50 See: Race to Zero UNFCCC. 2021. Race to Zero. <https://racetozero.unfccc.int> (27 February 2021).



- 51 See: NDC Partnership. 2021. NDC Partnership. <https://ndcpartnership.org> (Accessed 29 July 2021).
- 52 See footnote 5 for a full list of the above mentioned countries.
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- 55 Appunn, K. et al. 2021.
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- 58 The United Kingdom committed “in 2019 US\$2.0 billion to projects which targeted action against climate change as a principal or significant objective, making it the fifth-largest Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) donor to the issue, in absolute terms. This represented 23% of the UK’s bilateral allocable ODA committed in 2019, in line with the DAC average.”
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