

Proposal for a Global Framework for Climate Action (GFCA) to engage non-state and subnational stakeholders in the future climate regime

Summary

This briefing paper proposes a Global Framework for Climate Action (GFCA), a comprehensive and collaborative programme to build advantageous linkages between the multilateral climate regime and non-state and subnational climate initiatives.

Global climate governance features a great diversity of institutions, state and non-state stakeholders, and their plethora of actions aimed at mitigation and adaptation. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Kyoto Protocol remain the most important elements of the multilateral climate regime. However, these state-centred regimes and their ongoing negotiations have been criticized for being cumbersome and insufficiently effective. The multilateral regime leaves governance deficits regarding implementation (of adaptation and emissions reduction policies), regulation (new international agreements, norms and standards), and legitimacy (effective output, as well as engagement by underrepresented stakeholders). These deficits could partially be addressed through a growing number of non-state and sub-national initiatives. For instance, cities have adopted emissions reduction targets and cooperate on adaptation, and industries are setting their own targets to reduce emissions. Potentially, these kind of initiatives could make concrete and solution-oriented contributions to realize a climate resilient and low carbon future and also improve the effectiveness of the UNFCCC process. The groundswell of initiatives has however not reached its full potential as – until now – it is uncoordinated and not well documented.

The proposed GFCA aims to catalyze non-state and subnational initiatives, to grant recognition to initiatives that make substantial contributions, and to inspire governments to raise mitigation and adaptation ambitions by scaling up innovative solutions and successful methods. To achieve this, a layered design is proposed, which allows for the recording of a wide array of initiatives, while ensuring measurability of progress in terms of output (visible activities and products), outcome (behavioural change) and impact (changes in environmental indicators). Periodic overall assessments of participating initiatives, will strategically inform where initiatives could complement the multilateral process and where links could be built.

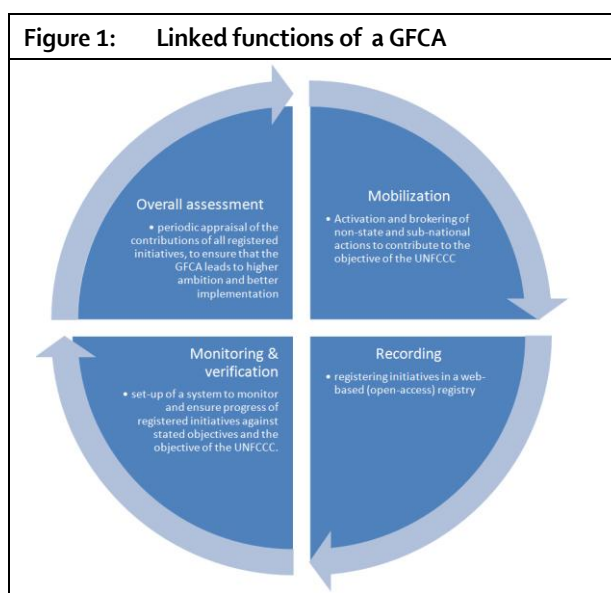
We envisage a GFCA as a collaborative programme, operated and administered by a network of experts, think tanks, public and private organizations. Such a network yields strengths of existing efforts and pools resources from multiple organizations, while it retains legitimacy through a partnership with an international body, such as the UNFCCC secretariat or UNEP.

The proposed GFCA could become an important element in the future global climate governance architecture. It would strengthen coordination capacity within the UNFCCC to steer non-state and subnational actions towards greater ambition and the implementation of international targets and agreements on the ground. It would also give recognition to initiatives that substantially contribute to low carbon and climate resilient development, and it would motivate reputation conscious non-state stakeholders to develop such initiatives.

A comprehensive programme

Non-state initiatives enjoy growing recognition in multilateral processes, including the UN system and the UNFCCC process. For instance, leaders of business, finance and civil society made commitments during Ban Ki-moon’s 2014 UN Climate Leaders Summit, and this year’s UN Conference on Small Developing Island States (SIDS) presented almost 300 partnerships. The UNFCCC’s Momentum for Change highlights initiatives that contribute to a climate resilient and low carbon future; and the UNFCCC website now features ‘Cooperative Initiatives’ that contribute to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The increasing acknowledgement of non-state initiatives can reinvigorate multilateral climate politics and engage a larger group of stakeholders in global climate governance. However, current efforts to link non-state actions and multilateral processes have been rather limited in scope, with most focusing on ‘visibility’ or ‘commitments’, rather than on implementation. The initiatives often lack accountability mechanisms and they are usually announced in an ad-hoc fashion at major events such as the aforementioned UN Conference on SIDS or the 2014 UN Climate Leaders Summit.

To address these shortfalls, we argue for a GFCA, which we envisage as a comprehensive programme to coordinate non-state and subnational initiatives vis-a-vis international climate targets and agreements. The programme would incorporate logically linked functions, namely: the mobilization of new and enhanced initiatives, their recording in a publicly available registry, monitoring and verification, and the assessment of the overall contribution



of participating initiatives (see Figure 1).

A GFCA could strengthen coordination capacities within the larger climate regime, and move beyond the ad-hoc nature of current multilateral efforts to engage non-state stakeholders. It could identify and internationally recognize

leaders among non-state and subnational stakeholders. Through well-documented and concrete actions, participating initiatives could contribute to closing the current emissions gap. A GFCA could furthermore enhance predictability and build trust between governments and non-state and subnational stakeholders, conveying the overall message that a low carbon and climate resilient future requires day-to-day actions and decisions from everyone, everywhere, and at all levels.

A collaborative programme

Functions under a GFCA could be performed by a network of collaborating research groups, expert organizations and international bodies. Such a network yields strengths of existing efforts and pools resources from multiple organizations, while retaining legitimacy through its partnership with international bodies such as the UNFCCC secretariat or UNEP. Moreover, by building on existing efforts, the GFCA would not require a heavy institutional footprint.

Several functions of the proposed GFCA are already performed within the UNFCCC process. The UNFCCC secretariat for example is already mobilizing and supporting non-state initiatives, exchanging lessons learnt in the Nairobi work programme on adaptation (NWP), and in the Climate Technology Center and Network (CTCN). The UNFCCC secretariat has also begun to record mitigation actions through its portal on Cooperative Initiatives.

The most visible element of a GFCA would be an online accessible platform. This platform would preferably be hosted by a public institution (for example the UNFCCC secretariat or UNEP) to emphasize the public interest nature of non-state climate actions, and to lend public legitimacy to the framework.

Various research groups and expert organizations (among them the collaborators and their associated organizations of this briefing paper) have been developing assessment methods for non-state and subnational initiatives. They could play operational roles in the monitoring and verification of progress of participating non-state and subnational initiatives. Progress reports of individual participating initiatives should be synthesized in periodic overall assessments, to demonstrate the overall effect of a GFCA and strategically inform subsequent mobilization efforts. This overall assessment could be performed by the UNFCCC secretariat, but also by another organization that is well-positioned to provide a larger view of developments in climate governance.

Benefits and conditions for participation

Baseline conditions for participation in the framework should prevent green-washing – passing off activities that are business as usual as green and sustainable – and ensure that participating initiatives make substantial contributions towards a climate resilient and low carbon future (see Box 1). Participating initiatives should disclose progress against (self-

defined) functions and targets. Exclusion from the GFCA should follow when initiatives fail to adhere to basic

Box 1: Example requirements for participating in a GFCA

Participating initiatives should:

- **Address climate mitigation and adaptation**, directly or as an associated concern ('co-benefit').
- Explicitly **link to internationally agreed objectives** (e.g. closing the emissions gap, improving implementation capacity in developing countries).
- **Formulate measurable goals** against which progress can be assessed over time.
- **Demonstrate activities** beyond mere political declarations.
- Commit to **regular reporting** of progress
- Be **oriented towards current operations and future results**; targeted stakeholders should aim at new commitments or expanded existing actions and initiatives, rather than merely showcasing past experiences (such as 'best-practices')

Box 2: Benefits for participants in a GFCA

A well-designed GFCA could:

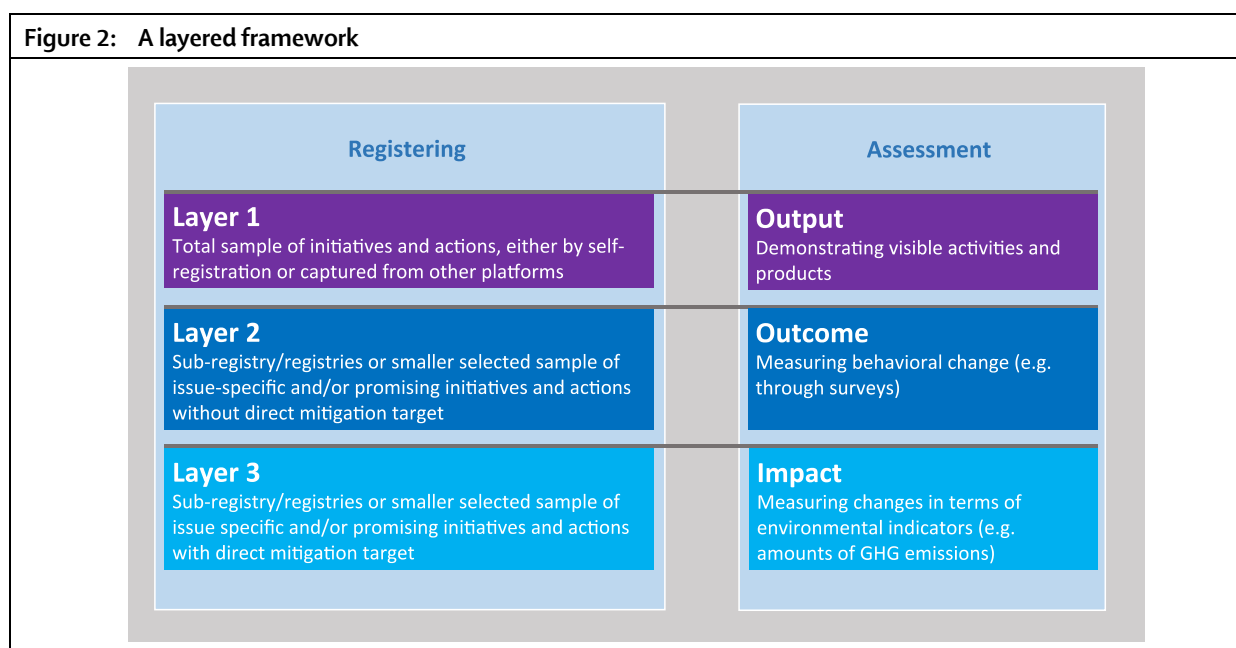
- Provide a **platform where views can be exchanged** and heard, not only by other non-state and sub-national stakeholders but also by Parties to the UNFCCC.
- **Formally recognize 'winners'** that contribute to a climate resilient and low-carbon future.
- **Improve credibility and reputation** of non-state initiatives towards a wider public.
- Give **access to networks** that convene around the UNFCCC process.
- **Receive support by the UNFCCC and its partners** to broker new initiatives, and to match issues, ideas and resources.

requirements; although a one-time grace period could be considered for meeting requirements within a reasonable time, following the example of the UN Global Compact.

A GFCA not only responds to the needs of the COP, but also to the needs of a wider community of stakeholders (Box 2). Participation in a GFCA would entail official recognition of non-state and subnational initiatives that make beyond business as usual contributions to low carbon and climate resilient development. A well-designed GFCA could motivate reputation conscious non-state stakeholders, such as businesses and NGOs, to develop their own climate actions.

Given the great variety of non-state initiatives, the design of the framework should allow for differentiation in the operation of its functions, and for the integration of useful parts of existing registries and databases. Accordingly, we propose a layered design which differentiates between types of initiatives and assessment methods (see Figure 2). Underlying the layered approach is a conceptual agreement that a comprehensive framework could record a wide array of actions, while ensuring measurability of progress. For instance, initiatives that aim at quantitative emissions reduction could be assessed in terms of changes in environmental indicators (impact). Initiatives that aim at education or awareness raising could be assessed through surveys that indicate behavioural change (outcome). At the very least, every participating initiative should provide a proof of operation, demonstrating visible activities and products that fit their declared function(s) (output). In sum, the characteristics of a type of initiative inform subsequent assessment procedures.

A layered GFCA



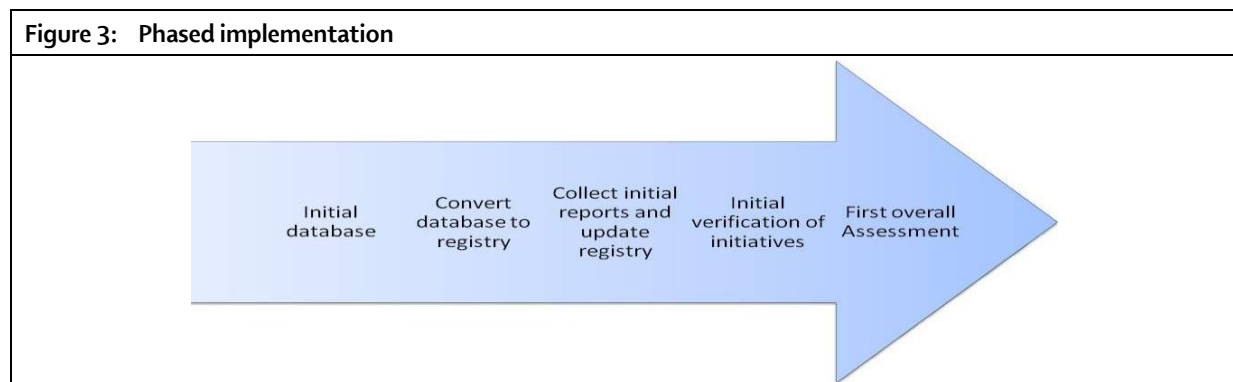
Next steps

Several risks need to be addressed in the further development of a GFCA. Firstly, a GFCA should not provide an excuse for governments to evade responsibilities; presenting non-state and subnational initiatives while evading new multilateral agreements at climate summits. We view a GFCA as a long-term programme that is not closely associated with a particular summit. Rather it also – and perhaps primarily – operates between sessions, and conferences. Secondly, the UNFCCC should remain primarily a Party driven (government centred) process. We are, however, confident that a well-designed GFCA will yield additional capacity especially in implementation and in motivating governments to make more stringent commitments, and therefore strengthen the multilateral UNFCCC process. Thirdly, a GFCA should prevent green washing. In this regard, the proposed GFCA provides safeguards by setting minimal conditions and by emphasizing monitoring and verification functions. Finally, while many non-state and subnational initiatives emerge in developed countries, a GFCA should also be responsive to specific needs of developing countries by gathering

additional capacity and resources for mitigation and adaptation in these countries. We therefore recommend a further exploration of possible climate finance facilities as strategic partners in the GFCA.

The further development of a GFCA could be phased (see Figure 3), building on existing efforts within the UNFCCC and by expert and research communities, while gradually extending functions. A registration function could be added to an initial database of initiatives. The resulting registry could be extended and updated with reports by participating initiatives. At a later stage, external research and expert organizations could verify the progress of participating initiatives. On the basis of progress data a first overall assessment could be conducted as early as at the end of 2015 by the time of the climate summit in Paris.

Figure 3: Phased implementation



Literature:

Chan, S. / P. Pauw (2014): A Global Framework for Climate Action (GFCA). Orchestrating non-state and subnational initiatives for more effective climate governance. German Development Institute/Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik, Discussion Paper.

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