

## Discussion paper

# Global Climate Action in the UNFCCC after 2020

June 2019

Since before COP21, there has been growing engagement between the UNFCCC process and the wider world of “climate action.” Under this broad heading, cities, businesses, states and regions, investors, and civil society groups take a variety of measures to mitigate or adapt to climate change. Such action occurs both individually and in collaboration with other sub- or non-state actors, national governments, and international organizations.

After COP21, a “space” for this broader realm of climate action has been institutionalized in the UNFCCC process in the form of the Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action.<sup>1</sup> Today, this programme broadly includes the work of the High-level Champions, the NAZCA portal, the Yearbook of Climate Action, Climate Action events at COPs, and the Regional Climate Weeks.

However, the Marrakech Partnership will terminate at the end of 2020. The question thus arises, what role should climate action play in the UNFCCC process after 2020?

This discussion paper seeks to help Parties and other stakeholders explore this critical question. It explores the changing context for climate action as the UNFCCC process shifts to implementing the goals of the Paris Agreement. It reviews the unique role of the UNFCCC climate action institutions in the broader ‘ecosystem’ of global climate action. And it highlights potential options going forward.

The paper makes four key points.

First, because cities, business, and other actors deliver many of the actions and innovations needed to achieve the Paris Agreement goals, linking them to the UNFCCC process can accelerate progress.

Second, at the same time, the UNFCCC remains a fundamentally intergovernmental process focused on negotiation not implementation. The global climate action “space” in the UNFCCC therefore should focus on those functions for which there is unique “added value” in the UNFCCC process, as opposed to the broader set of functions in the larger “ecosystem” of global climate action.

Third, because global climate action delivers results on the ground and develops new methods and approaches, the global climate action space in the UNFCCC can help countries formulate, implement, and (over)achieve their NDCs, as well as Long-term Strategies, National Adaptation Plans, etc.

Fourth, the breadth and legitimacy of the UNFCCC process gives it a unique ability to track climate action globally in order to make it both credible and inclusive, reflecting in particular climate action in developing countries that is often underrepresented in global networks.

The paper is intended to spark further discussion and deliberation over this important topic. Going forward, it will be necessary to further refine a common vision for global climate action in the UNFCCC post 2020, and to co-design the institutional elements needed to achieve that vision.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information see: <https://unfccc.int/climate-action/marrakech-partnership-for-global-climate-action>

## **1. Global climate action pre-2020: Rationale and achievements to date**

Around Paris, two complementary rationales pushed for a greater focus on climate action in the UNFCCC process. First, there was a desire to mobilize a broader range of stakeholders to demonstrate that action on climate change was already under way. This gave additional confidence and inspiration to countries to agree to an ambitious, universal agreement at COP21. Second, because the Paris commitments would only take effect after 2020, climate action offered a way to accelerate near-term progress on mitigation and adaptation before 2020.

In 2016, the Marrakech Partnership was welcomed by COP22 to carry forward this work through 2020. It has focused on expanding climate action, especially in underserved geographies and themes, on linking Parties and other actors, and on tracking commitments and progress.

Climate action from the private sector, sub-national governments, and other actors has now reached a truly impressive scale and scope, far exceeding what was envisioned in Paris. According to last year's UNFCCC Yearbook of Climate Action:<sup>2</sup>

- 1 in 5 people in the world now live in the ~10,000 cities and regions taking action
- Over 6,000 businesses whose annual revenue is greater than the combined GDP of the US and China have committed to climate action
- Existing multi-stakeholder initiatives, if they continue to scale up, could lower global emissions by one third by 2030

While it is difficult to say how much of the growth of global climate action over the last 5 years can be attributed to its institutionalization in the UNFCCC process, it is now undeniable that the global “groundswell” of climate action forms an essential element of the global response to climate change. The importance of the Marrakech Partnership as a bridge between this new context and the UNFCCC was highlighted in the recent Champions’ consultation, in which both Parties and other actors spoke to the importance of climate action for achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement.<sup>3</sup> These ideas were reinforced in a parallel and complementary consultation conducted by Galvanizing the Groundswell of Climate Actions.<sup>4</sup>

While the UNFCCC cannot and should not seek to manage the vast and diverse world of climate action, creating a space for such activities in the UNFCCC offers a critical point of intersection between the intergovernmental process and the broader world. Given the scale of the transition challenge ahead, engaging all of these actors further will be critical to achieve the Paris goals.

## **2. New context post 2020: Non-Party Actors as partners in achieving goals of the Paris Agreement**

Following the adoption of the Paris Agreement work plan at COP24, the UNFCCC process will now increasingly focus on how we achieve the agreed goals. This change necessarily informs how the UNFCCC engages with cities, business, investors, states/regions/provinces, and other actors who work alongside national governments to drive transformation. In the context of national

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<sup>2</sup> Yearbook of Climate Action 2019. Available:

[https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/GCA\\_Yearbook2018.pdf](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/GCA_Yearbook2018.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> To see the responses, visit: <https://unfccc.int/climate-action/marrakech-partnership/invitation-to-provide-feedback-to-the-high-level-champions-on-global-climate-action>

<sup>4</sup> A summary of the GGCA consultation is available here: <http://www.climategroundswell.org/blog-test/2019/3/21/summary-of-responses-to-consultation-on-the-future-of-global-climate-action-in-the-unfccc>

implementation, these actors are vital partners whose engagement can support NDCs, National Adaptation Plans, Long-term Strategies, and other national policies. The “groundswell” of action provides both direct and indirect channels to help all actors go further, faster.

First, climate action from the private sector, sub-national governments, and other actors contributes directly to climate mitigation and adaptation, and mobilize resources for both. Many sub/non-state actors have direct control over activities relevant for both mitigation and adaptation (e.g. transport structures in cities, electricity purchases by firms, etc.). This makes them able to contribute substantially both to national targets and global goals. It should also be noted that much of the “climate” action these actors take also advances other sustainable development goals.

Before Paris, there was some concern that greater attention to climate action from NPAs would reduce pressure on national governments to fulfill their own obligations. Since then, this concern has been largely turned on its head. On the one hand, governments increasingly see NPAs as necessary partners in delivering national pledges, and NPAs tend to be strong supporters and enablers of national policies. On the other hand, in some places NPAs have remained committed to climate action even when national governments have wavered. In other words, NPA climate action does not substitute for national policies, but rather reinforces it.

Second, more indirect but equally important, sub-national and private sector actors bring much-needed resources and innovation to the climate challenge. By developing new policy measures, business models, technologies, or other innovations, they create new tools that can be scaled up and borrowed by other actors. Moreover, many transnational networks and initiatives exist chiefly to mobilize and distribute resources—including technical knowledge, capacity building, or finance—via sub/non-state climate actions. Diffusing learning and resources transnationally accelerates progress.

Third, alongside its impacts on mitigation, resilience, and resource mobilization, the groundswell of climate action can have a catalytic effect on national policies. To the extent climate actions fit within current NDCs, they help governments deliver or over-achieve on their pledges. This can build political momentum to support climate action in the future by showing progress “on the ground.”

As this discussion makes clear, we need a shift in language to understand the different roles of entities who are not national governments in the UNFCCC process. Non-state actors have a longstanding and important role as **observers** advising Parties on negotiations and providing transparency to the intergovernmental process through which sovereign states make international law. Civil society organizations and representative constituencies (e.g. youth, gender, farmers, etc.) are particularly important in this regard.

In the context of implementation, however, many entities also have an important role as **actors** working either independently or collaboratively with Parties to deliver the goals of the Paris Agreement. This role is particularly important for cities, states/regions/provinces, business, investors, and others whose own activities significantly affect both mitigation and adaptation.

We propose a shift in language to make this difference clear. To date, the UNFCCC process has referred to all entities “non-Party stakeholders”. But this term mixes the roles of observers and actors. While in practice many entities play both roles, the institutional arrangements in the UNFCCC should not blur them. The Marrakech Partnership and whatever successor emerges after 2020 should be a space for non-Party actors (NPAs).

### **3. What is the unique purpose of Climate Action institutions in the UNFCCC process?**

As noted above, NPAs have a critical role to play in achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement, and the global groundswell of climate action has reached a massive scale. In this context, however, it is important to ask what the *specific* role of global climate action institutions in the UNFCCC process should be, and how it relates to the wider world of climate action. Table 1 outlines several key functions both “inside” and “outside” the UNFCCC and highlights a potential division of labor between NPAs, national governments, civil society, and the UNFCCC process itself.

In general, several key features of the UNFCCC process give it a unique role in the wider ecosystem:

First, as a Party-owned process, the UNFCCC is the ‘guardian’ of NDCs, Long-term strategies, National Adaptation plans, and other national-level policy instruments that promote the goals of the Paris Agreement. Global climate action institutions established in the UNFCCC post-2020 therefore need to focus on enabling and supporting Parties in formulating and delivering their contributions under the Paris framework.

Second, as a global multilateral institution, the UNFCCC possess unparalleled scope. This makes it uniquely suited to promote exchange and learning across different constituencies, regions of the world, and thematic areas. Because the world of climate action is so diverse, many actors are not yet learning from each other or collaborating effectively. The UNFCCC’s focality can make it a powerful tool for the division of knowledge and collaboration.

Third, and related, the UNFCCC’s global reach also makes it uniquely well suited to ensure that global climate action reflects the action and needs of all actors. Existing global networks tend to under represent the Global South and adaptation actions. By representing these interests, the UNFCCC can better align the groundswell of climate action with global priorities.

Fourth, the UNFCCC’s unique legitimacy as a multilateral process also gives it an important role in tracking and aggregating information on global climate action. Through NAZCA, the UNFCCC has created the most comprehensive registry of global climate action, essential for ensuring the credibility of these actions going forward.

Finally, bringing global climate action into a UN “space” highlights connections between climate action and other sustainable development goals. Because many NPAs are working to advance other SDGs as part of, or in parallel to, their climate work, bringing climate action into the UNFCCC can help reduce the artificial silos between the climate regime and related areas. These interlinkages are particularly important in the context of implementation.

**Table 1: Key functions and actors in the global climate action “ecosystem”**

Function	Non-party actors (cities, business, states/regions, investors, etc.)	National governments	Civil society	Specific role of climate action institutions in UNFCCC
<b>Catalyze new actions and initiatives and support implementation of existing ones</b>	Generate bold new actions and initiatives to raise ambition and deliver on existing pledges	Orchestrate and support non-Party Actors to take climate action	Advocate for greater and more ambitious action, support implementation	Galvanize action in key gaps (thematic, geographic, etc.) and across different kinds of actors and thematic areas (Champions or related roles)
<b>Distil and diffuse best practices and messages</b>	Peer-to-peer exchange; exchange with national governments	Consult with non-Party Actors, build platforms for linkage and exchange	Evaluate lessons learned and diffuse best practices	Support information exchange across different kinds of actors/themes, distill overarching messages for Parties and overall trends and narrative (Yearbook)
<b>Link Parties and non-Party actors</b>	Engage domestically with national governments on NDCs, LTSs, NAPs, etc.	Engage sub/non-state actors in policy development and implementation	Build advocacy coalitions with sub/non-state actors	Provide fora for Parties and non-Parties to interact globally and regionally (e.g. Regional climate weeks; Technical Examination Process; High-level dialogues at COPs) and help Parties understand how best to engage NPAs domestically
<b>Reporting and tracking</b>	Track and report their own progress	Account for non-Party Actors’ contributions in national reporting	Hold actors accountable for their commitments	Aggregate global information (NAZCA) to understand the “whole” of global climate action’s potential and progress, promote credibility

#### **4. How might the Global Climate Action arrangements in the UNFCCC look after 2020?**

The purpose of this paper is to frame questions around the future of global climate action in the UNFCCC in order to promote discussion. It is therefore premature to propose specific options for institutional arrangements, as these will need to be further deliberated with a wide range of stakeholders and co-developed by Parties. With reference to the four key functions listed above in section three, this section instead highlights some of the key questions to address going forward.

##### *Catalyzing action*

1. **How can the High-level Champions, or the successor role, best galvanize action and link Parties and non-Party Actors?** How should this role be institutionalized going forward to ensure that the most effective Champions are selected and that they have the resources and mandate to succeed? Should the role be complemented with “friends” of the Champions dedicated to specific regions or thematic areas?

##### *Linking Parties and non-Party Actors, diffusing best practices*

2. **How can national policies—including Nationally Determined Contributions, Long-term Strategies, National Adaptation Plans, and other measures—best be supported by climate action from non-Party Actors?** While each country has its own domestic process for engaging with domestic actors, what role can the UNFCCC space play in facilitating transnational linkages and diffusion of best practices?
3. **How might global climate action events at COPs be more effective?** Is there scope to make interactions between Parties and NPAs at COPs more effective, perhaps improving on the Technical Examination Process?
4. **How can we build on the success of the first Regional Climate Weeks in facilitating substantive interactions between Parties and NPAs?** What role might the UNFCCC play in promoting more tailored and substantive regional meetings?
5. **How can the Global Stock-Take best account for climate action?** NPAs are explicitly mentioned as a source of input for the GST, and understanding the scale and scope of climate action globally will be important for understanding progress toward the Paris Agreement goals. How can global climate action institutions in the UNFCCC best organize these inputs?

##### *Tracking and reporting*

1. **How can NAZCA and the Yearbook better track and communicate global climate action?** How can NAZCA be a more effective tool to support Parties’ actions, while also communicating the global scale and scope of climate action? What role could the Yearbook (or alternatives) play in summarizing and distilling key messages and trends?

##### *Institutionalizing global climate action*

1. **How best to organize support for global climate action activities in the UNFCCC Secretariat?** What core functions are needed within the Secretariat and how are these best resourced? What role can other actors play in helping deliver global climate action?

## **5. Next steps**

The growing role of non-Party Actors in the UNFCCC since Paris represents a fascinating development in global governance. It suggests that even during an age in which multilateralism is increasingly challenged, not least by the scale and urgency of the climate challenge, international processes can adapt and innovate. Going forward, we need to learn from the past five years' experience to build an effective global climate action space in the UNFCCC post 2020.

To not lose time, it will be important to finalize operational arrangements for the successor to the Marrakech Partnership by COP26. This means that important discussions and decisions will be needed this year and/or next year. Galvanizing the Groundswell of Climate Actions will continue working with all interested Parties and other actors to think-through this challenge. While designing and agreeing an effective set of arrangements for global climate action in the UNFCCC will take time and effort, it represents a unique opportunity to support the effective implementation of the Paris Agreement.

### **Who we are: Galvanizing the Groundswell of Climate Actions**

Galvanizing the Groundswell of Climate Actions is a series of dialogues that brings together organizations supporting climate action at all levels. Its objectives include:

1. Bringing the groundswell of climate actions from cities, regions, companies, and other groups to a higher level of scale and ambition;
2. Increasing efficient coordination among cooperative initiatives and sub- and non-state networks;
3. Improving analysis and understanding of “bottom up” climate actions;
4. Building a positive narrative of pragmatic, concrete action on climate change; and
5. Identifying opportunities for the groundswell of climate actions and the multilateral process to support and catalyze each other.

Since 2014, Galvanizing the Groundswell of Climate Actions has brought together city and regional networks, company networks, cooperative initiatives, governments, international organizations, and researchers to discuss and advance these objectives. By convening the community of actors that make up and support the groundswell of climate actions, we seek to realize the full potential of this extraordinary innovation in global governance.

[www.climategroundswell.org](http://www.climategroundswell.org)