Proposal for a Global Framework for Climate Action 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 criticised for being cumbersome and insufficiently effective. The multilateral regime leaves governance deficits regarding implementation (of adaptation and emission-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 emission-reduction targets and cooperate on adaptation, and industries are setting their own targets to reduce emissions. These kinds of initiatives have the potential to make concrete and solution-oriented contributions towards realising 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 has been uncoordinated and not well documented.

The proposed GFCA aims to catalyse non-state and subnational initiatives, grant recognition to initiatives that make substantial contributions, and inspire governments to raise mitigation and adaptation ambitions by scaling-up innovative solutions and successful methods. To achieve this, a layered design is proposed that 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 as well as public and private organisations. Such a network yields the strengths of existing efforts and pools resources from multiple organisations while retaining legitimacy through a partnership with an international body, such as the UNFCCC secretariat or the United Nations Environment Programme (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 have been enjoying 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 Summit, and this year's UN Conference on Small Island Developing 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 "international 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 focussing 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 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-à-vis* international climate targets and agreements. The programme would incorporate logically linked functions, namely: the mobilisation 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 recognise leaders internationally 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 organisations and international bodies. Such a network yields strengths of existing efforts and pools resources from multiple organisations 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.
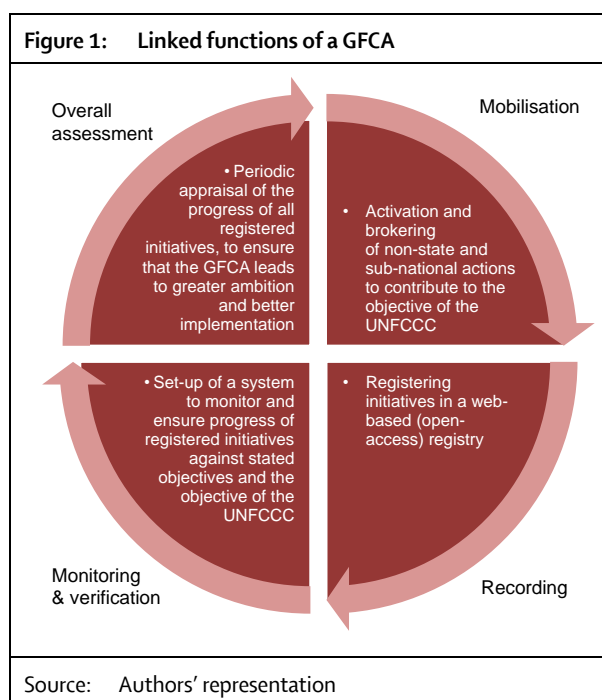
Several functions of the proposed GFCA are already being performed within the UNFCCC process. The UNFCCC secretariat, for example, is already mobilising and supporting non-state initiatives as well as exchanging lessons learnt in the Nairobi work programme on impacts, vulnerability and adaptation to climate change and in the Climate Technology Center and Network. 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 accessible online platform. This platform would preferably be hosted by a public institution (e.g. the UNFCCC secretariat or UNEP) to emphasise the public-interest nature of non-state climate actions, and to lend public legitimacy to the framework.

Various research groups and expert organisations (among them the collaborators of this briefing paper and their associated organisations) 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 synthesised in periodic overall assessments to demonstrate the overall effect of a GFCA and strategically inform subsequent mobilisation efforts. This overall assessment could be performed by the UNFCCC secretariat, but also by another organisation that is well-positioned to provide a broader 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).

Figure 1:   Linked functions of a GFCA

Overall assessment

Mobilisation

• Periodic appraisal of the progress of all registered initiatives, to ensure that the GFCA leads to greater ambition and better implementation

• Activation and brokering of non-state and sub-national actions to contribute to the objective of the UNFCCC

• Set-up of a system to monitor and ensure progress of registered initiatives against stated objectives and the objective of the UNFCCC

• Registering initiatives in a web-based (open-access) registry

Monitoring & verification

Recording

Source: Authors' representation

Box 1:   Example requirements for participating in a GFCA

Participating initiatives should:

- **Address climate mitigation and/or 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 expanding 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 recognise "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 from the UNFCCC and its partners** to broker new initiatives and to match issues, ideas and resources.

Figure 2:   A layered framework

Registering	Assessment
Layer 1 Total sample of initiatives and actions, either by self-registration or captured from other platforms	**Output** Demonstrating visible activities and products
Layer 2 Sub-registry/registries or smaller selected sample of issue-specific and/or promising initiatives and actions without direct mitigation target	**Outcome** Measuring behavioural change (e.g. through surveys)
Layer 3 Sub-registry/registries or smaller selected sample of issue-specific and/or promising initiatives and actions with direct mitigation target	**Impact** Measuring changes in terms of environmental indicators (e.g. amounts of GHG emissions)

Source: Authors' representation

Participating initiatives should disclose progress against (self-defined) functions and targets. Exclusion from the GFCA should follow when initiatives fail to adhere to basic 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 Conference of the Parties 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 contributions to low-carbon and climate-resilient development that are beyond business-as-usual. A well-designed GFCA could motivate reputation-conscious non-state stakeholders, such as businesses and NGOs, to develop their own climate actions.

A layered GFCA

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 that 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 the measurability of progress. For instance, initiatives that aim at quantitative emission re-ductions could be assessed in terms of changes in environ-mental indicators (impact). Initiatives that aim at edu-cation or awareness-raising could be assessed through surveys that indicate behavioural change (outcome). At the very least, every participating initiative should provide 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.
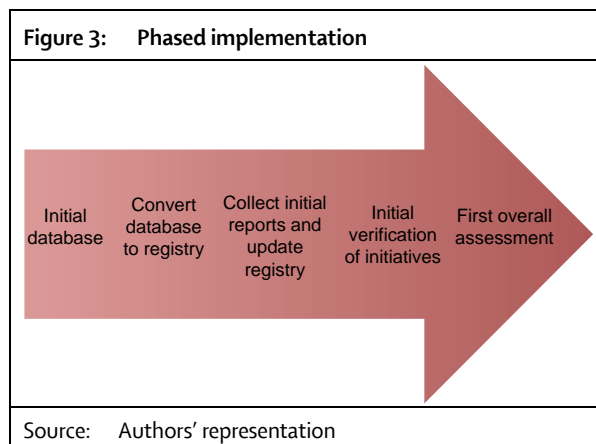
Next steps

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 as they present 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 as well as 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 emphasising monitoring and verification functions. Finally, although many non-state and subnational initiatives emerge in developed countries, a GFCA should also be responsive to the 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 organisations could verify the progress of participating ini

tiatives. On the basis of progress data, a first overall assessment could be conducted as early as the end of 2015 for when the climate summit in Paris begins.

Figure 3: Phased implementation

Initial database — Convert database to registry — Collect initial reports and update registry — Initial verification of initiatives — First overall assessment

Source: Authors' representation

Literature

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