

Roundtable Discussion

Accelerating Non-Party Climate Action at the Regional Level: Strategies to Reduce Geographic Imbalances

Hotel Kenzi Menara Palace, Marrakech

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On November 15, 2016 on the margins of COP22, Fundación Avina and Galvanizing the Groundswell of Climate Actions (GGCA) (www.climategroundswell.org), convened a discussion on promoting climate action at the regional level. The session provided an informal forum for participants to share thoughts and discuss priorities for promoting regional climate action and other strategies for addressing geographic imbalances in the climate action agenda. This short summary synthesizes the discussion, which was conducted under the Chatham House rule, from the perspective of GGCA.

Current situation

The discussion began with an overview of the current geographic imbalances in climate action by sub- and non-state actors (NSA). Studies of non-state climate action show less than 20% of climate actions being led by South-based actors, while South-based participation in transnational climate actions also lags behind the North. This was reflected by the thoughts of the High-Level Champions, who placed a renewed focus on the Global South in the Action Agenda during COP22. It was agreed that such imbalances threaten the success and legitimacy of initiatives such as the recently launched Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action. This, in turn, threatens national and global capacities to achieve NDCs and implement the Paris Agreement.

Participants shared and discussed some recent initiatives that have emerged to try to address these geographic imbalances by promoting climate action at the regional level. For example, Fundación Avina recently pioneered *ActionLAC*, which aims to accelerate the capacity of NSAs in Latin America to contribute to NDC implementation. It works with NSAs throughout the action cycle - mobilising stakeholders, financing and scaling, technical assistance, monitoring and coordination with other initiatives. In Africa, the new *African Agricultural Initiative (AAA)* was launched in April 2015 by the King of Morocco to promote food security in the context of climate change by connecting African farmers to climate finance. A third initiative promoting NSA climate action in the global South, albeit not specifically at the regional level, is the UNSG and China supported *Southern Climate Partnership Incubator*.

Opportunities for developing country participation

Participants discussed the opportunities that exist for promoting climate action in the Global South, noting a number of specific options. For example, it was highlighted that a significant amount of action is taking place in developing countries that is not currently recorded by platforms such as NAZCA. The groundswell of climate action could be greatly enhanced by improving mapping and recognition of these actions at regional and local levels. This could also help efforts to provide the oft-requested links needed to help support subnational climate actions, which is particularly important in politically sensitive contexts where local initiatives cannot dialogue effectively with national governments.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was also identified as being useful for promoting more widespread climate action. Its broad agenda offers a means of extending the climate action franchise to subnational groups without adequate global representation such indigenous peoples and SMEs in developing countries. Participants stressed the importance of visible, tangible benefits as social-institutional “glue” for holding the GCA together. Considering other large international agendas that may also offer opportunities. For example, the China’s One Belt, One Road initiative and the newly created AIIB will create major economic ripples across Asia and Africa that could be harnessed. Developing networks of municipalities and SMEs at the regional level in developing countries was seen as a useful preparatory step to achieving this.

Fear of the Paris Agreement being undermined by the rise of populist and nationalist political agendas were shared by discussants, but it was also emphasised that this could also be a catalyst for greater action by NSAs. To facilitate this, state-driven initiatives must consciously provide opportunities for NSAs to share investment, risk and knowledge. Developing a “part of the solution” narrative for private actors to push as a public relations tool was seen as crucial in attracting interest from actors that would otherwise not be heavily involved. Establishing well-connected NSA networks at subnational levels could help accelerate this.

Barriers to developing country participation

As the discussion moved to the barriers to promoting climate action in the Global South participants immediately highlighted the obvious resource and capacity constraints, particularly when climate action is not seen as a pre-existing priority. In cases where the public sector lacks resources, it might be particularly important to engage the private sector in advancing and financing climate action. The large and increasing complexity of climate action was also flagged as key barrier. Efforts must be made to ensure climate action achieves scale and new initiatives are nested to prevent countries being overwhelmed by the proliferation of new initiatives and structures. Communicating this complexity clearly was identified as a key challenge.

Barriers stemming from the opportunity cost of climate action were another key point of discussion. Participants emphasised the difficulty of presenting climate action as a credible alternative to short-term investment decisions unconnected to either adaptation or mitigation targets. Furthermore, it was raised that ambitious climate action would also require promoting managed decline in certain sectors. Addressing distributional consequences of climate action, dialogue with “losers” and confronting vested interests are prerequisites to achieving a just sustainability transition.

Participants also discussed national political environments in developing countries as a significant barrier to be addressed. It is critical for the groundswell of climate actions to link with NDCs, but in many countries the process for NDC formation is opaque and excludes stakeholder participation. Furthermore, promoting the specific goals and targets necessary for ensuring climate action is credible and avoids greenwashing will be challenging as in developing countries this often conflicts with cultural and professional norms.

Promoting climate action at the regional level

Participants all agreed that promoting a regional focus would be useful for expanding climate action in developing countries. Countries with shared geographies, languages or political characteristics have greater potential to learn from each other. ActionLAC was applauded as a leading initiative in this regard; it was suggested that the functions it provides could act as building blocks for other regional efforts. These include bringing global narratives to the local level, promoting exchange of solutions with cultural relevancy, connecting actors to resources, and facilitating contextual discussion and in-person dialogue.

Key issues to consider when promoting regional climate action were also identified. For example, some regions are already institutionally dense and have pre-existing cooperation structures while others do not. Climate action must be cognoscente of the reasons for this. Additionally, within regions attention must be paid to the different strengths, weaknesses, and needs of different actors trying to take climate action and along with which actors are best suited to what roles.

Discussion clearly reflected that, while the lead-up to Paris focused on showcasing, the priority now must be implementation. Participants also suggested that not all early action needs to be quantitatively measured as the action agenda is expanded. Capacity building, operationalization, and qualitative learning are all also valuable. Once quantitative measures are developed, however, their inclusion in NAZCA will be helpful in ensuring their credibility. Furthermore, encouraging the opening-up of NDC processes and promoting sub- and non-state actor engagement with them was also noted as a key action point. Involving the UNSG was highlighted as a potential way to overcome the political barriers to this.

It was agreed that the wider community of climate action supporters must take a leading role in expanding its geography. It will not happen quickly enough by itself. The urgency of this should be underscored as an increasingly complex climate action agenda that remains geographically imbalanced could face a serious legitimacy crisis in the near future.

Towards these ends, participants identified a number of concrete next steps:

1. Galvanizing the Groundswell of Climate Actions will continue to convene discussions on how climate action in developing countries can reach a higher level of scale and ambition. All partners and entities working toward this goal are invited to collaborate.
2. The German Development Institute will host a conference at this topic during the intersessional meeting of the UNFCCC in Bonn in May 2017.
3. Members of the climate action community will identify individuals in key countries who can serve as local climate champions to accelerate climate action in regional contexts.
4. Take advantage of NAZCA to connect potential action partners, particularly those who would not normally communicate.
5. Produce a quick list of resources or “best practices” for emerging climate initiatives in developing countries. This could be built out into a central platform that provides context specific information and guides to connect initiatives with regional partners, networks, and resources
6. Encourage Parties to reach out to all areas of society during NDC revision and formulation.

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