



## Discussion memorandum

# Ensuring credibility of the Action Agenda through strong initiatives

June 20, 2016

Non-state, subnational actors, and cooperative initiatives have become increasingly active in taking climate action and are more engaged with the climate negotiation process than ever before. Since COP20 in Lima, Parties to the UNFCCC have recognized their efforts and encouraged greater action and ambition. In addition, the Action Agenda has been established alongside the negotiations as a space to highlight the achievements of the initiatives and their potential as important contributors to addressing the global problem of climate change. However, while it is important to recognize and encourage the efforts of the broad community of actors, it is also necessary to ensure these efforts are effective and robust.

The Lima-Paris Action Agenda, building on the success of the high-level event held in Lima during COP20 and the UN Climate Summit before that, established a set of criteria for initiatives to meet to be included in the program. These were: be cooperative, inclusive, open, and regionally-balanced; be ambitious; be science-based; have capacity to deliver; have a sufficient level of maturity; and be ready to report on progress.[1] While this is a useful baseline for an initial assessment of initiatives, many of these criteria could be further refined and clarified to enhance the transparency of the assessment process and assist initiatives in fulfilling their goals. This background note provides an overview of the importance of defining criteria for strong initiatives, notes some key challenges for assessment, and provides options and questions to stimulate discussion and advance efforts to ensure that initiatives included in the Action Agenda provide the necessary confidence, credibility, and integrity of action. Practical and transparent criteria will serve to strengthen the overall impact of the Action Agenda.

## How Criteria Strengthen Initiatives and the Action Agenda

The Action Agenda will only deliver on its promise of motivating additional change and signaling universal transition if the 'signal' it sends is credible. If initiatives presented under the Action Agenda are verified as effective, robust, and capable of delivering, this will provide a more compelling picture of what is really happening. We will have a better understanding of how far

we have come and how far we still need to go. We will also have a clearer understanding of what works, better equipping us with the knowledge to move forward. Criteria can also serve as a baseline for evaluation and tracking the delivery of commitments by initiatives, although further elaboration would be needed for effective evaluation and tracking (see also *Aggregating and Tracking Non-State Climate Action* for more on this issue).

Criteria can also provide benefits to participating initiatives. A strong set of clear criteria can help initiatives increase their chances of success by providing guidance around which to organize their approach. Established criteria could influence how an initiative develops a work plan, allows for adequate staffing and budget, and establishes monitoring or reporting activities. Since the Action Agenda provides recognition for leadership in climate action, criteria can help to separate effective and robust initiatives from less ambitious or stagnant initiatives ensuring recognition is appropriately applied. For example, the business community has established criteria for its initiatives and commitments. Finally, greater credibility and legitimacy for initiatives could potentially lead to provision of support, as investors and financial institutions would have increased confidence that initiatives could deliver on their commitments.

## Balancing Stringency and Participation

Establishing criteria simply for the sake of transparency, without a clear aim or purpose, can be problematic. Overly strict criteria could limit participation and unfairly disadvantage certain types of initiatives that may have stories of success to celebrate and share but do not necessarily meet the standards established by given criteria. Exclusion of these initiatives would then limit the scale and impact of the Action Agenda and its capacity to clarify the extent of climate action on the ground.

One potential option for addressing this issue would be to establish a funnel model to capture the broad range of action taking place, but also provide the necessary framing and structure to highlight separately climate initiatives that are more ambitious and effective and that are progressing quickly. Under this funnel approach, a minimum set of criteria could be established that would include a broader range of initiatives, but in addition, a separate set of criteria could be established to highlight stronger initiatives and focus in on best practices. All initiatives would have to meet the minimum set of criteria, and initiatives would be supported and encouraged to move toward the best practices over time.

These different groups could be highlighted in different ways. For example, initiatives that meet the minimum criteria could be listed on the NAZCA portal (Non-state Actor Zone for Climate Action), while initiatives that meet the best-practice criteria could be featured as official Action Agenda initiatives and highlighted during the annual high-level event at the COP.

Additionally, not all initiatives are at the same stage of the development process. Some may be more advanced than others and it would be important to take this into consideration when conducting an assessment. In this case, it may be practical to consider developing a subset of criteria to account for the differences of initiatives at different stages of development.[2]

## Where criteria could be used

Criteria could be used in various aspects of the Action Agenda. Consistent with the “funnel” model, certain criteria may be more appropriate for some applications than others.

1. **Inclusion in NAZCA platform.** NAZCA includes both individual non-Party stakeholder commitments (captured by various data providers) as well as cooperative initiatives that link many stakeholders together. Because NAZCA provides mostly a tracking and aggregation function, it is important that it only include active initiatives. However, it may not need to impose a certain scale threshold. This would be the “wide” end of the funnel.
2. **Recognition as part of the Action Agenda.** The LPAA included about 70 initiatives from a larger pool of a few hundred. Are the criteria used for the LPAA the right ones going forward?
3. **Inclusion in an assessment report.** The high-level champions are preparing a report on the Action Agenda for COP22, and a similar publication may be put forward each year. Against what criteria should initiatives be assessed in this report?
4. **Featuring in the high-level event at COP.** The COP21 decision text establishes an annual high-level event during COP to feature non-state climate action and cooperative initiatives. It would be expected that only the most robust initiatives would be recognized in this way (the narrow end of the funnel).
5. **Best practices for all initiatives to strive toward.** Criteria and characteristics of successful initiatives can provide a framework and signpost for initiatives to work toward over time.

## Setting Criteria

### What should be covered?

It is important to clarify the scope of what criteria cover. The diversity of actors, sectors, and issue areas relevant to the Action Agenda is quite broad. Initiatives may be undertaken individually or cooperatively and actors include cities, regions, states, civil society, businesses, and international organizations among others. Sectors include energy, forests, land use, transportation, finance, business, urban environments, resilience and short lived climate pollutants. Furthermore, initiatives may be focused specifically on climate outcomes, or could focus on other issues such as sustainable development or health and have significant climate co-benefits. Initiatives can also have broad geographical coverage or be localized with a focus on large impact or incremental change. Taking this diversity into account will be important when clarifying the scope, and this should avoid unfairly disadvantaging initiatives that may meet criteria but could be overlooked due to their size, geographical location, or focus area.

### What do you want to know?

Before criteria can be selected, it is important to understand the purpose of the assessment and what in particular one wants to know about the initiatives. Are we trying to determine whether or not an initiative has impact? Whether or not the initiative is transformational? Effective? Or progressing toward its goal? Clarifying these intentions

or goals upfront would help guide the selection of appropriate criteria. For example, the criteria needed to assess for impact would be very different from criteria to assess for effectiveness. Furthermore, clarifying this intention upfront can help identify if the criteria must assess the initiative against some global standard, or whether or not it is being assessed against its' own individual goal or commitment. In terms of the Action Agenda, there may be multiple elements that should be assessed, but these intentions should be clarified before selecting criteria.

### **Who decides?**

It will also be important to determine upfront who is responsible for selecting criteria, and who is responsible for assessing initiatives against those criteria. Establishing clear roles for the different people engaged in organizing the Action Agenda, including the COP presidencies, the high-level champions, the UNFCCC Secretariat and any other entities such as the UNSG's office, or other stakeholders will avoid confusion. When applying the criteria, it will also be important to consider how to ensure a consistent approach, particularly if the responsibility is shared and different people are responsible for assessing initiatives in different sectors separately. Establishing consistent methodologies that apply to all initiatives, such as whether they self-report information or whether there is third-party verification, will also be important.

### **What are the options?**

In addition to the criteria used by the Lima-Paris Action Agenda, a number of assessment proposals and methods have been put forward with regards to selecting criteria (see resources section). These include a combination of both quantitative and qualitative criteria with diverse approaches and differing scopes. In general, criteria tend to fall into one of four categories: *governance*, including leadership, goals, and participation; *resources*, including human and financial resources as well as costs and capacity; *transparency and accountability*, including reporting and verification processes; and *impact*, such as assessed or projected effects and co-benefits.[3] However, some criteria may be more difficult to categorize such as durability or replicability. Table 1 outlines some potential criteria.

Once criteria have been selected there will still be some hurdles. Part of the challenge with a criteria-based assessment is that a single criterion could elicit a diversity of interpretations. It would therefore be advantageous to develop clear descriptions and definitions for the criteria in order to reduce potential misinterpretations and facilitate a broad understanding. It may also help to develop a set of questions an assessor could ask in order to determine whether or not an initiative meets a given criteria to reduce subjectivity risks.

Table 1: Potential criteria for the assessment of Action Agenda initiatives

Criteria for targets/impact	Criteria for structure/organization	Criteria for delivery
Specific goal or commitment	Institutional leadership	Meeting self-established benchmarks
Ambitious goal or commitment	Established work plan	Delivery of targets
Measurable outcomes	Conducts self-assessment	Have capacity/adequate resources
Coherent targets	Cooperation or inclusiveness	
Time-bound	External collaboration	
Advance Paris Agreement goals	Established/sufficient maturity	
Verifiable	Reporting processes	
Supplemental	Level of participation	
Size or scale	Accountable	
Transformational	Geographical presence/ balance	
Science-based		

### Further questions for discussion

- Should there be a single set of criteria for all initiatives, or should there be different criteria for different types of initiatives or for initiatives involved in different sectors?
- Which criteria represent the bare minimum (wide end of the funnel), and which ones are the most robust (narrow end of the funnel)?
- How should Action Agenda criteria relate to criteria that initiatives or networks may establish on their own for their own purposes (e.g. business initiatives)?
- Could criteria be phased in over time? Which criteria should come first?

## Resources

Galvanizing the Groundswell of Climate Actions (GGCA). 2015. Accelerating the Action Agenda through Robust and Credible Climate Commitments from Non-state Actors.

Galvanizing the Groundswell of Climate Actions (GGCA). 2016. Aggregating and Tracking Non-State Climate Action. Working Session Summary.

Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC). Accountability within the Ecosystem of Climate Commitment Platforms.

Nordic Council of Ministers. 2015. Tracking International Cooperative Initiatives.

World Wildlife Fund (WWF). Assessment Framework for Cooperative Partnerships.

---

[1] [http://newsroom.unfccc.int/media/408544/lpaa\\_-\\_briefing\\_at\\_bonn\\_session\\_-\\_02\\_sep\\_15.pdf](http://newsroom.unfccc.int/media/408544/lpaa_-_briefing_at_bonn_session_-_02_sep_15.pdf)

[2] WWF. Assessment Framework for Cooperative Partnerships.

[3] Nordic Council of Ministers. 2015. Tracking International Cooperative Initiatives.

### 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)