



Stanley Center
FOR PEACE AND SECURITY



Summary report

The Future of Global Climate Action in the UNFCCC

A Galvanizing the Groundswell of Climate Actions “online atelier”

May 11, 13, 15, 2020

The document summarizes the outcomes of an “Online Atelier” on the Future of Global Climate Action (GCA) in the UNFCCC held in May 2020.

Key points:

- The shift to implementation places greater emphasis on *action* by both Parties and other actors. Action will increasingly be the yardstick by which the value and legitimacy of the UNFCCC process will be judged.
- GCA is the part of the UNFCCC process that catalyzes and brokers action via collaboration between all actors. GCA should not be thought of as just the realm for non-state or sub-national actors, but as a tool to help *all* actors enhance action.
- On the road to COP26 and over the next five years, GCA activities should prioritize catalyzing action, facilitating capacity building and information exchange between Parties and non-Parties, and enhancing reporting and communication, while strengthening the organizational aspects of GCA in sync with the implementation architecture of the Paris Agreement.

The objective of the workshop was to build on previous conversations by deepening our collective thinking on how GCA could be strengthened going forward. It feeds into the consultations carried out by the High-level Champions, who were tasked at COP26 with exploring opportunities to improve the Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action (MPGCA). This summary covers key aspects of the conversations that took place around:

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We also note where there is greater consensus, and where points of divergence or open questions remain.

Purpose and value-added

As the UNFCCC process shifts to implementation, and as the COVID-19 crisis highlights the urgency of building healthy, resilient economies, multilateralism will be judged not solely by negotiated outcomes but more critically by how quickly it can deliver immediate action, in line with science, to deliver the goals of the Paris Agreement.

The UNFCCC is not an implementing agency, but in this new phase of the climate regime it can facilitate implementation by using its convening power to promote learning and cooperation around action. The GCA does not itself “deliver” implementation--that is done by actors themselves (e.g. Governments, local authorities, multilateral organizations, non governmental organizations, academia, civil society). However, GCA provides a critical connective tissue that helps all do more, faster. In this way, the GCA has the transformational potential to become a powerful platform within the UNFCCC process for driving implementation. The period 2020-2025 represents a critical window to deliver on this promise.

Going forward, we should not see GCA as a “business as usual” and siloed process specific to non-state actors. Rather, it is the space for accelerating action from all actors, including Parties, through inclusive and impactful cooperation. Furthermore, the “action” focus of GCA also provides a natural bridge within the UNFCCC to goals like good health and wellbeing, decent work and economic growth, biodiversity, partnerships for the goals and other SDGs, now of even greater importance as the world seeks to build resilience out of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Moreover, the GCA in the UNFCCC is only part--albeit a critical part--of the wider landscape of climate action. It should therefore focus on those areas--described as the core functions below--where it is best positioned to add most value.

The core objectives of GCA should therefore be:

1. Radically increase scale/scope of climate action, including in underrepresented areas (Global South) and unusual areas (hard-to-abate sectors)
2. Build a strong “ambition loop” between non-Party Actors and Parties
3. Drive ambitious action by all actors along transformative sectoral pathways
4. Report and track NPA-related climate action

At the same time, the GCA should avoid certain pitfalls:

- Avoid being driven solely by the organization of events (at COPs or regional climate weeks) focusing instead on creating year-long “communities of action”
- Avoid overlap across the UN system and pursue instead collaborative synergies with similar “action agendas”
- Avoid trying to centralize decision-making
- Avoid excessive bureaucratization
- Avoid losing sight of the importance to focus on rapid, sustainable and concrete positive impacts
- Avoid “greenwashing” superficial actions or initiatives

GCA objectives 2020-2025

Specifically, the GCA should target the following objectives and outcomes 2020-2025:

A. Catalyzing action

1. Delivery: Actors' and initiatives' short-term goals and interim targets (e.g. in the 2020-2025 period) are achieved and reported in key areas. Concrete results (lower emissions, more resilience, etc) are achieved and reported for longer-term goals.
2. Exponential growth in both the number and range of non-Party actors involved in climate action (across the entire ecosystem, not necessarily in GCA meetings), including in "surprising areas", and ambition rises across this group. For example, "Race to Zero" campaign delivers on ambition to 10x net zero pledges.
3. Substantive engagement of Parties across the world, including and especially from line ministries relevant to the various transformational pathways, in GCA activities.

B. Facilitating capacity building and information exchange between Parties and non-Parties

1. Sectoral pathways become common roadmaps for implementation, attracting substantive engagement from key actors
2. New or updated NDCs (pre-COP26 and for COP 31) fully incorporate and build on achievements and opportunities generated by GCA domestically and internationally

C. Enhancing reporting and communication

1. GCA outcomes are well tracked and reported; progress is assessed and actors feel accountable for delivering on their pledges
2. Decisive contribution to 2023 Global Stocktake
3. GCA outcomes should be central to the 'narrative' of the COP, receiving significant public and media attention
4. GCA gives the world hope regarding the future of the climate and our ability to work together to tackle shared challenges

D. Strengthening organizational dimensions

1. While each successive Champion brings additional value, GCA strategy remains stable and cumulative
2. GCA work sufficiently resourced and stable to allow effective planning
3. GCA governance inclusive and "co-owned" by all stakeholders

Functions and activities

Catalyzing action

- General observations
 - Mobilizing action is the core task of the Champions. While climate action has surged since Paris, it is difficult to say how much of this has been driven by the Champions themselves, whose catalyzing efforts and capacities have varied from year to year. Much catalyzing has been done by other actors. There is

general agreement that the Champions role, with proper support and strategy, can and should do much more in 2020-2025 than was done 2015-2020.

- Within this mandate, there remain open questions about how the Champions should prioritize their time. While there is some “ambassadorial” role, there is also a need to, e.g., work on large-scale, transformative initiatives, broker dialogues around key areas, etc.
- The Chile-UK Champions team has seen a step-change in resources, and put forward ambition plans like the Climate Ambition Alliance, 1.5C Pathways, and Race to Zero campaign. This provides a critical test of the potential of the Champions role, though also raises questions around how it can be sustained going forward.
- Overarching campaigns:
 - The Race to Zero represents a promising way to build a “whole” that is larger than the sum of the parts, demonstrating a potential model for how the Champions can add value to the existing landscape.
- 1.5C Pathways
 - The value of 1.5 Pathways is to unite a diverse array of key actors -- Parties and non-Parties--around a common vision for how a key sector can reach net zero. In this way, pathways are guiding documents, not technocratic manuals. They serve to align actors’ expectations and create a bridge/platform to connect the ecosystem of actors around a specific thematic area.
 - Given this function, the value of Pathways is just as much in the process around their creation as in the content of the document. To succeed, they must engage the key actors relevant to a given sector. There remains an open question about how to ensure processes around the pathways engage with the key sectoral actors while also remaining inclusive.
 - This requires: Inclusive leadership, legitimacy from having the right array of stakeholders, efficient process, value-add for participants
 - Pathways should be seen as living documents in a continuous cycle of: Convening key actors → Development of Pathway → Strategic dissemination to key actors → etc.
 - Going forward, it will be critical to find new and evolving ways to ensure that Pathways are connected to concrete action.
- Support / amplify existing initiatives
 - In addition to overarching campaigns and functions, how can the Champions best work with existing initiatives to bring them more resources/support/connections?

Capacity building and information exchange between Parties and non-Parties

- The logic behind this function is that action generates learning, which, properly diffused, can empower more action. If all actors are able to share and learn from others’ experiences, they will be able to take more action more quickly and effectively, to locate needed resources, etc. While learning and information exchange occur through many processes, GCA has a unique value-add given 1) the many different actors and sectors

involved; 2) the link between Parties and non-Parties; 3) the legitimacy of the UNFCCC. Through these processes, NDCs are able to take full advantage of the opportunities identified by GCA.

- The thematic areas within GCA can help create communities of practice to advance capacity building and information exchange. However, there is also a risk that dividing GCA into themes creates new “silos” that impede productive connections and information exchange. It therefore remains an open question about how to make thematic areas most effective.
- The 1.5C Pathways also can serve a vehicles for capacity building and information exchange (see above).
- In addition, this function can be delivered by 4 GCA activities:
 - Regional Climate Weeks
 - Annual climate action meetings at regional level
 - Allow all actors to meet to discuss experiences and generate practical collaborations on core topics most relevant to the region
 - Strong participation of national government officials from line ministries
 - Climate Action Implementation Labs
 - Demand-driven meetings between a Party and non-Party actors
 - Parties request targeted support from GCA community on particular topics of interest to them, drawing on existing needs statements
 - GCA reaches across global climate action community to provide countries with a curated series of engagements from most relevant non-Party actors and initiatives
 - Party participants drawn from implementation agencies, line ministries
 - How to link to, e.g., NDC Partnership or similar efforts?
 - Ministerial dialogues at COPs
 - Sectoral ministerial meetings (e.g. finance ministers, transport ministers)
 - Not a negotiating forum
 - Small scale and results-oriented around very specific climate action priorities
 - Promulgate methods and best practices for mobilizing and drawing on NPAs in their country and beyond to facilitate implementation
 - Many Parties have developed innovative and effective ways to engage with their domestic NPAs in the development and implementation of NDCs
 - GCA can help Parties share these experiences with each other

Reporting and communication

- Measure the **scale, potential, and achievements** of action communicates clear message of inevitable transformation
- In this way, GCA can provide the politically precious commodity of hope
- While scale and potential are now being tracked relatively well, more is needed on tracking progress. The Camda community is working on this issue.
- Continue to improve the Global Climate Action Portal

- Benchmarks success
- Promotes accountability
- Showcase big achievements/ambition at High-level Event during COPs, plus other events like Regional Climate Weeks, UNGA Climate Week, etc.
- Link to Global Stocktake in 2023
 - Facilitate NPA participation in GST dialogues
 - Talanoa Dialogue style meetings in lead-up
 - While not envisioned in the GST modalities, additional link to the GST could occur via:
 - Link from GCA portal to GS
 - Every five years, a “Global Climate Action Stock Take Report” (a kind of ‘super yearbook’) is presented as part of GST. First in 2023. Focuses on how NPA action creates more options for Parties

Organization

Political Level

- Champions (set GCA agenda and workplan, ambassador-like role, attends high-level meetings and events)
 - Trade-off: While there is value in a strong link to the Presidency, this also creates significant variability from year to year
 - Key question: how can COP26 help institutionalize GCA to maximize the benefit of the Champions’ link to the presidencies, while also making GCA cumulative and stable?
 - A clearer set of terms of reference for Champions may help future Presidencies choose the most suitable individuals. Adequate staffing and support will further improve consistency.
- Friends of Champions (currently not active)
 - A wider group around the Champions can help create stability and continuity
 - Should include a strong link to the UNSG’s team

Operational level

- Champions role requires long-term, stable, regular budget support
- Permanent Champions support team in secretariat, supports Champions to set GCA agenda and workplan
- Secretariat staff complemented by rolling secondments from the GCA community, with dedicated resources to support secondments from GCA actors in the Global South
- Rolling secondment from across the GCA community to Champions teams
- Champions, Executive Secretary, and UNSG agree effective division of labour with UNSG team (e.g. they focus on catalyzing around their core issues and initiatives)

Engagement and Outreach

- Communications
 - Strategic communications is key area where more staffing support is needed.

- GCA should also coordinate with communications professionals across the climate action community
- Funding to support NPAs from developing countries to participate in GCA activities
- Key questions:
 - Should there be thematic focal points?
 - How to best promote more substantive and meaningful engagement for key constituencies (civil society, youth, indigenous peoples, women, workers, etc.)? How can these communities best participate in the “action” space, when traditionally in the UNFCCC they have served as observers to the intergovernmental negotiations? In the Action space, they have a dual role as both actors who can deliver climate action, and also as representatives of important viewpoints whose meaningful inclusion can bring legitimacy to GCA, increasing its effectiveness.

Outcomes on the road to and at COP26

- Trial Climate Action Implementation Lab sometime 2020-2021
- Link to wider real economy narrative, in a post-C-19 green and equitable recovery (lead with economy towards transformation)
- Political recognition of the important role of the NPAs could be further strengthened at COP 26 through various vehicles such as a decision dedicated to that purpose, prominent text in a decision 1/CP26 and/or be featured consistently across several decisions with positive language (“welcomes”, etc.) to better reflect the important role of NPAs in the Climate Change Regime and the realm of implementation. A stronger recognition will only happen on the basis of a clear GCA outcome put forward by the Champions. (attention to political capital investment required)

Key questions and ongoing challenges

- While there is common agreement that ongoing, stable resources are critical for the success of GCA, significant obstacles remain. We cannot be certain that resources will match expectations of capacity.
- While the variation in Champions from year to year can be managed, it is an inevitable element of the rotating nature of COP Presidencies.
- How to better link to, e.g., youth and indigenous communities? How to better link gender equality across all thematic areas?

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