**Workshop summary**

# Designing a global platform for climate actions

## Oxford | July 24-25, 2014

Countries are moving to agree an ambitious climate deal by 2015. At the same time, there has been a surge of mitigation and adaptation actions at the sub- and non-state levels, as cities, regions, companies, and other groups forge ahead. These actions, many of which link to each other and to states and international organizations in dynamic action-oriented coalitions, have enormous potential to supplement and help catalyze the next climate agreement.

A growing number of observers, countries, and organizations have called for more comprehensive support for, engagement, with and tracking of these "bottom up" actions, coalitions, and initiatives.[1]  The ADP co-chairs'

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[1] For a summary of parties and observers views prepared for the workshop, see Chan et al, "UNFCCC parties and observers' views on sub/non-state actions and cooperative initiatives," available at:
http://www.bsg.ox.ac.uk/sites/blavatnik/files/documents/Oxford-NRDC%20workshop.%20Memo.%20What%20has%20been%20said%20in%20the%20UNFCCC_REVISED.docx

draft text of July 2014 explicitly calls for greater recognition and support of such actions, including through a dynamic online tool.[2]

But what goals might a global platform achieve? How can it and a broader framework of engagement be designed to achieve those goals? What entities are best suited to take this engagement forward? What is the relationship between "bottom up" action and the larger climate regime, and particularly the UNFCCC process?

On July 24-25, 2014, the Blavatnik School of Government at Oxford University and the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) convened 38 individuals from intergovernmental organizations, governments, civil society, the private sector, and academia to bring this conversation to a greater degree of specificity. The following summary notes the key points of discussion, including areas of consensus and disagreement. *Because the workshop was conducted under the Chatham House rule, this summary reflects the organizers' understanding of the discussion. It does not imply attribution to, nor endorsement by, any of the organizations or individuals present.*

The primary conclusion of the workshop was robust agreement on the need for some way to recognize and build on the phenomenal groundswell of climate action we see in every sector of society. The workshop allowed participants to significantly refine our shared understanding of what might be pragmatically done in this regard. Participants did not agree on what to call the mechanism—registry, platform, clearinghouse, framework, etc.—but strongly concurred that it requires further elaboration. As a placeholder, this summary document will refer to a "platform" for global climate action without prejudice to other options.



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[2] Doc. ADP.2014.8.DraftText. Available at:
http://unfccc.int/documentation/documents/advanced_search/items/6911.php?priref=600008015#beg

## Mission

While participants did not draft a mission statement (to avoid spending excessive time wordsmithing), significant consensus emerged around a core mission for a platform that prioritizes the following components:

- Driving action toward a **safe climate and resilient development**, consistent with the globally negotiated goals of the UNFCCC but potentially more far-reaching;

- **Catalyzing** such actions, meaning both supporting and scaling existing actions and promoting new actions where they do not exist;

- **Aggregating** such actions in a comprehensive clearinghouse or set of tracking mechanisms; and

- **Showcasing** such actions to build a positive, pragmatic narrative around climate change.

## Scope

Participants had extensive discussions concerning the scope of actions to be included in the platform, considering everything that was not a treaty arrangement negotiated in the UNFCCC or a national climate policy or law. The remaining universe of climate actions includes:

- Individual actions and policies by sub/non-state actors;

- Networks and initiatives that link sub/non-state actors together across borders;

- Action coalitions, partnerships, alliances, and other multi-stakeholder initiatives that include governments, international organizations, and/or sub/non-state actors; and

- Intergovernmental "clubs" or climate-relevant actions in other multilateral fora.

While scope remains an ongoing topic for discussion, the preponderance of opinion amongst participants favored a fairly expansive platform that included actions that:

- Linked two or more of any kind of actor across borders; and

- Made a significant contribution to GHG mitigation, climate adaptation, or the financing thereof.

In some cases it was also thought that an action that made a very significant contribution would be included, even if it was only undertaken by a single actor. The threshold qualification for "significant" requires further analytical work.

Participants also discussed substantive criteria that might apply to the actions that would be included in the platform. A number of questions remain for discussion, such as:

- Would a certain level of transparency be required for inclusion?

- Could there be a tiered system for different types of commitments? For example, an upper tier for globally significant actions, and a lower tier for more local or regional actions, with some number of intermediate categories?

- Would there be an expectation of continuous improvement? That is, would commitment makers have to build on and add to previous commitments rather than leaving them as static?

- Under what conditions would an action or initiative be removed from the platform?



## Functions and value-added

Participants discussed a number of potential functions for the platform. Sander Chan's issues paper, prepared in conjunction with the UNFCCC, identified six potential functions: mobilization, recording, monitoring, verification, assessment, and awarding.

While participants saw some role for all these tasks, the discussion centered around two key functions:

- **Aggregating** climate actions: tracking and adding-up the full universe of actions being taken to address climate change

- **Catalyzing** climate actions: through aggregation, facilitate efforts to support existing initiatives and to seed and inspire initiatives where they are lacking

Less priority was given in the discussion to potential functions like monitoring, verification, assessment, and information-sharing. While these tasks were considered important, many participants saw them as means for achieving the larger goals of aggregating and catalyzing. In many cases, participants saw these other functions as best located within the individual initiatives and thematic clusters that would comprise the global platform (see below), as opposed to functions for the platform as a whole.

How would a platform that aggregates and catalyzes climate actions contribute to the mission? In other words, how would it add value to climate actions? Participants identified several mechanisms, including:

1. Communicating the vast scope of existing climate actions, building a positive, pragmatic narrative around climate change and thus inspiring and building expectations for further actions. Many participants emphasized the power of a platform to change the discussion around climate change from one of "burden sharing" to "positive action."  While such a shift would require a careful communications strategy (see below), participants envisioned a upward spiral in which the platform aggregates existing actions, therefore helps to build a narrative and expectation that catalyze further actions, which could then be aggregated in the platform, beginning the iterative process again.

2. Providing a "one-stop shop" or "clearinghouse" for climate actions would create a powerful informational resource for policymakers, funders, individual initiatives working on climate change, and researchers. Participants noted the difficulty of identifying the full universe of actions being taken on cities, renewable energy, or other themes, to say nothing of climate actions as a whole. A central repository for such information could help governments, international institutions, philanthropic organizations and other donors, and others develop coherent and well-informed strategies. Such a birds-eye view would also be crucial for seeing where (both geographically and thematically) climate action has been insufficient, helping link opportunities to resources and support. Not least, it could give existing initiatives and networks a way to observe how other sectors are developing. For example, participants stressed how useful the experience of city networks, which are fairly advanced both internally and in their relationships with each other, was for initiatives involving other kinds of sub/non-state actors.

3. Facilitating a progressive convergence of standards for tracking climate actions. Participants strongly believed that a potential platform should not impose standardized criteria or templates on the existing ecosystem of climate actions. At the same time, they believed it was important for existing initiatives to work together in a more coordinated fashion, and to eliminate potential redundancies. For example, participants expressed admiration for the way city networks are increasingly converging on a common template for reporting emissions, and the coordinating function played by the UN Special Envoy for Cities and Climate Change. A platform was seen as a key way to help these types of harmonization processes emerge elsewhere.

4. Supporting monitoring, verification, and assessment. Most participants agreed that, given the diversity of climate actions, a common standard or procedure for monitoring actions, verifying them, and assessing them, would be difficult to achieve and potentially counterproductive. Instead, many participants though such functions—essential for the credibility and therefore the success of the platform—were best performed by individual initiatives or within thematic clusters through a variety of modalities (e.g. third-party verification, peer review, independent expert groups, etc.). That said, it was also argued that a common platform could help to build an expectation for robust actions and commitments by providing a way to benchmark actions and showcase particularly ambitious actions.
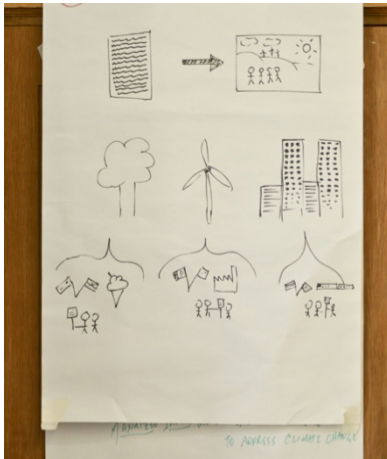
## Design and structure[3]

Participants spent significant time considering how the platform might be designed, discussing both general principles and key details. Ongoing conversations will be needed, but several points of consensus emerged:

**Build from the existing ecosystem of climate actions**. No participant expressed a desire to replace the existing landscape of climate action with a new system. Rather, participants saw a global platform as bringing together and supporting existing initiatives, and helping create conditions under which new initiatives could emerge. Most viewed the platform as a light-touch aggregator and linker of independent initiatives.

**Subsidiarity or a "platform of platforms**." As discussed above, participants believed most if not all of the functions of existing climate action initiatives should remain with those initiatives. For example, a number of city networks help cities make commitments to tackle GHG emissions and adapt to climate change through the exchange of best practices and peer benchmarking. Following the creation of a platform, individual cities would continue to interact with their networks as before. Now, however, those actions and commitments would also be recorded (relatively automatically) in a global platform that would allow the aggregation not only of an individual city network's actions, but those of all city networks together, as well as the broader universe of climate action. At this top level, only relatively modest amounts of information could be captured (e.g. what actor has taken what action). More detailed information would only be possible for sub-sets of the platform. For example, to count actual emissions reductions would be very difficult across sectors due to the potential for double counting (e.g. both a company and a city could potentially claim credit for a factory's reductions). Nonetheless, the overarching platform would paint a powerful picture of the scale and scope of climate action, and provide an informational tool for closer analysis of specific subsets clustered around, for example, the type of actor making commitments (e.g. cities, companies, etc.), the issue area (e.g. renewable energy, finance), the geographic region (e.g. Denmark, rural Liberia), etc. It was envisioned that these overlapping clusters, built on existing initiatives, would be the primary point of contact for most users of the platform.

**A virtual platform linked to a variety of "human platforms".** Participants largely agreed on the value of creating an online platform that aggregated climate actions as described above. They hoped such a platform would, to the extent possible, automatically collect information from existing websites and sources to minimize maintenance requirements and provide up-to-date information. At the same time, participants stressed the usefulness of a "human platform" as well. As with the virtual platform, participants believed most of this human platform would consist of the various initiatives, networks, and meetings that already exist. The Technical Expert Meetings, for example, already bring together a variety of actors to discuss concrete progress on specific themes at UNFCCC meetings. Other key meetings at which the platform's human networks would

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[3] A memo summarizing the design options reflected in existing platforms was prepared for the workshop. Chambers et al., "Platform design options: a survey of models," available at: http://www.bsg.ox.ac.uk/sites/blavatnik/files/documents/Oxford-NRDC%20workshop.%20Memo.%20Design%20options.docx

convene might include the September 2014 UN Secretary-General's Summit, the Clean Energy Ministerial, the annual Chatham House conference, the Clinton Global Initiative, the World Economic Forum, and similar meetings.

## Communication strategy

Participants identified communication as a key element of the platform's catalytic role. It was largely not envisioned that the platform itself would implement the communication strategy, but rather that it would be a tool for others (e.g. politicians, activists, and other advocates of climate action) to develop communication strategies around. Four audiences were identified, each of which would require a distinct strategy:.

1. *Actors who are already involved in climate action*. The platform would be a tool for actors already taking climate action to learn from others' experiences, and to reinforce their commitments by making them part of something much bigger.

2. *Sub/non-state actors who could do more*. A key group to mobilize are those cities, companies, regions, or other actors who have not taken (sufficient) climate actions. By capturing the vast scale of existing actions, the platform could: a) show what opportunities for climate action are available; and b) create the expectation that climate action is required. As one participant noted, it should be embarrassing for actors not to be involved in the platform.

3. *National politicians*. A key objective of the platform is to encourage greater country-level actions by communicating how much action is occurring on other scales, both domestically and globally. Such a demonstration can give national politicians and parliamentarians greater confidence and political capital to craft bolder national policies.

4. *The wider public*. To create a broad, positive narrative around climate change, the platform must ultimately be able to communicate its message to the broader public. Participants therefore hoped the online platform could have a compelling and intuitive user interface that could rapidly communicate the scope of climate action to users at various levels of aggregation.

## Incentives of key actors

Participants sought to inform their discussion of the objectives and design of the platform by considering the incentives and motivations of the key actors. Who would participate and why? Given that most sub/non-state actors would interact relatively indirectly with the platform as a whole (as discussed above, they would instead engage with the clusters and initiatives that comprise the platform), there was some debate as to whose incentives were most relevant to the platform. The following set of general incentives were identified:

1. Recognition of actions: individual actors, as well as initiatives and coalitions, may desire the reputational enhancement that linkage to a global platform may provide.

2. Access to a broader network of information: actors may benefit from the platform's aggregation of information. While the top-level data will be publically available, the deeper forms of information sharing and exchange that occur within individual initiatives would require more active participation, thus mitigating the free-rider problem.

3. Access to funding, capacity-building, and other support: to the extent funders and others interested in supporting climate action use the platform as a tool to develop strategies, participation may lead to enhanced opportunities for support.



## Governance, resources, and relationship to the UNFCCC

Participants largely converged around the idea of an independent platform governed jointly by the initiatives and actors that populate the platform and the UNFCCC. A steering committee of key organizations, including the UNFCCC Secretariat, was envisioned. Some suggested that the UNFCCC Secretariat may be, de facto, a "first among equals" member of the steering committee, given its comparative informational advantage and formal legitimacy.

One participant spoke for much of the group by envisioning the platform's relationship to the UNFCCC as one "at arm's length, but holding hands." No participant advocated that actions or commitments made under the platform would substitute for national contributions to the Paris agreement and beyond. At the same time, several participants called for greater linkages between the platform and the actions it may contain and the

intergovernmental negotiations. For example, participants raised the possibility that the UNFCCC member states may, at some point, choose to formally recognize or refer to the platform, though how this would work in practice remains a topic for discussion.

On the organizational side, a small staff could be employed to develop and maintain the platform itself, focusing mostly on technical work, database management, and financial management. Over time, this small secretariat might grow to support key functions including: networking/coordination, visibility/communication, support for existing initiatives, and mobilization of new initiatives. Financial resources would be sought from philanthropic organizations and donor governments.

## Next steps

One of the strongest areas of convergence at the workshop was the desire amongst participants to continue working toward a platform to aggregate and catalyze climate actions. Participants shared a sense of urgency, and committed to a number of concrete follow-up actions, including:



1. Creating a Google Groups email list to facilitate further discussion amongst key organizations and individuals;

2. Convening follow-up meetings alongside the September 2014 UN Secretary-General's Climate Summit, the October 2014 Bonn negotiations, and the December 2014 COP20 in Lima, and beyond;

3. Increasing discussion of these issues with colleagues in developing countries;

4. Hosting a brainstorming session with experts in online platforms and data management;

5. Updating the "Climate Initiatives Database" wiki, spearheaded by Ecofys, the Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership, and WRI, to collect existing information on climate initiatives;

6. Continuing development of the UNFCCC portal of cooperative initiatives; and

7. Contributing to forthcoming publications by IDDRI, the German Development Institute, and others on these questions.