Open Climate Governance Primer

INTRODUCTORY NOTE: This primer describes the benefits of a 'whole of society' approach to climate governance, providing illustrative examples from a range of countries. It is intended for both government officials and representatives of civil society organizations to use as a resource when engaging with their counterparts on climate governance issues. It has been developed for members of the Open Government Partnership (OGP), but can also be used by all stakeholders seeking to build support for these approaches in their domestic context.

What is open climate governance?

- Open climate governance refers to a transparent, participatory and accountable approach to developing and implementing policies and actions to tackle climate change. Policies and actions may include laws, regulations, decrees, directives, plans and programs as well as fiscal instruments to address climate change mitigation or adaptation. Ultimately, open climate governance aims to promote the legitimacy, effectiveness, equitability and sustainability of climate policies and actions.

- **Transparent:** Promoting proactive disclosure and access to information and data on climate-relevant activities. This includes information relevant to mitigation and adaptation as well policy responses such as legislation, long-term strategies, Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), national adaptation plans and detailed budget information. Proactive disclosure refers to information made public at the initiative of the public body.[1] Best practices include the disclosure of information in a timely fashion and in a range of formats that are accessible to users with different technical abilities. In addition, information on opportunities for participation is also disclosed in a way that the public can easily locate, understand and use in a timely fashion.

  EXAMPLE: *In its 2016–2018 OGP National Action Plan, Chile committed to lead regional negotiations to strengthen environmental democracy. This commitment builds transparency into its process by communicating all negotiation news and official documents on a dedicated webpage. The negotiations, except for select events, are also open to the public.[2]*

- **Participatory:** Providing early, adequate and accessible opportunities for the public to engage, while ensuring a breadth of consultation that includes vulnerable communities. This encompasses reporting back to those consulted on how their inputs were taken into account, and ensuring that these instances of participation have a bearing on decision-making.

  EXAMPLE: *Costa Rica made public consultations an integral part of its INDC drafting process, holding a series of stakeholder workshops that became the basis for the draft. The government later circulated the finalized draft widely and gathered feedback through workshops, presentations and meetings with relevant groups, such as the press and indigenous groups.[3]*

- **Accountable:** Beginning with a precise determination of an institution's objectives and the identification of measurable indicators of successful performance. Accountability originates from standards and systems to ensure that power is exercised responsibly, that environmental and social safeguards as well as fiduciary standards are enforced, and that independent grievance redress mechanisms are in place when these are violated.[4]

  EXAMPLE: *In its 2016–2018 OGP National Action Plan, Honduras committed to design a National Climate Change Plan with citizens' input and participation. The government has built an online platform where citizens can submit and vote on proposals for specific actions to be included in the plan. The resulting draft will be presented with detailed explanations for the inclusion or exclusion of proposed actions.[5]*

How will open climate governance support the implementation of climate goals?

It Builds Public Support for Climate Action:

- Under the Paris Agreement, countries must report their progress on mitigation and adaptation actions and progressively increase the ambition of their national climate actions over time. Increased access to information and participatory decision-making will help governments demonstrate transparency in reporting and build the public trust that is necessary to scale up ambition.

  EXAMPLE: *Engaging in a participatory process to open greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions data through OGP enabled the Macedonian Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning to draw the attention of high-level public officials in other sectors. This contributed to building awareness of climate actions among decision-makers and raising the political profile of the climate agenda. This is not only significant for Macedonia's current climate commitments, but also for the fact that, as a European Union candidate country, Macedonia will have to continue assuming higher standards for climate action and reporting. Additionally, by developing and promoting the use of robust GHG inventories, the Macedonian government was able to identify areas where the ambition of climate action could potentially be increased.*[6]

- Strengthening transparency and accountability mechanisms can help safeguard climate finance from corruption and mismanagement. This is important because investments in climate resilience and low-carbon technology must be made rapidly. Yet the mechanisms through which these funds are starting to flow are new and relatively untested. The risk of misuse, including corruption, is further magnified by weak governance and institutional frameworks, highlighting the need for reinforced public accountability.[7] Ultimately, this helps ensure that funds are reaching the most vulnerable communities and effectively supporting local decision-making.[8]

  EXAMPLE: *Climate finance flows have surged in recent years, but many countries still face challenges in adequately monitoring climate finance, including a lack of appropriate institutional arrangements.*[9] *This endangers the safe delivery of funds where they are needed. In the Philippines, a group of civil society organizations launched a comprehensive investigation on the spending of climate funds. They discovered that, while $880 million had been committed from 2010–2013, only $396 million had been disbursed, and only a fraction of this money was destined for local communities. The Oversight Committee on Climate Change was subsequently established by the Philippine parliament.*[10]

- Strengthening transparency and public participation can foster legitimacy and cooperation from the public and civil society, helping officials mobilize support for national climate goals.

  EXAMPLE: *In the Sinazongwe district of Zambia, which has suffered chronic and devastating droughts, the government centrally initiated a dam and irrigation project with very measured participation of local communities. The community consequently resisted the construction of the dams and the irrigation projects were delayed.*[11]

Open Data and Access to Information Can Drive Innovation:

- Open data empowers non-state actors to innovate and drive the shift to a low-carbon future.

  EXAMPLE: *Initiatives like C3*[12] *in France and Climate-KIC's Climathons*[13] *bring citizens together to develop crowdsourced solutions to specific climate challenges with the use of open data. The success of C3 in 2015 led the French Ministry of Environment to launch the GreenTech Incubator, a program that fosters start-ups working on issues such as energy transition, biodiversity and sustainable cities through the reuse of open data.*[14]

- Increased access to information allows the private sector to identify investment opportunities to drive transformation.

  EXAMPLE: *OpenForests, a consulting company that supports sustainable forestry projects and connects them with investors, collects and manages its clients' forestry data and reports them in a transparent manner. This allows projects to identify opportunities for improvement, show best practices and build trust among investors and stakeholders.*[15] *In this case, it is a private company that is producing and disclosing data in favor of informed investments, but the same effect could be expected from government-generated data.*

- Open data allows the most vulnerable countries to use the best available tools to adapt to climate impacts, assess risks and make robust decisions in a changing climate.

  EXAMPLE: *NASA's DEVELOP Program and the Rwanda Environment Management Authority have started a joint project to map land change over time in Rwandan wetlands and pinpoint critical areas for enhanced protection. This project uses NASA's open data to advance wetland conservation efforts, help safeguard local biodiversity, mitigate changes in climate and increase food security.[16]*

It Supports Efforts to Enhance Resilience to Climate Impacts:

- Enhanced public participation in adaptation planning at the national and subnational level helps ensure that strategies are locally relevant, accurately reflect the community's needs and make efficient use of resources. Additionally, it builds public awareness and support for the plans.

  EXAMPLE: *The use of a community-based tool for risk assessment in Ghana resulted in greater knowledge of risks and adaptation opportunities among both policymakers and the affected communities. The coastal municipalities subsequently developed contingency plans, and citizens remained involved in their socialization and implementation. This helped ensure the plans were relevant to the affected communities.[17]*

- Increased access to climate and environmental data enables local decision-makers to adequately plan adaptation and resilience projects.

  EXAMPLE: *Officials in Accra, Ghana, are using a portal of open water sanitation data developed by Resilience.io to strengthen resilience in this sector.[18]*

How does open climate governance support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?

- Climate change poses the greatest threat to those who are the most socially and economically vulnerable, further exacerbating existing inequities. Meanwhile, both mitigation and adaptation interact with broader equity issues involving livelihoods, health, food security

and energy access.[19] Creating opportunities for public participation in decision-making helps officials develop more effective, socially equitable policies, with benefits for the achievement of SDG 10.

EXAMPLE: *Vietnam's coasts have lost more than 80 percent of their mangrove forests since the 1950s, magnifying the impact of storm surges. This in turn endangers the agricultural, water resources and aquaculture sectors as a result of floods and rising sea levels. In southern Vietnam, mangrove restoration projects took local communities' needs into account, protecting their right to access the forests and use their resources. The restoration projects therefore not only protected against storms, but they also provided economic benefits and preserved the economic activities of women. This won the communities' continued cooperation and strengthened the projects' long-term viability.[20]*

- By inviting greater public participation and transparency in decision-making, governments can build up the inclusivity and responsiveness of their institutions in support of SDG 16.

  EXAMPLE: *In its 2016 OGP National Action Plan, Honduras committed to design a National Climate Change Plan with citizens' input and participation. The government has built an online platform where citizens can submit and vote on proposals for specific actions to be included in the Plan. The result of this online consultation will be presented in open meetings to prioritize actions, following which the government will give detailed explanations for the inclusion or exclusion of proposed actions.[21] If successfully implemented, this commitment will ensure that the National Climate Change Plan reflects an inclusive and responsive creation process.*

How can the OGP drive progress on climate action?

- OGP brings governments and civil society together around a collaborative action plan creation process, providing a space for capacity-building and cooperation. Additionally, OGP provides targeted technical support through its Support Unit and thematic working groups. These resources can simultaneously support implementation of the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

- OGP provides opportunities and platforms for peer exchange and learning across many levels — geographical, institutional and sectoral.

- By integrating the OGP process with their ongoing climate initiatives, governments can build political momentum behind these initiatives, buttress the legitimacy of plans at home and demonstrate their efforts internationally.

EXAMPLE: *Argentina has recently implemented mechanisms for public participation in climate policy and used OGP's forum to further formalize this initiative. While these efforts may strain public resources, the goal is to ensure coordination within government and with civil society and lend legitimacy to its climate change strategy for more effective outcomes.[22]*

Endnotes

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