



History of Climate Agreements and the Need for a Global Climate Alliance

Ritika Jajoo

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¹ Ritika is Climate Policy Consultant at Konrad Adenauer Stiftung.

Introduction

Over the course of the coming decades, dealing with climate change will become a key focus area for both the public and private sectors. This is gathering pace at a faster rate in the Global North, where actions against global warming are gaining prominence among the public. The presence of climate change in the Global South discourse, particularly amongst the citizens, is also now gaining momentum. The floods and heat waves faced by many Global South countries this year, most notably in South Asia and East Africa, have pushed climate change matters to the top of the global public agenda.

Image 1: An Indian farmer carries wheat crop harvested from a field on the outskirts of Jammu, India. Unusually early, record-shattering heat waves in India have reduced wheat yields.



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Globally, there is a consensus that previous climate agreements have not achieved their desired targets. The agreements have sought to be truly inclusive - the most recent example being the Paris Agreement with 193 Parties - and they have provided a foundation and conceptual framework to allow for transformative action. What is required now is focused action to achieve set targets. Taking the current baseline of climate action, it will only be possible to achieve the ambitious target of stemming the rise in global temperatures to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, by the end of the century, or even the necessary 2.0°C target of the Paris Agreement, with additional, focused government policies.

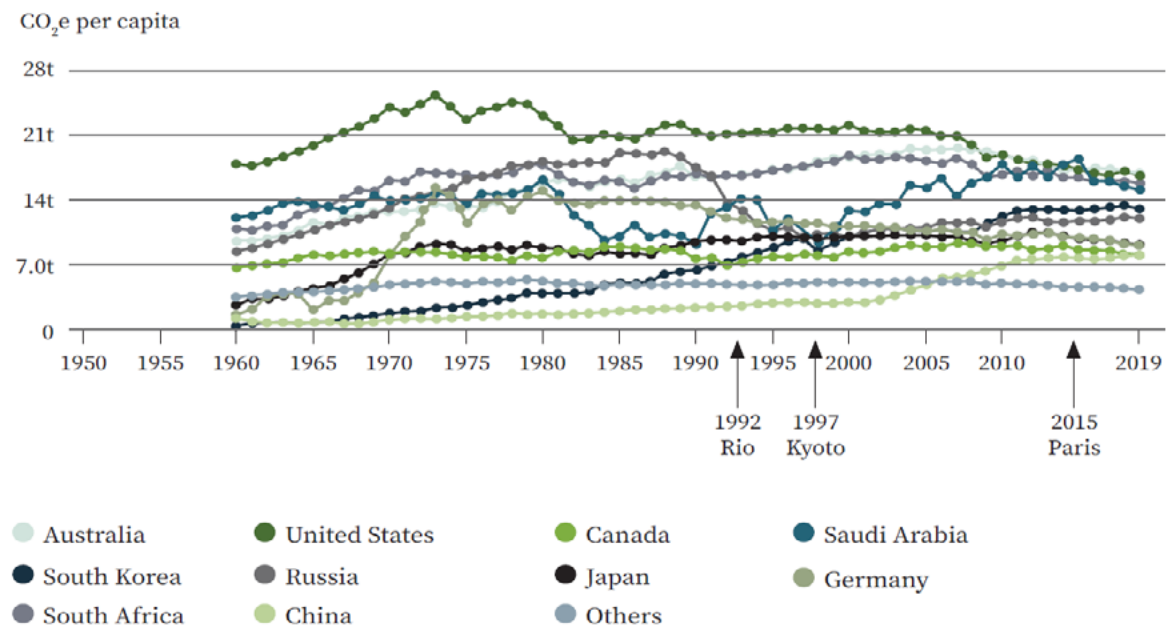
The global climate simulator EN-ROADS, which allows users to explore the impact of roughly 30 policies, such as electrifying transport, pricing carbon, and improving agricultural practices, on hundreds of factors like energy prices,

temperature, air quality, and sea level rise – projects a 3.6°C temperature increase by 2100 if we continue to move as we are doing now. Similarly, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is now projecting a significant rise in average global temperatures (2.8°C by end of the century, based on current NDCs submitted).

Global climate action is urgently required to achieve the critical target of 2°C by 2100. To facilitate this, international organisations, such as the United Nations under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), have been a forum for multiple climate discussions – resulting in the landmark agreements of Rio (1992), Kyoto (1997), and Paris (2015). Charts number 1, 2 and 3 show the per capita and absolute CO2 emissions reductions over the past seven decades. In both scenarios, the reductions were almost negligible for developed countries following both Rio and Kyoto. They were negative for developing countries, which continued to increase their emissions. For developed countries, the emissions reductions following Paris are only slightly higher, but remain slow.

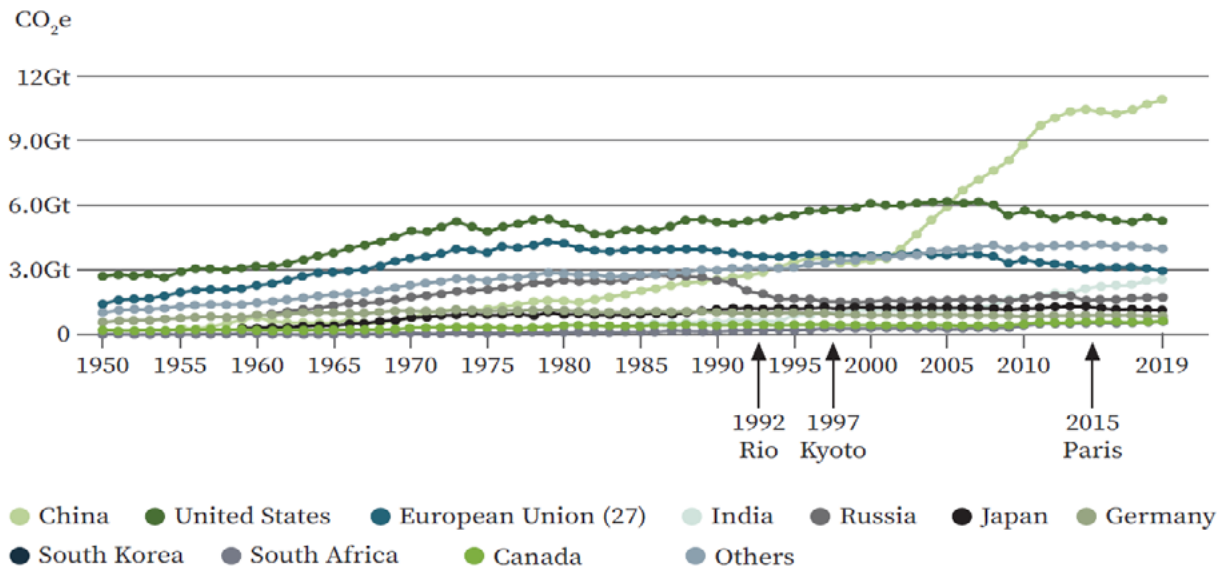
There are suggestions that the agreements under UNFCCC did not provide adequate incentives or opportunities for developing countries to reduce their emissions more rapidly. Over the years, the contribution of developing countries to total emissions has only increased, with per capita emissions and absolute emissions also reflecting this fact.

Chart 1: G20 CO2 per capita emissions excluding LULUCF



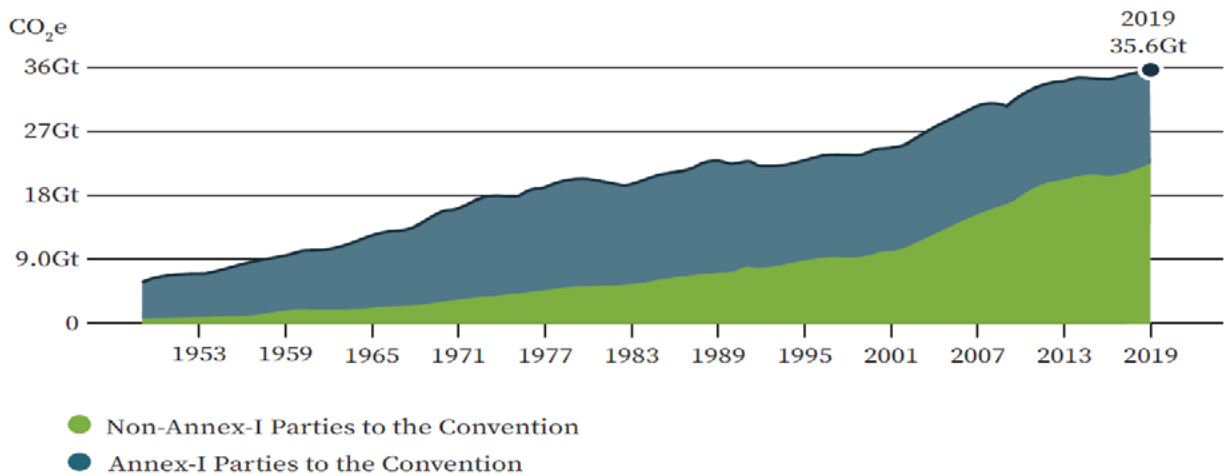
Source: Gütschow, J.; Günther, A.; Pflüger, M. 2021. *The PRIMAP-hist national historical emissions time series v2.3.1 (1850-2019)*. Zenodo. doi:10.5281/zenodo.5494497.

Chart2: Total G20 CO2 emissions excluding LULUCF



Source: Gütschow, J.; Günther, A.; Pflüger, M. 2021. *The PRIMAP-hist national historical emissions time series v2.3.1 (1850-2019)*. Zenodo. doi:10.5281/zenodo.5494497.

Chart 3: CO2 contributions of Annex I (developed) and Non-Annex I Parties (developing)



Source: Gütschow, J.; Günther, A.; Pflüger, M. 2021. *The PRIMAP-hist national historical emissions time series v2.3.1 (1850-2019)*. Zenodo. doi:10.5281/zenodo.5494497.

Rio Declaration and Agenda 21

The Rio Declaration was signed in 1992 at the Earth Summit and consists of 27 non-binding principles. Agenda 21, henceforth referred to as the Agenda, is an action plan of the United Nations on sustainable development, produced as a consequence of the Earth Summit. It is one of the first attempts at making a comprehensive, actionable plan against climate change, but its primary focus is development in light of sustainability, and not emissions reduction. The Agenda, unlike the Paris Agreement, has no specific numerical or quantified targets. It does not mention a long-term goal for net zero or emissions reduction across sectors. It can be considered as a very nascent approach to a climate agreement since its focus is on the non-core issues of climate change like public awareness. Since the goal is to promote sustainable development, its target activities largely include combating poverty and

hunger; building human resources and capacity by increasing the role of different groups; developing data collection functions; and climate adaptation to avoid the effects of desertification and other extreme weather conditions. The Agenda does not carry the required focus on energy efficiency, renewable energy and GHGs.

One of the biggest challenges associated with the implementation of the Agenda is that it is entirely based on individual national action. It serves as a checklist for countries to consider while formulating national legislation but does not mandate any country to take action based on the Agenda itself. There is no requirement for a statutory commitment, and the Agenda is not legally binding on any country.

The Agenda readily accepts the principle of equity and recommends fewer action items for developing countries. The Secretariat, during the Conference, had estimated a cost of over \$600 billion for financing sustainable development in developing countries, out of which over \$150 billion was to come from the international community or the developed countries as grants or loans on concessional terms. There is a list of funding sources in the Agenda that developing countries can refer to for their financing needs, including innovative financing methods through investments in entrepreneurship. Yet, no additional funds have been created for developing countries, and the flows prescribed were not mandatory. There is no compliance process to ensure the flow of funds or other measures, which developed countries are expected to support, such as capacity building.

The Agenda provides for multilateral development banks (MDBs) to finance activities in developing countries but does not mention which sectors to cover and the quantum of minimum funds to be received. While a UN review report suggests that there has been an increase in financing through foreign direct investments (FDIs), MDBs and other sources, it also highlights a steady fall in Official Development Assistance (ODA) which was targeted at 0.7% of GNP, given annually per developed country. Average ODA levels as a percentage of GNP fell from 0.35% in 1992 to 0.22% in 2000, and the reason cited was misgivings around aid effectiveness.ⁱⁱ

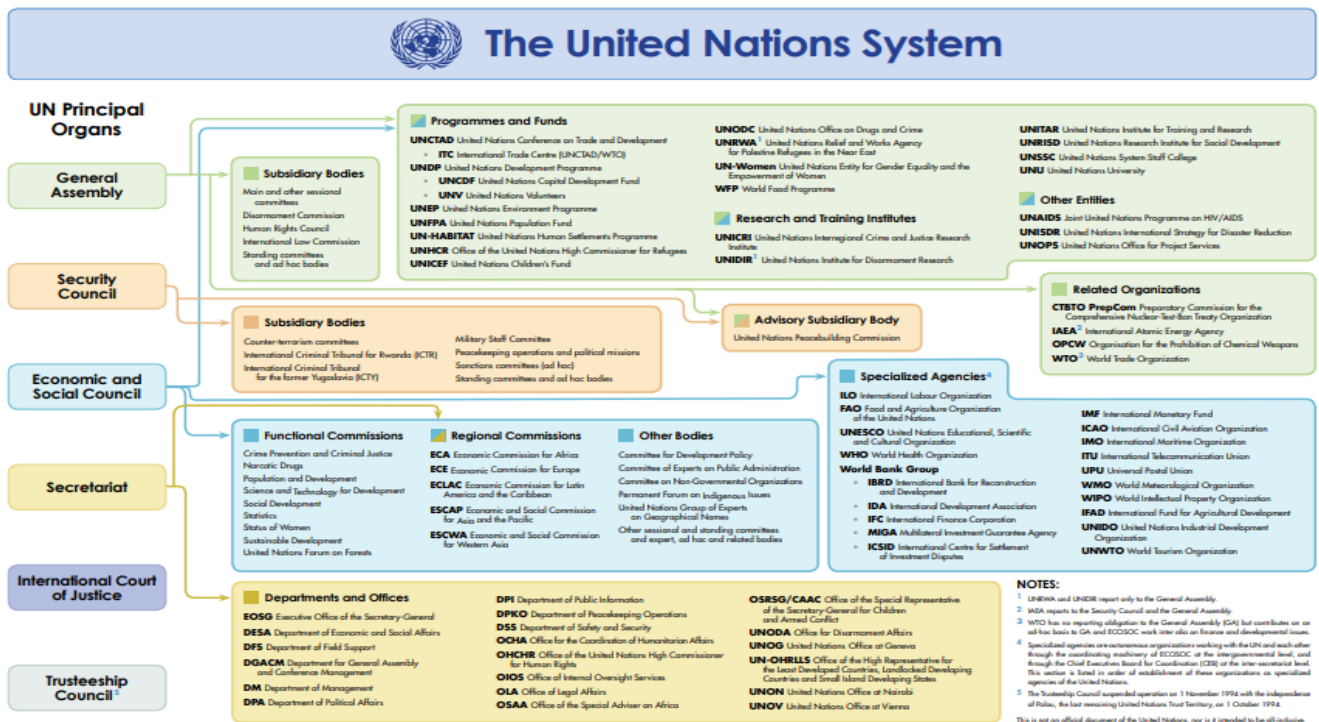
Even though there was a slight increase in financing through other sources, the UN review claimed that monitoring and evaluation of these funds was difficult due to the lack of proper reporting. The Agenda also recommended a reallocation of military budgets for the purposes of sustainable development, but does not provide any timelines or mandates for countries to refer to.ⁱⁱⁱ

There are no mechanisms for trade-related import duties, carbon taxation, emissions trading system (ETS), or mechanisms to prevent carbon leakage. Addressing the challenges of the Agenda, the review report by the UN recommends the introduction of a global carbon price, the linking of different carbon markets, or the introduction of a cross-sectoral emissions trading system (ETS) system similar to the European Union.^{iv} A striking feature of the Agenda is its focus on technological flows. The mechanisms prescribed by the Agenda can be implemented decades later, despite being drafted originally in 1992.

Policy proposals constitute a crucial component of climate agreements, especially if there are no concrete financial mechanisms. The focus of the Agenda is solely on sustainable development, with only a few measures related to direct environmental action. Both the Rio Declaration and the Agenda take a superficial approach to climate action, focused on smaller issues, and attempt to provide conventional solutions. The Agenda mentions agriculture as an important sector for sustainable development, but the policy prescriptions only skim the surface of the sector in the form of crop diversification, soil erosion, and waterlogging, among others. The UN review report also sheds light on the incoherence of different policy actions with

respect to land use and other sectors, rendering the Agenda inefficient due to a lack of international coordination in different approaches.v
 The monitoring, reporting, and compliance processes under the Rio Declaration are loose and completely based on voluntary reporting by countries. There are no hard targets under the Agenda, hence requiring no compliance mechanisms. As it is based on self-reporting, each country has its own methods of calculation and reporting, leading to inconsistencies amongst different reports and, ultimately, an inadequacy in measuring the direct effectiveness of the Agenda.

Chart 4: The United Nations System



Source: United Nations

The governing body of the Agenda is the United Nations, with a large organisational hierarchy, as shown in the figure below. According to the UN review, the Agenda suffers from a weak institutional structure. The Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) is responsible for the implementation of the Agenda, along with international coordination across agencies. Due to its low ranking in the organisational structure, it has not been able to move decisions quickly and effectively. The CSD lacks a financial element and has no mechanisms for implementation. With new agreements being signed under the UNO, the administrative costs of the organisation have increased significantly; and with funding as a challenge and a lack of results from the projects being taken up, the UN has been falling short of the required institutional support needed.

Kyoto Protocol

The Kyoto Protocol was adopted in 1997 and entered into force in 2005. It has a total membership of 192 Parties to date. The Protocol is based on the concept of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBDR-RC), as it provides legally binding emissions reduction

targets to 37 industrialised countries, called 'Annex I' countries. It is one of the few legally-binding international environmental agreements with penalties for non-compliance.

Under the Protocol, countries are divided into Annex I, Annex II, and Non-Annex I countries. Annex I consists of industrialised members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), along with economies in transition (EIT), while Annex II is a sub-set consisting of only the OECD countries. Non-Annex I countries are mostly developing/industrialising economies. While this distinction is crucial to implement the principles of equity, imposing targets only on industrialised countries had two geopolitical consequences: one, large emitters like China and India were left out of the purview of the Protocol; and two, another large emitter, the United States of America, was alienated due to the absence of targets for developing countries.^{vi} By 2007, two years after the Protocol came into force, developing countries had already surpassed developed countries' emissions.^{vii} Leaving out India, China, and the United States - the three largest emitters currently - meant that the Protocol was doomed to fail from the get-go.

Annex B of the Protocol (containing emissions reduction targets) did not provide many countries with a target in the first commitment period (2005-12). For example, Australia had an emissions cap of 108% over 1990 levels, meaning that it could continue polluting even further during the first commitment period. Similarly, Iceland was at 110%, Norway at 101%, and Russia and Ukraine at 100%.^{viii} Australia continued with a similar target after the Doha Amendment during the second commitment period (2013-20) with its emissions reduction target at 99.5% over 2000 levels. In fact, many Annex B countries like Canada, Japan, and Russia withdrew from taking a quantified economy-wide target for the second commitment period.^{ix} Since there were no long-term worldwide targets, developing countries continued to free-ride, and some developed countries chose to quit the Protocol itself.

The Protocol, in its current shape, lacks policy and sectoral prescriptions. Some proposals have suggested that just a long-term temperature goal can be disillusioning, as in Kyoto, and specific long-term actions, for example, reducing the carbon content in steel by x% by 2030, may be more effective.^x Despite a legally-binding mechanism, no mechanisms existed to prevent countries from withdrawing from the Protocol without complying with their targets. Compliance was mandatory, leading to accountability within the Protocol, but statutory commitments to remain in the Protocol were not mandatory. Many countries did not ratify the Doha Amendment, questioning the legitimacy and authority of the Protocol itself.

The text of the Protocol does not mention any quantified targets for financing. It does prescribe developed countries to provide financial resources to meet the costs incurred by developing countries in implementing programmes for emissions reduction. The Protocol utilised the Financial Mechanism of the Convention, operated by the Global Environmental Facility (GEF). According to an IPCC report, from 1991 to 2004, GEF allocated a total of \$1.7 billion for climate change-related activities.^{xi} India, at the COP 26 Summit in Glasgow, declared that it alone requires about \$2.5 trillion by 2030 to implement its climate mitigation plan.^{xii}

Without mandatory financial transfers from developed countries to developing countries, the green transition will not be possible. The financing mechanisms under Kyoto were not sufficient, even with the Adaptation Fund financed with a share of proceeds from the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM). Market mechanisms under Kyoto have been considered strong. The ETS under Kyoto is one of the first attempts at creating a global carbon market since the EU-ETS acts as a national programme instead of an international one.^{xiii} Under

CDM, developed countries could earn carbon credits through offset projects in developing countries and count it toward their emissions reduction targets or trade them in the international market.

However, there was fear among economists that trading the surplus allowances might reduce the effectiveness of the Kyoto system and allow them to affect market rates. They suggest that revenues from the sale of allowances should be used for further green projects within the country.^{xiv} Additionally, for the CDM, it was assumed that projects would be taken up as bilateral agreements between countries. As of October 2006, it was found that 56% of the transactions were unilateral through companies selling directly to industrialised countries.^{xv} It indicates the enthusiasm of the private sector to participate in green transitions, and future financing mechanisms should be reflective of this.

Monitoring, reporting, and compliance form a very crucial and unique feature of the Protocol. The system of reporting is based on individual reports from countries. While the reports are reviewed to track implementation, the submitted data remains unverified. The compliance process is largely intergovernmental as the Enforcement Branch consists of Parties, making it highly likely that decisions are influenced by political will. For the Branch to take any decisions, it has to receive a double majority from Annex I and Annex II countries, separately, and the final decision can be challenged by the Party in the discussion. If there is a dispute, the expert group, consisting mostly of member Parties, is responsible for evaluating the decision.

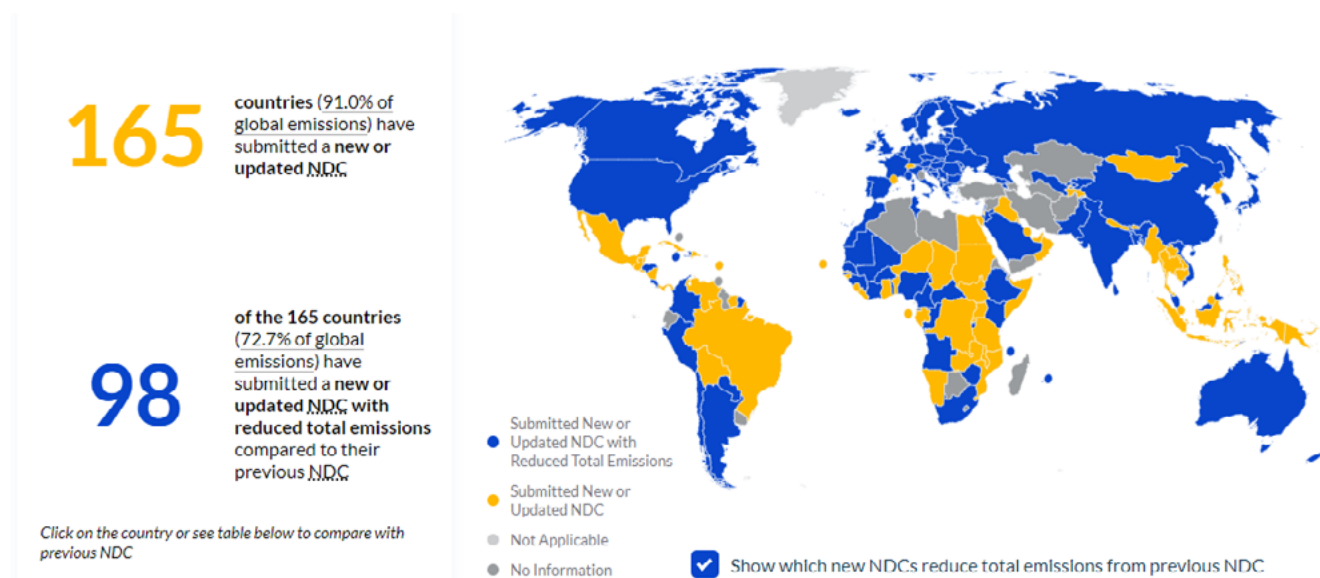
In case it is found that a country has been non-compliant, consequences are set in place. If the country does not comply again and chooses to not accept the decision of the Branch, there are no further consequences; the process can remain endless. It is clear that even though Kyoto has sticks and not just carrots like other agreements, penalties for non-compliance can be easily evaded as they are not mandatory to comply with either. Additionally, the mandates of all other bodies within the Kyoto framework are small, and only the Enforcement Branch of the Compliance Committee can compel a country to take action. The remaining bodies are only advisory in nature.

Paris Agreement

The Paris Agreement was signed in 2015 at the 21st Conference of the Parties Summit in Paris, France. It was hailed as one of the most important steps towards emissions reductions in developing countries.

The most important contribution of the Paris Agreement in the climate policy discussions was the global target. Paris aims to limit global temperature to below 2°C compared to pre-industrial levels by 2100 and attempts to limit temperature rise to 1.5°C. It seeks to achieve this target using Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). While politically acceptable, in most cases, NDCs are not in line with the global target. According to the World Resources Institute, current NDCs under Paris will lead to at least a 2.9-3.4°C rise in temperature by 2100.^{xvi} The UN Environment Programme projects this rise to be at 2.8°C under current policies. Additionally, more than half the countries which have submitted revised NDCs after the initial five-year period have reduced their national targets. These 98 countries account for 72.7% of global emissions.

Chart 5: State of Nationally Determined Contributions under the Paris Agreement



Source: Climate Watch 2020 NDC Tracker. 2021. Washington, DC: World Resources Institute. Available online at: <https://www.climatewatchdata.org/2020-ndc-tracker>

NDCs are not bound by any sectoral targets, and countries are free to choose their policy interventions based on their national interests. There is no standardisation in the submission of NDCs, making it nearly impossible to track progress. For example, India and China mention scaling up their installed solar capacities in their NDCs, while the European Union^{xvii} specifies increasing renewable energy in final energy consumption. According to the Climate Watch NDC comparison, China has not specified a timeline for the implementation of its NDC, while India and the EU have. Similarly, India has made a conditional NDC, while China and the EU have unconditional NDCs.^{xviii} Such inconsistencies in reporting targets hinder the process of monitoring and create space for non-compliance. To be effective in implementation, NDCs require a standardised reporting mechanism, including timebound sector-wise targets for decarbonisation. Additionally, NDCs are not legally binding within the Paris Agreement, nor are countries required to pass national legislation to implement their NDCs. Due to considerably lower internal political pressures in developing countries on climate-related subjects, they may find it easy to circumvent their Paris commitments.

The principles of equity manifest only in the form of loose commitments, low reporting obligations, and a guaranteed \$100 billion transaction from the developed countries. Policies for CBDR-RC must also be in line with global targets. Loose commitments and low reporting obligations lead to slow decarbonisation in developing countries, especially in high emitters like India and China. The financial transaction of \$100 billion by 2030 is not only highly insufficient but has also not been transferred to developing countries. At the COP26 Summit in 2021, Parties noted with deep regret and urgency that the \$100 billion amount designated for developing countries per year by 2020 has not been mobilised.^{xix} Other funds under the Financial Mechanism, like the Green Climate Fund and the Adaptation Fund, have committed minuscule amounts for green transitions.

While a Technology Mechanism exists under the Paris Agreement for the development and transfers of technology, it is not effective since transfers are largely bilateral. For this, countries would have to share the specifications

of the type of technical support needed, and the Mechanism can act as a facilitator in the transfer. The OECD suggests that NDCs can be used as a mechanism for countries to share their requirements.

The Technology Mechanism was adopted in 2010, and the Paris Agreement has not made any significant changes. It is clear that technological flows are not at the heart of climate negotiations.^{xx} Studies suggest that technology flows through FDI and knowledge transfers have not been in line with country requirements based on their GDP. While China, Mexico, and South Africa have received technology inflows in line with the size of their economies, India, Brazil, and Russia have lagged behind.

Table 1:
Climate Technology Transfers to select Global South countries.

Country	Inward Patent Flows ²	Import of low-carbon equipment ³	FD inward FDI links ⁴	Economy Size (GDP)
Brazil	0.7%	0.7%	2.5%	2.9%
China	15.5%	8.3%	7.1%	11.1%
India	N.A.	1.5%	1.6%	4.9%
Mexico	2.2%	1.7%	2.5%	2.2%
Russia	1.3%	1.4%	2.2%	3.3%
South Africa	1.2%	0.4%	0.9%	0.7%

Source: Matthieu Glachant and Antoine Dechezleprêtre, 'What role for climate negotiations on technology transfer?'

Policy prescriptions under the Paris Agreement are not sectoral, but long-term, goal-oriented. Sectoral policies have proven to be more efficient as they set a pathway for decarbonisation and focus on high-emitting sectors. For the Paris targets, a combination of sectoral and goal-oriented policies may prove to be more effective.

The biggest criticism associated with the Agreement is the absence of a compliance mechanism to enforce self-declared targets. Unfortunately, the Paris Agreement does not have any consequences for non-compliance, making it easy for countries to circumvent their own targets and rendering the Agreement largely futile.

Elements of the Global Climate Alliance (GCA)

The GCA effort builds on the German G7 proposal of a Climate Club. The GCA has three major aspects: membership, incentives, and compliance. Each aspect has its own elements that together define the GCA in its entirety. They are as follows:

- **Targets:** Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), that include overall long-term climate targets in line with the 1.5°C end-of-century target, and sector-wise decadal transformation pathways.
- **Commitments:** Countries to enact domestic laws or policies to achieve their chosen transformation pathways.
- **Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR):** Represent the principles of equity, to be fulfilled through climate finance and technology support from the Global North to the Global South.

² Average of patent flows to the country as a share of world inward flows (2007-09).

³ Average of import of low-carbon equipment as a share of world imports (2007-09).

⁴ Capital links between a source company owning at least one carbon patent and a foreign company (2011)

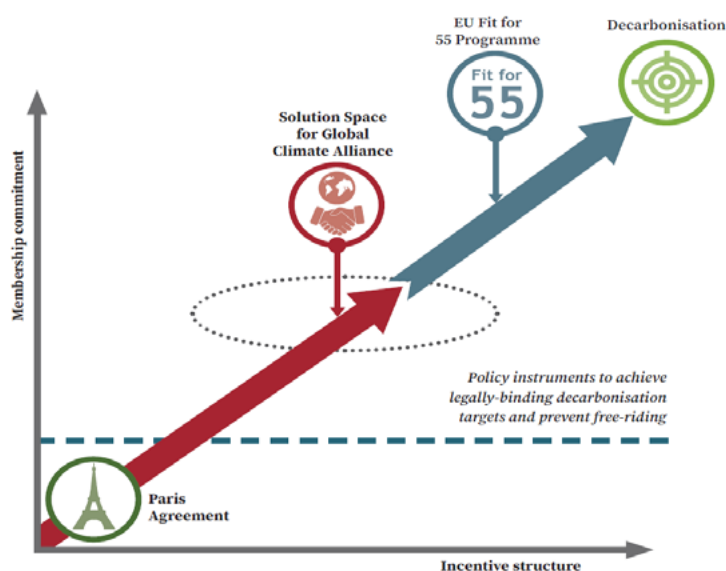
- **Financial and technological flows:** Instruments to implement CBDR principles, to assist transformation in the Global South.
- **Policy cooperation:** Transformation pathways that concentrate on specific high-emissions sectors, with a focus on mitigation, adaptation, and capacity building.
- **Funding sources:** Dedicated climate finance pool raised from Global North countries through various mechanisms such as a global carbon incentive program, SDR pooling, MDB contributions, and Official development assistance (ODA) assistance.
- **Climate financing system:** Enhanced role for MDBs and PFIs in financing adaptation and mitigation measures.
- **Dedicated funds:** Multiple climate funds established and scaled up to support climate solutions in Global South countries, including Just Energy Transition Programs, Climate Innovation Foundation, Resiliency Funds, long-term currency hedging instruments, credit guarantees, insurance pools, and climate fund-of-funds for various regions.
- **Monitoring, reporting and compliance:** Effective reporting processes to provide transparency for cooperation mechanisms, allow for mutual learning, and enhance compliance.
- **Governance:** Translating political commitments by heads of states and countries into processes, with regional and sectoral structures capable of delivering, reviewing, and refining the transformative mechanisms, policies, and financing tools.

Towards Creating a Solution Space for the GCA

While considering the most appropriate framework for the GCA, we have understood that the level of commitment from its membership is directly related to the incentives available. The greater the incentives for a country to remain committed to the agreement, the stronger that commitment would be, and vice versa.

The Paris Agreement represents a low point in the commitment-incentive function, whereas the EU is extremely high. The GCA lies in the space between these two, where commitments are realistically high and so are the incentives. Green financing will drive green transitions, while incentives will drive commitments.

Illustration 1: Solution Space for the Global Climate Alliance



Source: Chart conceptualised and created by the authors

Notes de fin

- i United Nations Conference on Environment & Development, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 3 to 14 June 1992, AGENDA 21, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/Agenda21.pdf>
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CONTACTS

Karin Jancykova
Programme Manager
Climate Policy, Energy and Global Environmental Governance
KAS Multinational Development Policy Dialogue (MDPD)
email: Karin.Jancykova@kas.de



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