

Forums

Building Productive Links between the UNFCCC and the Broader Global Climate Governance Landscape¹

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Global climate governance has undergone a significant transformation in the past decade. Previously it might reasonably have been characterized as a system governed by the UNFCCC and its Kyoto Protocol, with a secondary role for national policy regimes. Since then, a large array of governance initiatives acting across international borders have joined the UNFCCC regime, including those created by subgroups of governments, private sector actors of various types (specific industrial sectors, institutional investors, etc.), non-governmental organizations, and subnational actors like cities and regions. These initiatives are variously understood through ideas such as transnational, private, or non-state governance.²

Many academic and policy debates about the UNFCCC, however, have largely ignored these developments. “Multilateralists” tend to focus on the design of intergovernmental agreements, with an at least implicit assumption that a “good” design of such a climate regime, combined with national government action, would be necessary and perhaps sufficient to meet the challenge of climate change.³ By contrast, many “transnationalists” are pessimistic about the multilateral process and at times ignore the UNFCCC and its role, instead focusing on the conditions that give rise to alternative forms of climate governance and how these activities might collectively result in climate governance from the “bottom up.”⁴ In practice, we know these two spheres interact. The latest round of UNFCCC negotiations launched in Durban in 2011 focuses on increasing

1. This article reflects and builds upon discussions at a December 2013 workshop held in Neemrana, India, sponsored by the Centre for Policy Research (New Delhi) and the Mitigation Action Plans and Scenarios (MAPS) program of the Energy Research Centre (Cape Town). This article builds on pp. 14–19 of the workshop report. See Centre for Policy Research 2014.

2. Bulkeley et al. 2012, 2014.

3. E.g., Winkler and Beaumont 2010; Hare et al. 2010.

4. E.g., Victor et al. 2005; Hoffmann 2011.

ambition through international cooperative initiatives (ICIs), but little explicit attention has been paid to the nature of such interactions. We see this as a missed opportunity for the research community and policy-makers.

With this article, we seek to open a research agenda that takes a more sophisticated approach to the question of *linkages* within the broader global climate governance landscape. Many scholars focus exclusively on the multilateral or transnational spheres without considering the ways they are interconnected.⁵ Those working in the areas of institutional interplay and fragmentation tend to focus on dyadic relationships between arrangements (often within the multilateral context) without enough theorizing about the nature of these relationships.⁶ In the policy sphere, the recognition of ICIs is a promising development, but we suggest a need to think more deeply about the nature of these different types of initiatives and their relationship to the UNFCCC regime. That would include the possibility of the UNFCCC playing a coordinating role in the broader landscape, based on the empirical observation that several initiatives (but not all) voluntarily define themselves in relation to the UNFCCC. Our view is that a global climate governance landscape with coordination will be more effective than one without. After briefly laying out the global climate governance landscape, we argue for deeper engagement with questions of linkages to better understand the existing system and envision ways it could be developed further. We introduce two ways of thinking about these possible linkages—division of labor and catalytic—to illustrate the value of this line of inquiry, before concluding with suggestions for future research.

The research agenda we seek to open would be particularly useful and important for exploring empirical and normative questions about the role of the UNFCCC in global climate governance. By enabling research on the ways initiatives are already connected to the UNFCCC, this research agenda could allow for better understanding of the extent to which the UNFCCC is currently positioned as the core institution in the climate governance landscape, and thus the specific ways it may be able to coordinate governance across the landscape.

The Global Climate Governance Landscape

We reject the notion that new climate governance spaces provide a distinct alternative to the multilateral treaty regime. Instead of this false dichotomy, we see a need for ways of articulating this emergent governance landscape. Some have characterized broader action collectively as part of a climate “regime complex,”⁷ although this concept focuses mostly on interstate agreements. Abbott extends this notion to refer to a “transnational climate regime complex,”⁸ but this in turn leaves out the interstate agreements. We prefer the term “global climate governance landscape” as a

5. For an exception, see Hale and Roger 2014.

6. Zelli and Van Asselt 2013.

7. Keohane and Victor 2011.

8. Abbott 2012.

way to capture all these elements and shift the focus to broader patterns of governance. We see “landscape” as a neutral term that does not presuppose particular types of relationships between governance arrangements or theoretical orientation.

Notions of complex systems are useful for understanding the global climate governance landscape, and for enabling us to reconceptualize the UNFCCC less as an authority that attempts to govern climate change in its entirety and more as a coordinating node in a diverse landscape of initiatives.⁹ This perspective allows for new ways of thinking about the role of the UNFCCC and its relation to other parts of the climate governance landscape. We recognize that the multi-lateral treaty process has comparative advantages in delivering some governance functions that are essential to the functioning of the overall system and/or that can only be resolved through formal intergovernmental coordination. Such functions include generating and reinforcing overarching norms and principles; setting broad goals and exerting pressure on national governments to deliver on general commitments; keeping the issue high on the international agenda; facilitating North–South financial flows; providing a marketplace for new ideas; and creating transparency and common infrastructure for climate change mitigation activities (e.g., by establishing common units and standards that are measurable, reportable, and verifiable). Rather than expecting the UNFCCC to do all of the hard work, however, we might consider how it could facilitate governance innovations and activities beyond the treaty regime.

Taking Linkages Seriously

To ensure a more effective response to the climate problem, we argue that there is a need to think more critically about how different parts of the climate governance landscape are or could be connected. We contend it is useful to (1) consider the governance functions that need to be performed; (2) look across the governance landscape to think about where and how those functions can be performed; (3) and analyze how more effective divisions of labor could be facilitated by creating linkages between the UNFCCC and other types of governance arrangements. It is also important to consider types of linkage that may undermine the activities of individual governance initiatives, as well as the question of the power and authority relationships working across the landscape. We suggest that a typology of linkages and their functions would be useful for guiding this analysis. As a first step, we propose a distinction between linkages that aim to *organize a division of labor* between different institutions, and others that seek to *catalyze action*. Division-of-labor linkages are about handing over a task to another entity that might be better positioned to perform that task. Catalytic linkages require doing something differently to enable another entity to better perform a governance task.

These categories emerged through an inductive process and are not meant to capture the full range of possible linkages. We present them here to encourage

9. E.g. Hoffmann 2011.

deeper theorization about linkages and to illustrate the value of doing so. A growing body of literature on “fragmentation” and “institutional interplay” has raised awareness about the need for linkages across scales, issues, and institutions.¹⁰ We aim to broaden this discussion by thinking about the particular functions that linkages serve and the politics around different types of linkages. First, we suggest mapping the types of linkages currently in place, for example through social network analysis. Division-of-labor linkages may occur more frequently between the UNFCCC and other intergovernmental organizations, while catalytic linkages may occur more frequently between the UNFCCC and transnational governance arrangements. In principle, however, division-of-labor linkages could also occur between the UNFCCC and elements of the transnational sphere, and catalytic linkages could occur between the UNFCCC and other intergovernmental organizations. We see particular value in research that asks why we currently observe particular types of linkages and explores the range of possible types of linkages and how they could be established. By reconsidering what linkages are meant to do, we can think differently about current relations between various climate governance arrangements and how they could and should be organized in the future.

Division of Labor Linkages

As noted above, division-of-labor linkages currently apply especially within the intergovernmental arena, and concern the appropriate relationship between the UNFCCC and the various international regimes and organizations that deal with different aspects of climate change, such as the Montreal Protocol, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), and the Global Environment Facility (GEF).¹¹ Some of these linkages, like the GEF, date back to the emergence of the UNFCCC. One implication of exploring these linkages is to enable actors within the UNFCCC process to think about how to avoid unnecessary duplication and to focus the UNFCCC’s agenda on core roles that it is best (and in some cases, uniquely) placed to undertake. Linkages with outside institutions should be designed to address inconsistencies between regimes and minimize the possibility of strategic gaming or forum shopping between institutions by states or other actors. These issues related to division-of-labor linkages are particularly the focus of the regime complex literature.¹²

It should be possible to shortlist a number of institutions for which it would be particularly useful to enhance coordination, with a view to creating greater clarity on which institution is doing what (and, possibly, with which outcomes). It is useful to think through what types of linkages are necessary in particular contexts. For example, we could think more about enhanced coordination between the secretariat of the UNFCCC and those of other international regimes,

10. E.g., Biermann et al. 2009; Selin 2010; Zelli 2011; Oberthür and Stokke 2011; van Asselt 2014.

11. There also are questions concerning the appropriate division of labor within the UNFCCC system, which itself consists of an assemblage of organizations and subparts.

12. Keohane and Victor 2011; Raustiala and Victor 2004.

such as the biodiversity and ozone regimes. These bureaucracies already cooperate with each other (for instance, through the Joint Liaison Group between the biodiversity, desertification and climate change secretariats), but could do so more effectively through broader agreements between the respective decision-making bodies to more explicitly define the division of labor. The UNFCCC Conference of the Parties (COP) and the GEF Council have an agreement regarding the latter acting as an operating entity of the financial mechanism of the Convention. A similar agreement could also be useful, for example, in the case of monitoring the biodiversity impacts of REDD+ activities and other climate policies that could affect biological diversity; here it might also be possible to envision a division-of-labor linkage between the UNFCCC, the Convention on Biological Diversity, and transnational initiatives such as the Climate, Community and Biodiversity Alliance. With respect to ozone depletion, a new division of labor could emerge clarifying which roles the UNFCCC and the Montreal Protocol will play in regulating the phasing out of hydrofluorocarbons.

Currently, treaties usually specify such linkages in a formal manner, but in some cases the problem is precisely about how to formalize them. Linkages may involve formal reporting by other organizations to the UNFCCC or memoranda of understanding (MOUs), which are already widely used for biodiversity-related agreements. MOUs could be used more broadly to define division-of-labor linkages and allow the UNFCCC secretariat some flexibility in drawing on the expertise and capacity of neighboring environmental regimes.

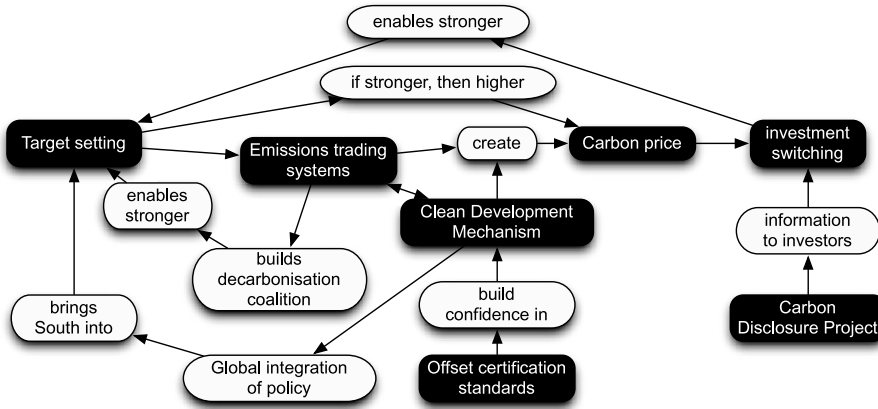
Division-of-labor linkages may be challenging in case of conflictive relationships. For instance, although ICAO was mandated to regulate emissions from international aviation, it has failed to take meaningful action thus far, primarily because of disagreement over how to reconcile its core principle of equal treatment with the UNFCCC's principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities.¹³ Also potentially important are the emerging trade conflicts over climate policy, with the WTO starting to adjudicate on cases about alleged unfair trade practices associated with low-carbon technologies.¹⁴ These two examples also make clear that the question of the authority relations between different intergovernmental treaty areas comes into play—how member states confer authority differently on different treaties, with the WTO normally seen to have significantly more power than the UNFCCC. Linkages are never simply a functional question and may also be subject to political conflict.

Catalytic Linkages

The role of catalytic linkages is to enable action to directly reduce emissions, or to engage in other concrete actions that might address underlying drivers of emissions, shape investment in low-carbon development, and build climate

13. Scott and Rajamani 2012.

14. Lewis 2014.



Note: Dark background indicates governance activities. Pale background indicates possible causal processes and feedbacks

Figure 1

Potential Synergies in Global Climate Governance on Mitigation with Linkages through Carbon Markets

resilience (as opposed to negotiate text, develop specific rules, and so on). These linkages are typically more informal and may simply describe interactions between the effects of different initiatives without any conscious coordination.¹⁵ The politics of these linkages are thus also rather different from those involving divisions of labor—less a question of direct jurisdictional questions and more about subtle forms of authority and power relations than overt conflict.¹⁶ We can identify a number of (potentially) catalytic linkages, but there is a need to think more systematically about how the effectiveness of the myriad initiatives that have emerged outside the UNFCCC may be better harnessed by more explicit linkage with UNFCCC activities, generating results that are greater than the sum of the parts.

For example, we can imagine a set of interactions between the major existing carbon markets, which frequently are direct outgrowths of the target-setting efforts under the UNFCCC, and the private governance initiatives developed by institutional investors, such as the Carbon Disclosure Project (CDP). Figure 1 sketches the relationship between different modes of governance—governance by price and governance by information—and identifies some of

15. Some scholars use the term orchestration to describe the way that actors may seek to coordinate action across initiatives (see notably Hale and Roger 2014). Our focus on catalytic effects is in some ways related, in that orchestrating actors may be doing so in order to create catalytic effects through the interaction between initiatives. But we argue that these effects from interactions between initiatives and their consequences could occur even without deliberate orchestration, and that there is value in identifying these sorts of effects.

16. See Bulkeley 2012 on ways to think about this more complex politics.

the different governance functions and potential synergies involved.¹⁷ While carbon markets put a price on carbon emissions, the CDP gives information to investors. To the extent that expectations of future carbon prices become more stable, this information should become more useful to investors over time, thus making it easier for policy-makers to establish stricter targets, producing higher carbon prices.

An important element in the logic of these catalytic linkages is that they require an enabling environment for innovation and experimentation. Initiatives within the UNFCCC system need to create space that other actors can fill by developing new technologies, ways of mobilizing investment, etc. A positive example is the development of project methodologies within the Clean Development Mechanism. Rather than trying to reach agreement on a single standard, the Executive Board invited project participants to submit methodologies for approval. In this case, the Executive Board played an important role as a “boundary organization” operating between the UNFCCC and the world of project development, leading us to speculate that such organizations may have a particularly important role to play in facilitating catalytic linkages within the global climate governance system.

At the same time, there may also be an important role for serendipity in establishing catalytic linkages. For example, there is a host of public-private international technology initiatives, such as the Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Partnership (REEEP) and the Global Methane Initiative (GMI), which could take advantage of opportunities presented by the Climate Technology Centre and Network within the UNFCCC for mobilizing investment in renewables, energy efficiency, and methane abatement. Such a linkage could enable both types of initiative to achieve more than either could on their own. We suspect that personal connections and participation in common networks are the most likely means to create such connections. A question then is whether reliance on serendipity is a weakness and actors ought to try pursue more systematic efforts to generate such connections (e.g., through boundary organizations), or whether one of the strengths of the transnational climate governance space is precisely that the range of networks and initiatives is dense enough that it is likely to produce such serendipity in many circumstances.

It is important for the UNFCCC to create opportunities for direct interactions between negotiators and representatives of these initiatives during COPs to explore possibilities for creating catalytic linkages. These interactions need to go beyond the world of side events and parallel conferences that already exists. Recently, some COP presidencies have facilitated productive exchanges, including several official events on cities and climate change during the 2013 COP in Warsaw, as well as “Technical Expert Meetings” on topics such as land use, the

17. The figure also depicts governance by learning (among investors and managers) and governance by investment (by investors over managers).

urban environment, renewable energy, and energy efficiency. However, such initiatives have yet to be institutionalized within the UNFCCC process.

Areas for Future Research

There is a serious research agenda to be pursued on linkages across the global climate governance landscape. By focusing attention on the function of linkages and the conditions under which different linkages produce improved overall responses to climate change (emissions reductions, changed investment paths, more equitable distributions of the effort, improved adaptation, and so on), as well as the circumstances where significant obstacles exist across different initiatives, research could enable the designers of climate governance institutions to do their job more effectively. We suggest a distinction between those linkages that are principally about divisions of labor between different institutions and those that catalyze changes in action across various scales and institutions. For division-of-labor linkages, the question is mostly about efficient coordination as well as avoidance of duplication and forum shopping. For catalyzing linkages, it is more about promoting synergistic interactions between different modes of governing. One fruitful area of future research would be to develop more systematic typologies of linkages, building on what is loosely indicated in this article—from formal agreements between two initiatives to emergent effects between their activities.

A number of specific questions arise out of this agenda that could be pursued in substantive research. First, to what extent is the UNFCCC currently positioned as the core institution in the climate governance landscape? Social network analysis could help identify more precisely the character of the links between various governance initiatives, and the role of the UNFCCC in that system. Second, should the UNFCCC play a central role in orchestrating activity across the landscape and if so, can we develop research that enables us to distinguish effectively between more and less useful sorts of linkages between different initiatives, such that policy-makers might know how to focus their own attention? Third, how should we measure the effects and effectiveness of interactions between initiatives? Coordination across the governance landscape adds effectiveness, so the role of coordination is an important area of investigation in its own right. Can we assess the aggregate effect of action inside and outside the UNFCCC, and whether that action is adequate to addressing the challenge while also considering the distributional impacts and thus justice questions? Fourth, how should we understand the political dynamics of linkages—the conflicts over jurisdiction, the types of actors that are empowered (and marginalized), and the forms of authority that are generated through the linkage of governance initiatives?

We assume the climate governance landscape will only get more complicated over time. The ability to work out how its different elements interact, and thus how they may be enabled to interact more effectively, is thus likely to

become an ever more pressing question for both researchers and those attempting to govern climate change.

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