

DESIGNING A MEANINGFUL GLOBAL STOCKTAKE

Executive Summary



The first global stocktake (GST) under the Paris Agreement, the lynchpin of the Agreement's ambition cycle, takes place from 2021–23 and serves as the first official checkpoint to assess Parties' collective progress on climate action. As the process gets underway, this paper investigates how the GST, within the constraints of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) process, can be designed to best advance the effectiveness of the Paris Agreement. To this end, it investigates: (1) the design of the GST, as mandated and underway, focusing in particular on the evolving context, emerging gaps, and challenges within the UN climate regime; and (2) the interaction of the GST process with the wider landscape of intergovernmental and transnational institutions, initiatives, and fora in global climate governance beyond the UN climate regime.

THE GST WITHIN THE UN CLIMATE REGIME

The 2015 Paris Agreement set the global direction of travel by identifying goals on greenhouse gas mitigation, adaptation, and support. The GST is required to both assess the 'collective progress toward achieving the purpose of this Agreement and its long-term goals,' and to address 'opportunities for enhanced action and support,' in recognition that higher ambition is a function of both urgency and opportunity.

The first GST serves as the first official checkpoint to assess Parties' collective progress on climate action. A crucial question this paper seeks to address is whether, and if so, how, the GST can be designed—within the constraints of the UN climate process—to offer a real moment of reckoning for the international community on its efforts to address climate change.

Article 14 of the Paris Agreement and decision 19/CMA.1 provide broad guidance on the nature, purpose, tasks, outcome, and many, but not all, of the mechanics for the GST. The GST consists of three primary components: information collection and preparation (initiated in late 2021), technical assessment (which will overlap with

information collection and preparation and will commence in the spring/summer of 2022), and consideration of outputs.

A process that only aims for greater efficiency, better managed information, and feedback loops between different components of the GST will realize a part of the GST's potential, but not necessarily offer a robust assessment of the Paris Agreement's potential for 'environmental effectiveness' (i.e., its ability to decisively resolve the environmental problem the regime was designed to address). To ensure that the GST offers a real moment of reckoning for the international community on its climate efforts the process needs to:

- assess the 'environmental effectiveness' of the Paris Agreement
- identify opportunities for further action in mitigation, adaptation, support, and loss & damage so as to enhance the environmental effectiveness of the Paris Agreement
- catalyze sufficient action within and outside the UNFCCC process and across a range of actors that helps put the world on a path to climate stability and resilience.

For the GST to do the above, it must be more sensitive to the evolving context of and well-positioned to address the emerging gaps and challenges in the UN negotiating process. There are at least two significant shifts in the scientific and political context in which the GST will be conducted: (1) a shift from the ‘well below 2 degrees C’ end of the spectrum to 1.5 degrees C in relation to the global temperature goal; and (2) a shift from aiming to reach net-zero in the ‘second half of the century’ (Article 4.1) to ‘by or around mid-century.’ The GST process will also need to address two important emerging gaps: that of implementation and equity. Further, the GST will need to prepare for key substantive and process challenges including the challenges of: mining the information that flows into the process to determine the benchmarks against which ‘collective progress’ can be assessed for each of the long-term goals identified in the Paris Agreement; and managing information flowing from and, in some cases avoiding duplication with, other processes, especially those established at COP26.

This paper recommends that the GST directly engages with these identified issues, and focuses on:

- how the identified gaps can be plugged, rather than on a precise assessment of how large the gaps are
- enhancing implementation in addition to catalyzing more ambitious target-setting
- identifying opportunities for action—across mitigation, adaptation, loss & damage, and support.

It also recommends that many of the issues raised in relation to evolving context and emerging gaps form part of the framing for the GST rather than be subject to the UN consensus-based decision-making process. The Subsidiary Body Chairs and co-facilitators of the technical dialogue could use their informal notes and consultations to provide a robust framing to set the tone, an agenda, and a starting point for the discussion. The GST could then avoid a duplicative determination that the international community is not doing enough, and that a substantial ambition gap exists, a foregone conclusion, but instead explore how this gap is to be plugged and identify specific opportunities to do so.

The GST could also be designed as a dynamic process that builds on knowledge generated and catalyzed through the two years it will run. Each of the three sessions of the GST’s technical dialogue could build on the previous. The first session could, for instance, end with

‘conclusions’ that identify knowledge gaps in relation to the themes discussed. Party and non-Party stakeholders could then generate tailored knowledge to plug the identified knowledge gaps. Throughout these sessions, many questions will arise in the assessment process that do not lend themselves to ready responses, for instance the issue of benchmarks or indicators to assess progress against the long-term global goal on adaptation.

If the GST is to be directed, as this paper recommends, toward implementation, one option to connect the GST process with real world action is to append one or more technical annexes to the output of the technical dialogue, or even the GST. Such technical annexes could list specific opportunities for climate action. The criteria for inclusion of specific opportunities in the annexes could be determined collaboratively by Parties at the first session of the technical dialogue. These could be opportunities for enhanced action—across mitigation, adaptation, loss & damage, and support—that offer templates for what works, and can be scaled up. These identified opportunities could be organized by sector or by theme and take into consideration interactions with actors in the wider landscape of global climate governance.

THE GST AND THE WIDER LANDSCAPE OF GLOBAL CLIMATE GOVERNANCE

Over the 21st century, the landscape of global climate governance beyond the UNFCCC has grown much more varied and multifaceted to include a multitude of inter-governmental and transnational institutions, fora, and initiatives. Fora, such as the G7, the G20, the Ministerial on Climate Action, and the Major Economies Forum, provide overarching platforms for broader political discussions. Most other intergovernmental and transnational organizations and initiatives have a more sectoral or thematic scope that supports a focus on concrete action (e.g., ICAO, IMO, the Global Methane Pledge, the Powering Past Coal Alliance, the Global Resilience Partnership, the Climate Investment Platform).

Although the linkage between the wider landscape and the UNFCCC has significantly evolved, and has served to significantly enhance global climate action – including through the Marrakesh Partnership for Global Climate Action and the High-Level Champions - there is significant untapped potential and considerable room for enhanced interaction on substance rather than just procedure.

As the focus of global climate cooperation transitions from negotiation to implementation, the GST provides a unique opportunity for advancing the conversation between the intergovernmental UNFCCC/Paris Agreement process and the wider climate governance landscape. In this respect, the design of the GST so far seems to promote broad participation by non-Party stakeholders (NPSs), relevant cooperative initiatives, and international organizations, but leaves much of the interaction with the wider landscape to be further developed.

There are two broad potential approaches for enhancing the interaction between the wider governance landscape and the GST: participation of, and inputs by, the wider landscape can enrich and inform the GST; and GST outputs can provide an important impulse to the wider governance landscape to advance ambition and effective implementation.

The effective participation of NPSs, international organizations, and cooperative initiatives in the GST may be promoted through different means and channels, including:

- extending the deadline for submission of inputs beyond the current deadline of February 2022
- inviting presentations/interventions in the GST's technical dialogue and toward its consideration of outputs
- organizing relevant events within and outside the UNFCCC and through contributions and inputs by

experts.

The High-Level Champions and other intermediaries could play an important role in motivating, coordinating, and consolidating inputs by NPSs and cooperative initiatives; identifying possible stakeholders for making interventions/presentations; and facilitating impactful stakeholder events feeding into the GST.

The GST output could in turn provide an impulse to the wider governance landscape. For example, it could highlight the urgent need and ample opportunity to maximize emission reductions, resilience efforts, and support across sectors and themes, as well as the need and opportunity to further enhance the accountability and transparency of relevant initiatives and efforts. GST outputs could also include announcements of key new initiatives and updates on existing ones.

The sectoral and thematic granularity of the wider landscape may hold particular potential in both directions. A strong sectoral/thematic lens of the GST could facilitate effective participation of actors in the wider landscape and the identification of best practices, needs and opportunities. The GST output could in turn specifically address key sectors/themes, for example, identifying specific good practices, gaps, and potential. It could also highlight the importance of sectoral/thematic granularity and concreteness of climate action more generally, including in NDCs and Long-Term Strategies and related implementing action—which could support effective action throughout the wider governance landscape.

This paper was developed collaboratively with the team at C2ES and gained immensely from two brainstorming sessions with key stakeholders in October and December 2021.

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The Center for Climate and Energy Solutions (C2ES) is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization working to forge practical solutions to climate change. We advance strong policy and action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, promote clean energy, and strengthen resilience to climate impacts.