

1 Mobilizing Non-State Actors for Climate Action through the Global Stocktake

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10 **Non-state actors play an essential role in the fabric of global climate governance. Here, we**
11 **propose four tailored strategies that non-state actors can mobilize to advance climate**
12 **action among states and harness the potential of the Global Stocktake.**

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14 The Paris Agreement's (PA) Global Stocktake is designed to assess Parties' collective progress
15 towards achieving the Agreement's purpose and its long-term goals, with the view to inform the
16 next round of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) for 2035¹. The Stocktake will help
17 assess collective progress in meeting Paris Agreement targets, but it will primarily function as *a*
18 *call for climate action*². In this article, we emphasize the differential roles that non-state actors³
19 can play in advancing the Stocktake process, focusing on the dual task of ramping up states'
20 NDC ambition and compliance efforts.

21 22 **The Global Stocktake**

23 COP28 in Abu Dhabi this year will deliver the Paris Agreement's first Global Stocktake, which
24 forms a key component in the Agreement's ratchet mechanism by providing an assessment of
25 collective progress that will inform the updating and enhancing of NDCs. Work on the Stocktake
26 began in earnest at COP26, 2021, where country reports, scientific integration research (i.e.,
27 from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)), and synthesis reports were
28 compiled through *data collection efforts*. While this has been an ongoing process, most recent
29 have been the *technical assessments* at COP27 and the Intersessionals at Bonn. This year we will
30 see the final *consideration of outputs* of the Stocktake results.

31 The Global Stocktake is largely a state-driven process. It also engages non-state actors in
32 complex ways. In terms of data collection, there is a UNFCCC submission portal for states and
33 observer bodies to add data on mitigation, adaptation, finance, and the means forward on these
34 fronts⁴. Subsidiary body chairs of the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice
35 (SBSTA) and the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI) also noted topics on which they
36 sought data (thematic and cross-cutting issues). These submissions are timed to work in with the
37 technical assessments, and there is again more room for non-state actors in this process. The
38 assessments include a series of dialogue events, which are “open, inclusive, transparent and
39 facilitative” of states and non-state actors. Informal consultation with non-state actors has also
40 continued throughout the Stocktake on the types of questions and procedures required to foster
41 productive inputs⁵. The final step in this Stocktake will be discussed at COP28 with a wide range
42 of observer organizations on site.

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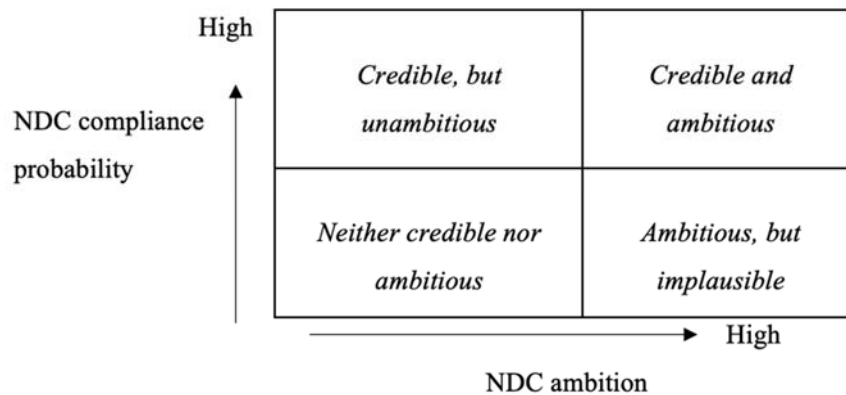
44 **Compliance and Ambition**

45 How should non-state actors mobilize to advance the Stocktake so that it functions as a
46 corrective device which catalyzes climate action rather than a mere accounting device⁶? An
47 international transparency mechanism such as the Global Stocktake can enhance the credibility
48 of climate targets and the likelihood that Parties will comply with their NDCs,⁷ but we propose
49 that the way non-state actors engage differentially depending on the needs and efforts of
50 individual countries will be key to fostering meaningful climate action.

51 Recent assessments show that international climate cooperation faces two urgent major
52 challenges: an ambition gap and a compliance gap. First, the total ambition of current NDCs is
53 inadequate for meeting the PA’s long-term targets⁸. Second, there is already a deep compliance
54 gap between countries’ NDCs and current climate policy trajectories⁹. Overall, states need to
55 pledge both more ambitiously and implement climate policies more vehemently to safeguard the
56 PA’s effectiveness¹⁰.

57 The dual challenge of ramping up NDC ambition and compliance efforts is a useful starting point
58 for understanding where and how non-state actors should invest their efforts. While the
59 Stocktake process is designed to assess states’ global response to the climate crisis, and does not
60 home in on an individual country’s NDCs, non-state actors can play prescriptive and
61 differentiated roles vis-à-vis state NDCs that can complement the aggregate assessment in

62 important respects. The effectiveness of NDCs depends on how *ambitious* they are and how
 63 *credibly* states can comply with their content (Figure 1: Ambition and Compliance probability of
 64 NDCs). However, current data on climate ambition¹¹ and compliance likelihood¹² in NDCs
 65 suggest that countries face differentiated climate action challenges across these two desiderata.
 66



67
 68 Fig 1: Compliance probability and Ambition of NDCs

69
 70 Only a few countries have committed to ambitious NDCs and underpinned these with credible
 71 climate policies.¹³ However, most countries face a deficit in either ambition, credibility, or both
 72 aspects. While there is an ongoing debate over whether more ambitious NDCs are generally
 73 more or less credible¹⁴, this is an empirical matter to be studied over time. Whichever way the
 74 data trends, increasing both ambition and credibility of compliance through non-state actor
 75 intervention is beneficial for the PA’s core objectives. However, to maximize their impact, non-
 76 state actors should tailor their strategies according to a country's distinct challenges – whether it's
 77 addressing compliance gaps, ambition shortfalls, or a combination of both.

78
 79 **Mobilizing Non-State Actors**

80 Within the Global Stocktake process, non-state actors will need to mobilize and play functionally
 81 differentiated roles. These efforts will vary according to where – in which quadrant – state NDC
 82 efforts can be located¹⁵.

83 For states that are credible and ambitious, non-state actors should play a *facilitative* role,
 84 continuing to provide information from different sectors within the state, helping to diffuse best-
 85 practices, and supporting other non-state actors. This will likely take place both domestically and

86 internationally within the next Stocktake cycle of the UNFCCC. Domestically, key steps will be
87 the provision of policy- and sector-specific information to governments¹⁶, monitoring firms, and
88 generally praising best practices. Internationally, information submissions through various
89 portals will be vital, including also to the Global Climate Action portal¹⁷, and through technical
90 dialogues.

91 When state NDCs are ambitious but implausible, non-state actors will need to adopt an
92 *accountability* role, seeking to reduce the gap between promises and implementation. This may
93 require pushing domestic media through information dissemination to demonstrate how the state
94 is faring with respect to their NDC. For particularly obstinate states, naming-and-shaming tactics
95 may be required both within the state and at the UNFCCC level¹⁸. Likewise within the UNFCCC
96 the technical dialogues and interventions in COP Plenaries will provide opportunities for
97 accountability-holding practices.

98 If a state is making credible but unambitious commitments, then non-state actors should
99 play a *proactive* role, seeking to ramp up the level of commitment. This is likely to happen
100 mostly at the domestic level for democracies where politicians – sensitive to voting pressures
101 from electoral districts – can be pushed toward altering government policy¹⁹. It may also happen
102 in technical assessments/dialogues, but it is generally too late to exert this pressure during COPs.
103 Non-state actors working in more authoritarian states will likely need to rely on the Stocktake
104 process more directly where networking with other states and non-state actors – creating
105 boomerang pressure – is a more plausible way of shifting states' ambition levels²⁰.

106 When state NDCs lack both credibility and ambition, non-state actors will need to play an
107 *offensive* role, requiring multipronged efforts both domestically and internationally. Within the
108 state, providing information about the importance of greater ambition, showcasing externalities
109 faced by developed and developing countries alike, and highlighting government failures in the
110 face of climate change will be key. Efforts to push for climate litigation will likely prove
111 important, and employing the Global Stocktake as a means to flag this option will be critical²¹.
112 Beyond the state, but both within the UNFCCC and other international organizations, efforts to
113 push NDCs forward through naming-and-shaming will likely be paramount. Working with non-
114 state actors from other sectors who can find other ways forward – for instance, through domestic
115 and regional legal action in the courts – may be necessary.¹⁵

116 The modes through which non-state actors can mobilize within the Global Stocktake
117 moving forward are not documented exhaustively here. The typology is designed to raise
118 consideration of the general type of action necessary – how non-state actors can mobilize – based
119 on the compliance-ambition gap for the state being targeted. A deeper analysis of different
120 institutional pathways and modalities for non-state actor mobilization is welcome.

121 Ultimately, the Global Stocktake process is designed to assess aggregative effects – not
122 those of NDCs individually. As non-state actors form an increasingly constitutive part of global
123 climate governance²², it is vital to ensure that non-state actors can target states in ways that are
124 not unnecessarily combative. This will help maintain the general logic of the PA: efforts by all
125 actors over time should inspire more action for others in a virtuous cycle.

126

127 Contributions

128 Both authors made significant and equal contributions to the conceptualization and drafting of
129 this work.

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134 Ethics declarations

135 Competing interests

136 The authors declare no competing interests.

¹ UNFCCC. *Global Stocktake* <https://unfccc.int/topics/global-stocktake>

² Hale, T. ‘All hands on deck’: The Paris agreement and nonstate climate action. *Glob Env Pol*, **22** (2016).

³ We are referring to non-Party stakeholders both with and without observer status.

⁴ Non-state actors without observer status can submit to the Secretariat for preapproval before submission.

⁵ UNFCCC. *Preparing for the First Global Stocktake* https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/REV_Non-paper_on_Preparing_for_GST1_forSBs_15Sept.pdf

⁶ UNFCCC. *Why the Global Stocktake is a Critical Moment for Climate Action* <https://unfccc.int/topics/global-stocktake/about-the-global-stocktake/why-the-global-stocktake-is-a-critical-moment-for-climate-action>

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⁹ IPCC 2023. *AR6 Synthesis Report: Climate Change 2023*.

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¹¹ Climate Action Tracker. <https://climateactiontracker.org/countries/>

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- ²⁰ Keck, M.E. and K. Sikkink. *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*. Ithaca, New York, USA: Cornell University Press (1998).
- ²¹ Peel, J. and H.M. Osofsky. Climate change litigation. *Annual Review of Law and Social Science*, **16**: 21-38 (2020).
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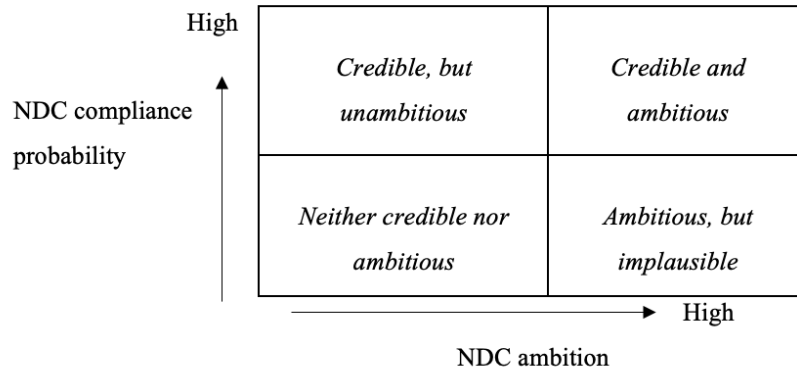


Fig 1: Compliance probability and Ambition of NDCs