

Analysis of Climate Civil Society in Latin America and the Caribbean Toward a Regional Initiative for the Independent Global Stocktake

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IGST
Independent Global Stocktake



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About the independent Global Stocktake

The Independent Global Stocktake (iGST) is a consortium of civil society actors working together to support the Global Stocktake (GST), the formal process established under the Paris Agreement to periodically take stock of collective progress toward its long-term goals. The iGST aligns the independent community—from modellers and analysts, to campaigners and advocates—so we can push together for a robust GST that empowers countries to take greater climate action. www.independentgst.org



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Executive Summary

This working paper aims to examine the conditions and interests of civil society organizations in Latin America and the Caribbean and to identify strengths, opportunities, and challenges for advancing climate goals in the current policy context to explore the interest of climate civil society in a regional initiative for the Independent Global Stocktake (iGST) and its potential activities and functions. Building on the analytical framework of epistemic communities, this study's empirical data was compiled using an online survey tool (35 respondents), by undertaking semi-structured interviews (7 interviewees), and through documentary analysis. The stakeholders interviewed represent only a sample of the diversity of civil society in Latin America and the Caribbean; this paper does not intend to be a comprehensive representation of civil society's climate action in the region.

Our findings show significant differences within climate civil society regarding agendas, scope, and organizational structure. Moreover, the pandemic scenario and what may come after it has been identified as entailing significant financial and political challenges for regional climate politics. Finally, low governmental transparency and limitations on the availability of information directly relevant to social actors' activities and contexts are critical barriers for social climate action. These factors make it necessary to consider distinct approaches and strategies leading up to the region's iGST process.

Nevertheless, there is considerable support for the climate agenda and interest in the iGST initiative. Similarly, civil society actors across the region identify with the core values of the Global Stocktake, such as transparency, accountability, and greater ambition in climate goals. Thereby, the existing context is quite favorable to begin building a regional initiative of the iGST.

Participants identified that the iGST could have great potential for the co-production of climate knowledge; it could also promote greater diversity and inclusion in international climate regimes, reinforcing national ambition, transparency, and accountability, as well as important possibilities for institutional learning and capacity building.

However, findings also suggest certain issues that can limit the engagement of civil society organizations in the iGST. These include the lack of a clearer vision and action path toward the Global Stocktake in 2023; the distance between its international focus, local climate groups, and the general public; the gap between national climate commitments and their actual implementation; and the funding needed for the organizations to sustain their engagement.

Consequently, recommendations are outlined to promote stronger engagement in a regional iGST initiative. These address the need to enhance the meaning and contextual relevance of the iGST regionally, to reconsider its particular niche among ongoing climate networks and South-South cooperation initiatives, and to acknowledge and take on the human and financial limitations of regional climate civil society.

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1 Introduction

The Paris Agreement architecture is based on continuously increasing the ambitions of the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) until they align with long-term climate goals to reduce climate change.¹ The Global Stocktake (GST) is the institutional mechanism established by the Agreement to assess the collective progress toward climate goals every five years. Starting in 2023, the GST will inform the next round of NDCs and international action (Northrop et al., 2018). In this context, the Independent Global Stocktake (iGST) initiative, integrated by organizations, analysts, advocates, and campaigners, aims to strengthen the GST's accuracy, transparency, accountability, and relevance (Holz et al., 2019).

The iGST Civil Society Network in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) is an initiative that seeks to bring together the experience and visions of LAC climate actors into the iGST for mutual learning and knowledge sharing. LAC countries have wide variations in greenhouse gas emissions, positions regarding the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the ambitions of their NDCs, and climate policy orientation (Hochstetler & Viola, 2012; Pulver, 2013). The regional climate civil society is also diverse in nature, agenda, and structure, from grassroots organizations and local activists to national chapters of international NGOs and national organizations. Thus, the particularities of LAC climate politics and civil society are fundamental to understanding the role that the iGST can play in the region and the specific way this initiative can contribute to climate action.

¹ The Paris Agreement establishes specific goals regarding mitigation, adaptation, and finance. All the countries that are part of the UNFCCC and have ratified the Agreement committed to take measures to adapt to climate change effects, promote resilience, and align financial flows toward keeping the temperature increase 2°C above pre-industrial temperatures and pursue efforts to limit it to 1.5°C, which are the lowest levels of planetary risk as per scientific knowledge.



Therefore, this working paper aims to **i)** examine the context of LAC climate policy and the actions of civil society organizations to identify strengths and risks for advancing climate goals and **ii)** explore if there is an interest in a regional iGST initiative and what its potential functions could be. The empirical data builds mainly on online surveys and semi-structured interviews with NGOs, climate organizations, and activists. Despite the available capacities and contextual constraints (e.g., COVID-19 and social-distancing measures) that framed this study, further efforts should consider suitable methods for the diversity and richness of regional groups and context. Based on the initial exploratory research findings, this report identifies potential trajectories for the iGST regional network. This study's outputs will be translated into strategies and specific actions for the regional iGST initiative through a collaborative process with interested organizations and groups in a second stage.



2 Analytical Approach

This study takes as an analytical standpoint that an epistemic community around the GST can be a driver for raising climate ambition. The scientific consensus about the significant risks of climate change for environmental and social systems should mobilize governments' will to address this critical issue. However, the slow formation of the international climate regime, the opposition of various actors, and the setbacks in different nations show the political process' complexity. The position of many countries in the UNFCCC negotiations has been influenced by their economic dependence on fossil fuels, emissions intensity, financial capacities, membership in international organizations, and the political weight of groups in favor or against increased climate action (Bernauer, 2013; Harrison, 2015). Public support has driven the creation of national climate policies and their ambition, as well as the density of climate civil society, transnational social action, and economic partners' diplomacy, among others (Lachapelle & Paterson, 2013; Roger *et al.*, 2017). Consequently, it should be asked, how can the GST influence these factors to incentivize countries' climate action? Moreover, how can the iGST strengthen this effect?

Research in political economy, comparative politics, and neighboring fields has revealed that epistemic communities can translate knowledge and experience into power, shaping the agenda and decisions of governments, institutions, and non-governmental actors as well as public views (see Figure 1). Epistemic communities often take the form of networks of experts, professionals, scholars, NGOs, social groups, and other actors with practical experience, expertise, and authoritative claims to policy-relevant knowledge in an issue-area (Haas,1992; Cross, 2013). These communities transcend the paradigm of "researcher speaking truth to power," which has shown its limitations in the political arena. In contrast, the network members are usually located in different countries and have diverse backgrounds, expertise, and types of knowledge (e.g., academic, practical, traditional), yet they share a set of norms, beliefs, and aims, mobilizing collective action toward a political goal (Dunlop, 2016; Maliniak *et al.*,2020).



The GST will assess the progress achieved by the international community’s climate actions from a scientific basis and an equity perspective, and findings will be translated into key political messages to inform the NDCs’ update. Then, is it possible to create a regional epistemic community through the iGST around the GST? Furthermore, if this is the case, how? An epistemic community’s formation requires interaction, establishing spaces for practice and learning, channels for sharing cognitive resources, and collective knowledge production, dissemination, and use (Cross, 2013). These processes are favored when there are complementarities among actors and groups that are dissatisfied with a political issue, perceived shared risks, challenges, or when uncertainty and knowledge have a strategic role for their actions (Akrich, 2010). Thus, this study explores the sociopolitical conditions for articulating an epistemic community for the iGST in LAC and the characteristics that this process could take.

Figure 1. Epistemic communities at play

Mediterranean pollution control (Med Plan, 1975)	Local scientists, environmental groups, sympathetic policymakers, and key officials within the United Nations Environment Program were able to persuade national governments to participate in an international mechanism to regulate and control pollution from various countries in the Mediterranean basin. They also facilitated the creation of environmental departments and agencies in most countries involved (Haas, 1989).
Nuclear arms control (Antiballistic Missile Arms Control Treaty, 1972)	Social movements and security experts provided their governments with the basis for negotiations of an international treaty that established an international nuclear weapons regime. They achieved this by producing coherent policy proposals and organizing fora, conferences, media interventions, and other proximity spaces with policymakers, which allowed them to exert political influence (Adler, 1992).
Banning chlorofluorocarbons (Montreal Protocol, 1987)	Scientists such as Frank Rowland and Mario Molina, environmental activists, and public officials from different countries translated data and scholarly research on the negative effects of CFCs on the ozone layer into policy proposals and shaped a commonly shared view of the environmental problem their continued use posed. Not only did they prepare the inputs for the political decision to be made, but they also managed to articulate the scientific and political aspects of the problem in a way that allowed them to establish their point of view as dominant, leading to the successful implementation of the Montreal Protocol, which banned CFCs internationally (Haas, 1992).
Security sector reforms in the European Union (the 1990s)	A network of national and transnational scholars, activists, and security consultants formed an epistemic community in the security policy domain and pushed for the conceptualization of the matter through the lens of human security, merging security with development cooperation and introducing the requirement of constant reforms in the EU security institutions (Faleg, 2012).
Public support for the Paris Agreement and the COP21 (2015)	Climate experts, social movements, climate civil society, and activists provided information regarding the policy debate around COP-21 and the signing of the Paris Agreement. This epistemic community’s endorsement significantly increased public support for the international regime among the American population, regardless of ideological dispositions or political preferences. In essence, if authoritative epistemic communities inform people, views do change (Maliniak, Parajon, & Powers, 2020).



3 Methodology

This study is based on a mixed-method approach, where quantitative and qualitative data was gathered, and a documentary analysis was undertaken. The steps taken in this approach were the following:

1. A literature review was undertaken on the obstacles, interests, and prospects of the region's climate agenda.
2. Three informal talks with regional and transnational climate groups were used to inform the analytical categories and the design of an online survey tool and a semi-structured interview protocol.
3. The online survey tool was distributed over 3 months, through an open invitation in LAC environmental networks and by email to NGOs and organized groups. Thirty-five NGOs, organizations, and activists participated in the survey, which lasted between 25–30 minutes (see annex 1 – list of participants). It consisted of ten sections that covered diverse topics, including general characteristics of climate NGOs and social groups and the perspective of climate NGOs and social groups on the climate issue, short-term risks for LAC climate action, and the context of the climate agenda (e.g., NDCs, Paris Agreement, civil society involvement). The participants shared their views on the role of climate reports² in promoting policy changes and social action. Finally, respondents also answered questions on their level of awareness, interest, and willingness to participate in the regional iGST initiative.
4. A semi-structured interview protocol was used, which focused on specific aspects for a regional initiative of the iGST, such as potential agenda, activities, organization, opportunities, and challenges. The interviews were conducted with representatives of seven NGOs and social groups (see annex 2 – interviewed groups). Lasting between 45–90 minutes, the empirical data was processed based on a thematic analysis.

² Climate reports are studies on climate trends, economics, policies, and other issue-areas that deliver insights about climate impacts and solutions to inform decision-making and action.



This study's outputs will be shared with participants for its potential use in their activities and potential feedback on its interpretations. In a further stage, this study's outputs will be translated into specific orientations for articulating a regional initiative of the iGST through an analytical and collaborative process with interested organizations and groups.

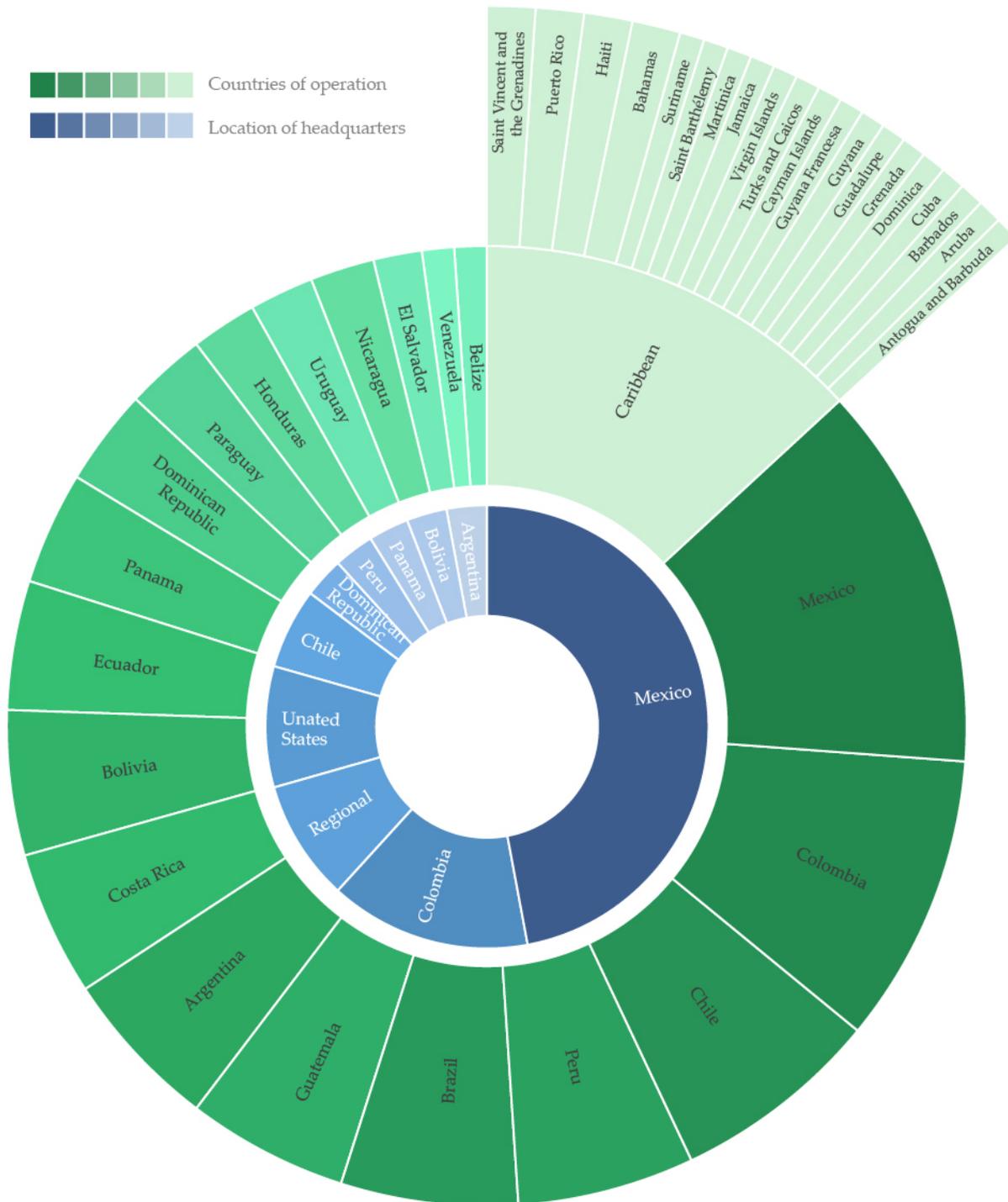
4 Results

4.1 Climate social actors

The respondent climate NGOs and groups are based in nine countries and have operations in 41 LAC nations. Most headquarters are located in Mexico (47.06%), followed by Colombia (14.71%), the US (8.82%), and Chile (5.88%). These groups' activities focus on Mexico (68.6%), Colombia (51.4%), Chile (37.1%), Brazil (31.4%), Peru (31.4%), Argentina (28.6%), Guatemala (28.6%), Bolivia (25.7%), Costa Rica (25.7%), Ecuador (22.9%), Panama (20%), Dominican Republic (17.1%), and Paraguay (14.3%). Despite the prevalence of the largest countries, the climate groups have operations in most Caribbean countries (see Figure 2).



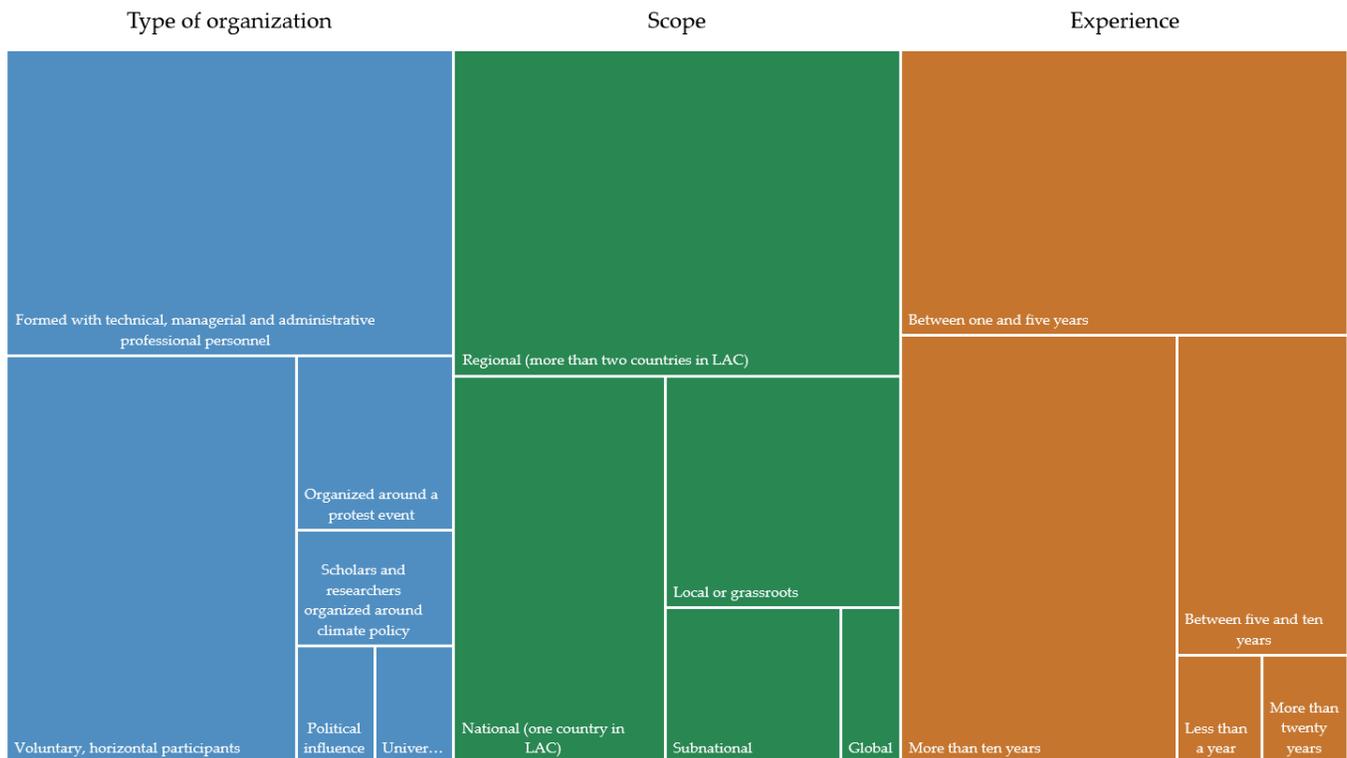
Figure 2. Climate groups' locations and United States scope





The majority of the groups are recently formed (one to five years, 40%), and 37.1% have more than ten years of activity. Given the scope of their activities, they consider themselves regional (45.7%), followed by national (25.7%), and local or grassroots (17.1%). Most organizations are formal and professional (42.9%), followed by grassroots and those resulting from social movements (37.1%) (see Figure 3).

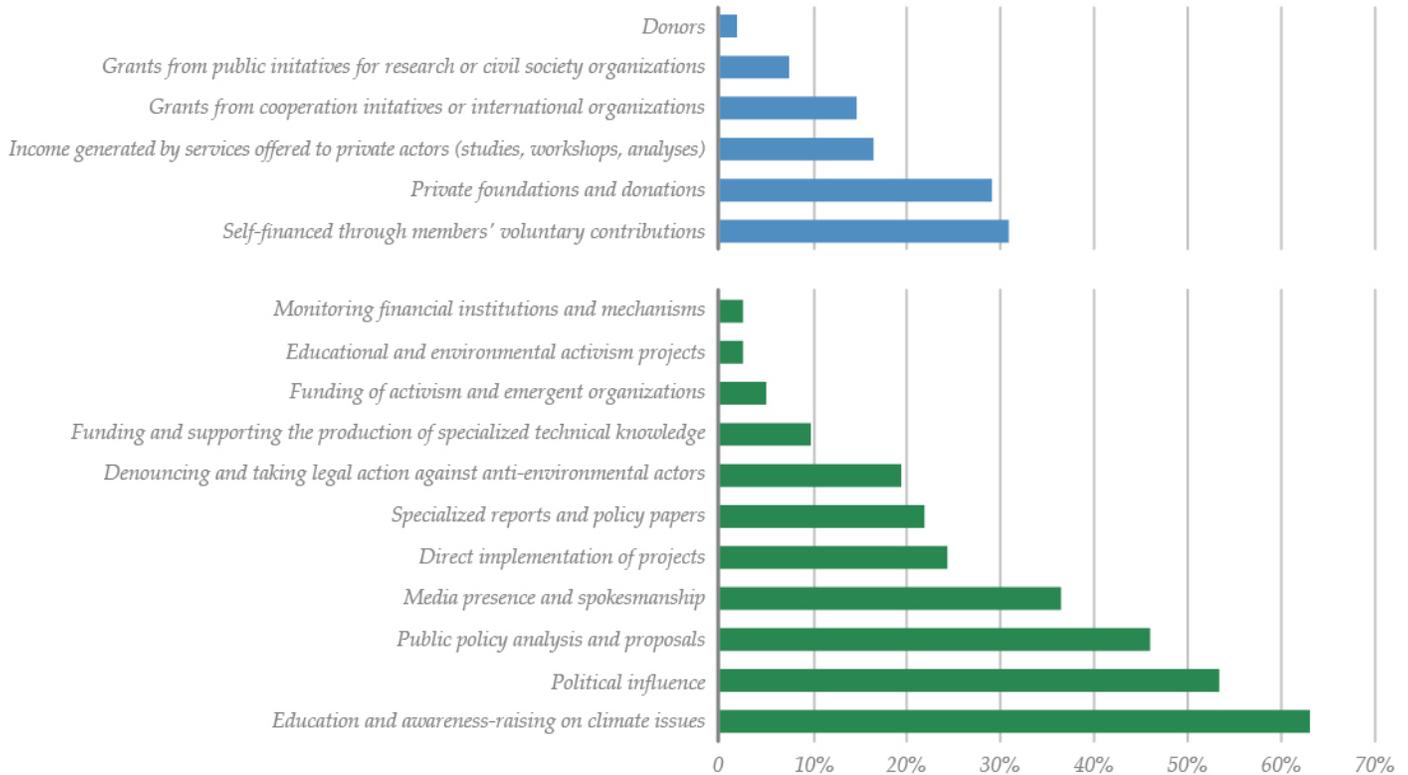
Figure 3. Climate groups' characteristics



Their funding comes mainly from self-financing and voluntary work (48.6%), donations and private foundations (45.7%), services (25.7%), and grants from international cooperation funds and international organizations (22.9%). The organizations' work focuses on education, advocacy, policy orientations, public communication, and litigation (see Figure 4).



Figure 4. Funding and activities



On the one hand, the actors' prevailing view is that addressing climate change requires a structural transformation of economic and social systems, ranging from the transformation of energy and goods production to a deep reconfiguration of political priorities (31%). Contrastingly, some interviewees remark that a change in consumption and production habits (green growth) is the best solution to the problem (26%), while others sustain that the solutions will come from international agreements and domestic policies with clear targets and financing mechanisms (17%).

On the other hand, in relation to domestic climate policies, the overall perception is that, despite some progress, goals, finances, policy tools, and implementation pathways must be strengthened (40%). Another significant percentage of the organizations (37%) believes that these policies favor transnational companies and economic approaches rather than promote economic system changes. However, participants (83%) believe that international cooperation and agreements have some relevance for the climate agenda (see Figure 5).



Figure 5. Views on the climate agenda



The variations in their structures, scopes, and funding help explain climate groups' positions concerning the international arena (see Figure 6). The agenda of transnational and national NGOs builds on the ongoing global climate debate, explaining why they develop a favorable perception and involvement in the UNFCCC processes. However, although local organizations are interested and willing to participate in international initiatives, there is a gap between this agenda and their everyday activities. Finally, grassroots organizations and youth movements have links with transnational networks and coalitions but tend to be skeptical about the outcomes of institutionalized processes.



Figure 6. Climate actors' subgroups

Category	Examples ³	Key features	Relation to the international arena
Transnational NGOs and national NGOs with international ties	AIDA, AILAC, Greenpeace, Latin American and the Caribbean Youth Climate Movement, WRI, Ancon, Fundación Avina, ICM, Climate Reality Project, OLAC	Defined structure and roles, professional staff, ties to international processes and debates, demarcated agenda, and funding mostly from international donors	Core to their agenda and activities
Local NGOs and research groups	CDHT, Fundación Gaia Pacha, Terra IntegraMX, Fundación BUAP, ONG CVerde, AMEXGEN, Blog CulturaGreen, WEEDS, Fundación Planeta Azul Caribe, Red SUMAS, Universidad Militar Nueva Granada	Defined structure, formed around researchers and activists, close ties to local issues and actors, funded through services and private and social donations	Favorable but with low ties to their everyday activities
Grassroots organizations, social and youth movements	Ciudadanos Reforestando Querétaro, Global Shapers Rosario, Jóvenes Peruanos frente al Cambio Climático, Pacto x el Clima y YOUNGO Ocean Voice, Reacción por el Planeta, Voces Unidas de Puerto Morelos	Organized around a shared concern or issue, horizontal decision-making, volunteering involvement, and mostly self-financed	Links to transnational social networks and coalitions but skeptical about outputs of institutionalized processes

4.2 Short-term risks to the regional climate agenda and action

The post-COVID scenario entails significant challenges for regional climate goals. The actors recognize the relevance of international cooperation issues, but their concerns focus on the COVID-19 economic crisis and its implications for national climate policy and civil society's capacities. Even though there is still significant uncertainty as to what the future will bring in that regard, our results show some aspects that require further

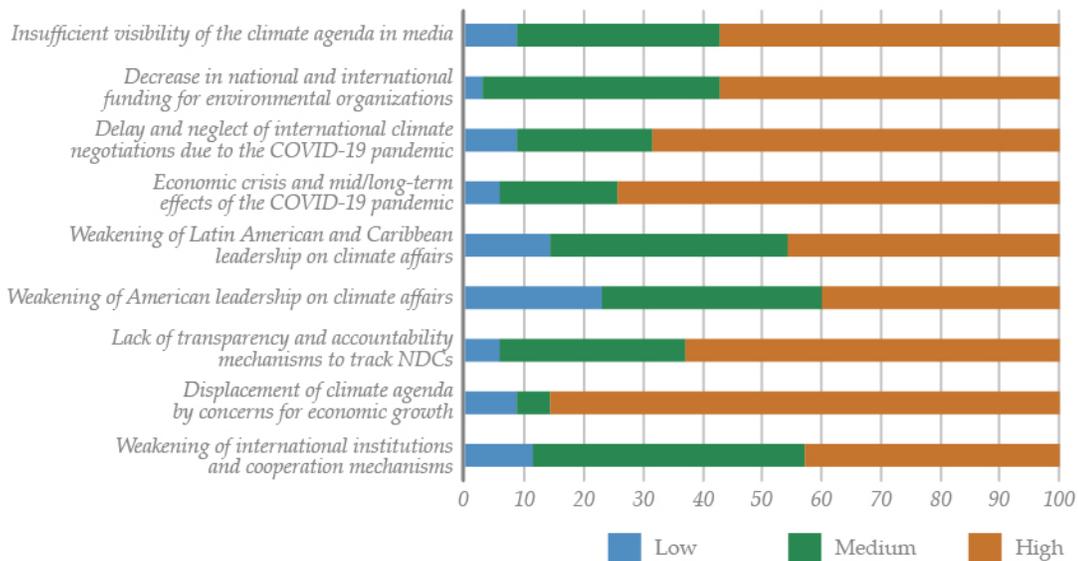
³ The acronyms included in the table stand for the following names of organizations or climate groups: Interamerican Association for Environmental Defense (AIDA), Independent Alliance of Latin America and the Caribbean (AILAC), World Resources Institute (WRI), Iniciativa Climática de México (ICM), Latin American Monitor for Climate Action (OLAC), Center for Human and Technological Development (CHDT), Mexican Association of Energy Management Enterprises (AMEXGEN).



consideration for the climate agenda. Firstly, as a contingent event, COVID-19 drives material and social changes that will reframe the lines of tension of regional climate politics. Secondly, strengthening local actors' activities and domestic accountability mechanisms could play a critical role in the emerging context.

The survey respondents perceive the economic context and its implications for political priorities and civil society funding as the most critical challenge for 2021.⁴ For instance, 74% consider the economic crisis and the medium- and long-term effects of COVID-19 to be a risk. This factor is associated with a possible relaxation of climate regulations and policies to favor economic growth and their resulting setbacks for environmental goals (85.70%), the delay and governmental neglect of international negotiations (68.60%), as well as lower visibility of the climate agenda in the media (57.1%). Furthermore, 57% are concerned about the reduction in international and domestic financing for climate action (see Figure 7). Similarly, during the interviews, the participants' discourse was framed by their financial struggles to maintain their activism in the short term.

Figure 7. Perceptions on short-term risks for climate policy



⁴ Another risk that was not considered in the survey is the high regional vulnerability to climate change. For instance, in 2020, hurricane ETA hit Central America and the Caribbean, generating severe social, economic, and environmental consequences, particularly in Guatemala, Honduras, and Cuba. This hurricane reoriented the attention of several NGOs and social groups toward addressing the negative social impacts.



The post-COVID scenario could reshape the contours of national politics and shift the tension from the international to the domestic arena. The issues that have been central to the climate debate since 2015, such as the weakening of US leadership and international institutions and cooperation mechanisms, were secondary for participants. In contrast, participants see the lack of domestic accountability of NDCs as a vital issue (62.9%) (see Figure 7). The interviews also corroborated this trend. The limited transparency regarding government decision and policy-making and the lack of practical tools for evaluating the implementation and performance of climate policies were critical areas of concern.

4.3 Context of climate policy and NDCs

Our findings suggest that the broad social support for the climate agenda and international actors' influence have been fundamental for governments' action in UNFCCC negotiations. Due to changes in international politics, however, the role that most relevant foreign governments will play in the medium term is uncertain, increasing the importance of domestic and transnational civil society action. Considering the gap between the goals proposed in the NDCs and their actual compliance, it is crucial to develop mechanisms to hold LAC countries accountable.

The survey respondents see social interest (79%) and media visibility (76%) as the most relevant climate policy drivers. This is consistent with previous studies and highlights strong public support in LAC (see Figure 8). For instance, according to Pew (2019), 80% of Mexicans perceive climate change as a significant threat, followed by 73% of Argentinians and 72% of Brazilians – compared to 55% of Americans and 66% of Canadians. The activism of NGOs and other social groups has been another key internal policy-driver (75%), followed by political parties and the leadership of politicians (63%). Similarly, Edwards and Roberts (2015) argue that LAC civil society has generated a context that favored governmental action at the national and multilateral levels.



A shared perception amongst civil society is that, although the Conferences of the Parties (COPs) and other multilateral negotiations have a relatively low relevance (60%) for domestic policy formation, international pressure (73%) and the agendas of foreign governments are influential factors (see Figure 8). This is consistent with previous studies that point out international actors' climate attitudes as a key determinant. To illustrate this point, it should be noted that US diplomacy and reputational risks catalyzed the LAC governments' favorable position at the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement negotiations (Hochstetler & Viola, 2012; Pulver, 2013).

Respondents see China's position as slightly more influential (68%) than the US agenda (67%). Since 2017, the US has eliminated its support for the LAC climate agenda, and more broadly, its international policy weakened the historically close relations with the Western Hemisphere. China has recently adopted a proactive position in international climate politics, and its low carbon energy industry has fostered regional renewables deployment (Engels, 2018; Urban, 2018). However, the emergence of China as a leading economic partner in LAC has generated environmental concerns. Chinese investments focus on mining, oil and gas, and large-scale crops and infrastructure, which have generated local environmental degradation and carbon emissions (Ray, 2017; Li *et al.*, 2020). Thus, its overall political and structural effect on LAC governments' positions toward the GST is uncertain.

Stakeholders have an overall negative view of the design and performance of NDCs (see Figure 9). Unconditional goals are deemed low, and most importantly, the necessary policy and planning tools to deliver these goals are seen as underdeveloped. The actors also surmise that the mechanisms for transparency and social involvement regarding how these climate policy planning instruments are defined, reviewed, implemented, and monitored are not in place or have a restricted scope. The difference between emission trends and climate objectives had the worst assessment (24.3%). Paradoxically, the likelihood of increasing the ambition of NDCs was high compared to other aspects (35.4%).



Figure 8. Drivers of climate policy formation and ambition at the national level

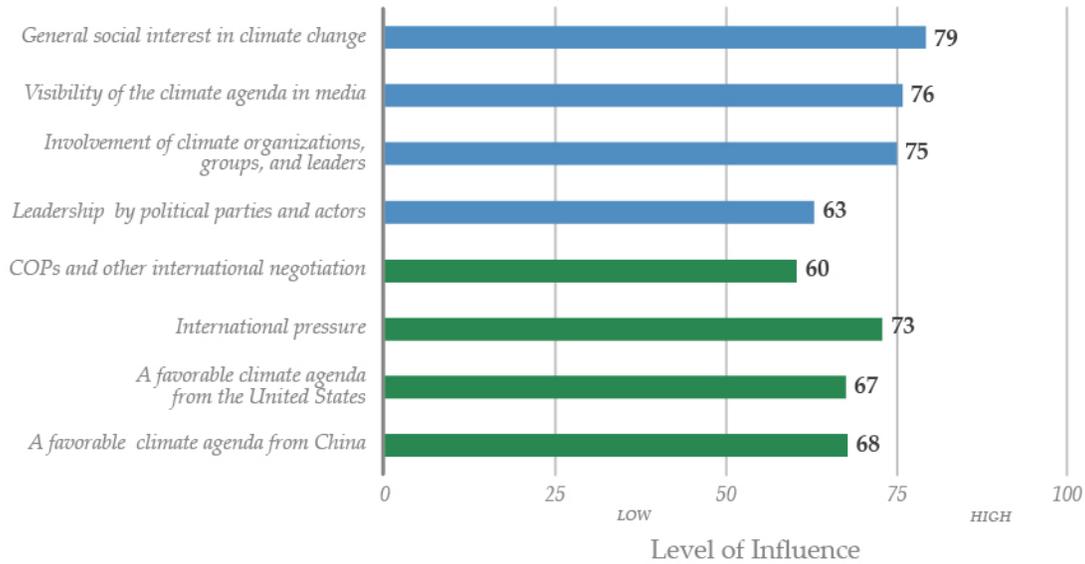
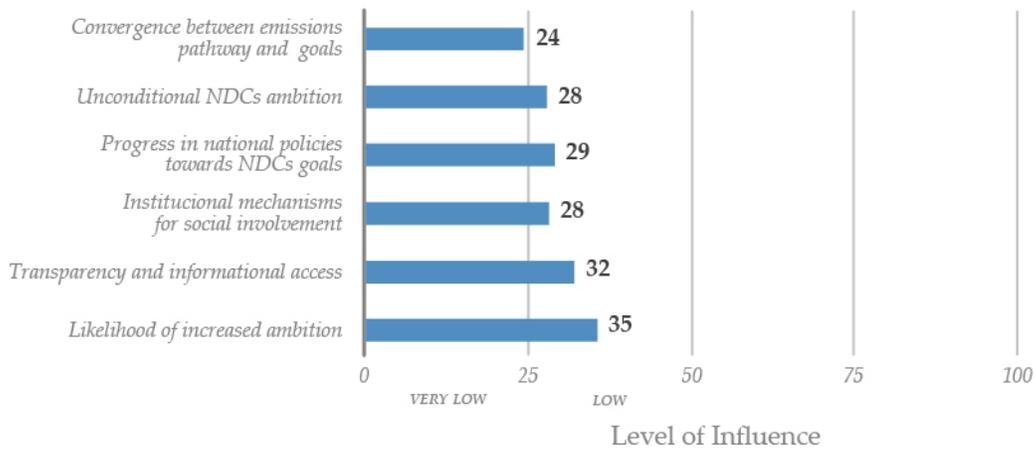


Figure 9. Design and performance of NDCs



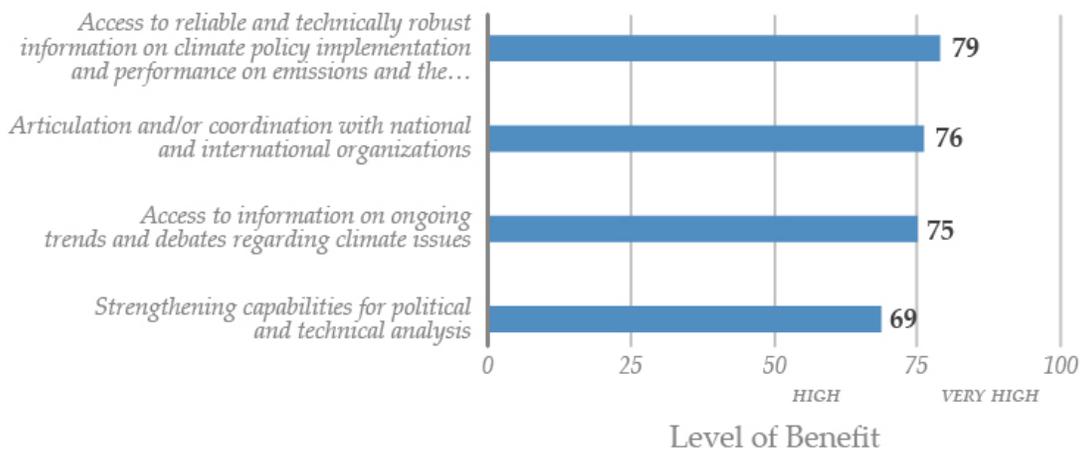
4.4 Social involvement and climate reports

Most stakeholders engage with the NDCs (60%), while 31% are interested but have not found or developed a channel to participate in this area because their agenda targets both the local and social changes rather than the political arena. The engagement of these groups constitutes an opportunity for the iGST in the region. Low governmental transparency on



their actual enforcement, how domestic policy instruments are methodologically constituted, and limitations on available knowledge relevant to their activities and contexts are perceived as the most critical barriers for social climate action. Consequently, actors show a high level of interest in capacity-building strategies (see Figure 10), particularly enhancing access to reliable information (with comparable data and open and verified methodologies) and links with national and transnational groups.

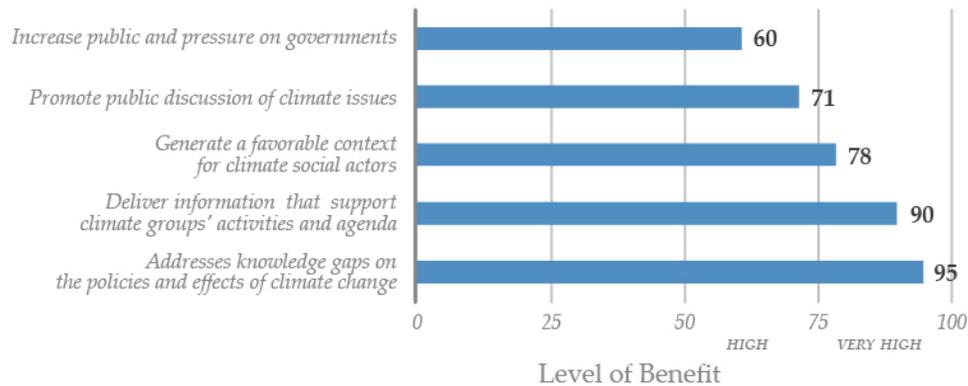
Figure 10. Aspects related to improving social involvement



Even though the core objective of climate reports is to inform decision-makers, their main effect is expressed in the action of climate social groups and public discussion (see Figure 11). By delivering a better understanding of greenhouse gas emission trends and the costs of insufficient climate action and political coordination, climate reports can provide evidence and information that strengthen NGOs and other social groups' activities and favor media attention to the social aspects of the climate agenda and in the public debate on the climate issue. Thus, creating links between the GST and social climate actors could be a critical strategy to achieve national climate goals.

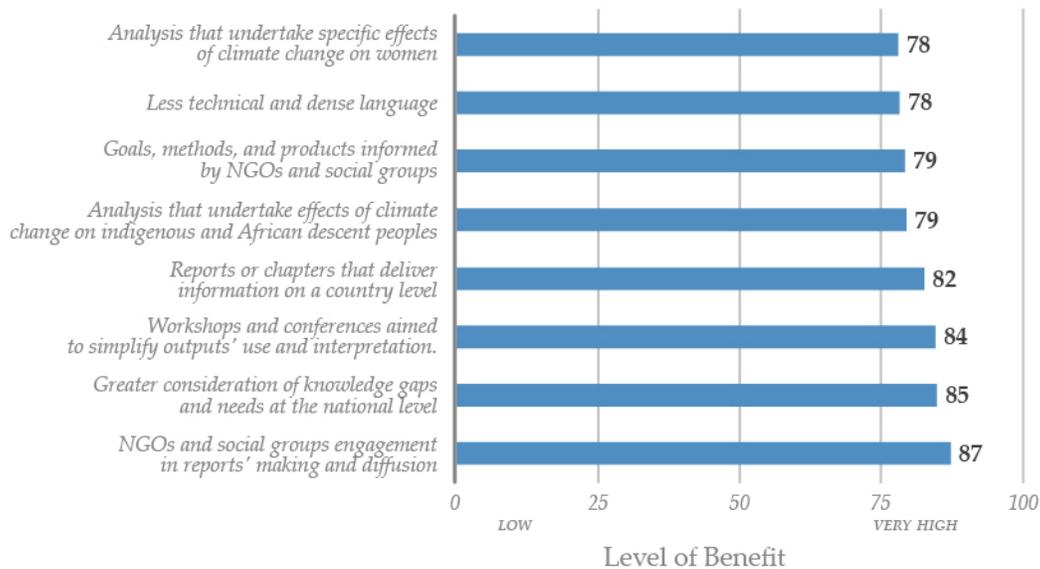


Figure 11. Positive effects of climate reports



Actors showed a positive attitude toward the benefits of a greater link between climate reports and their particular agendas (see Figure 12). The priority strategies are the involvement of social actors in the making and dissemination of reports, greater consideration of domestic knowledge gaps and needs, activities that facilitate social actors' usability, and elaborating reports and chapters that undertake and disaggregate information for the national level. These outputs suggest a willingness to get involved in actions toward this aim, which may increase the GST's impact.

Figure 12. Areas for extending social salience of climate reports

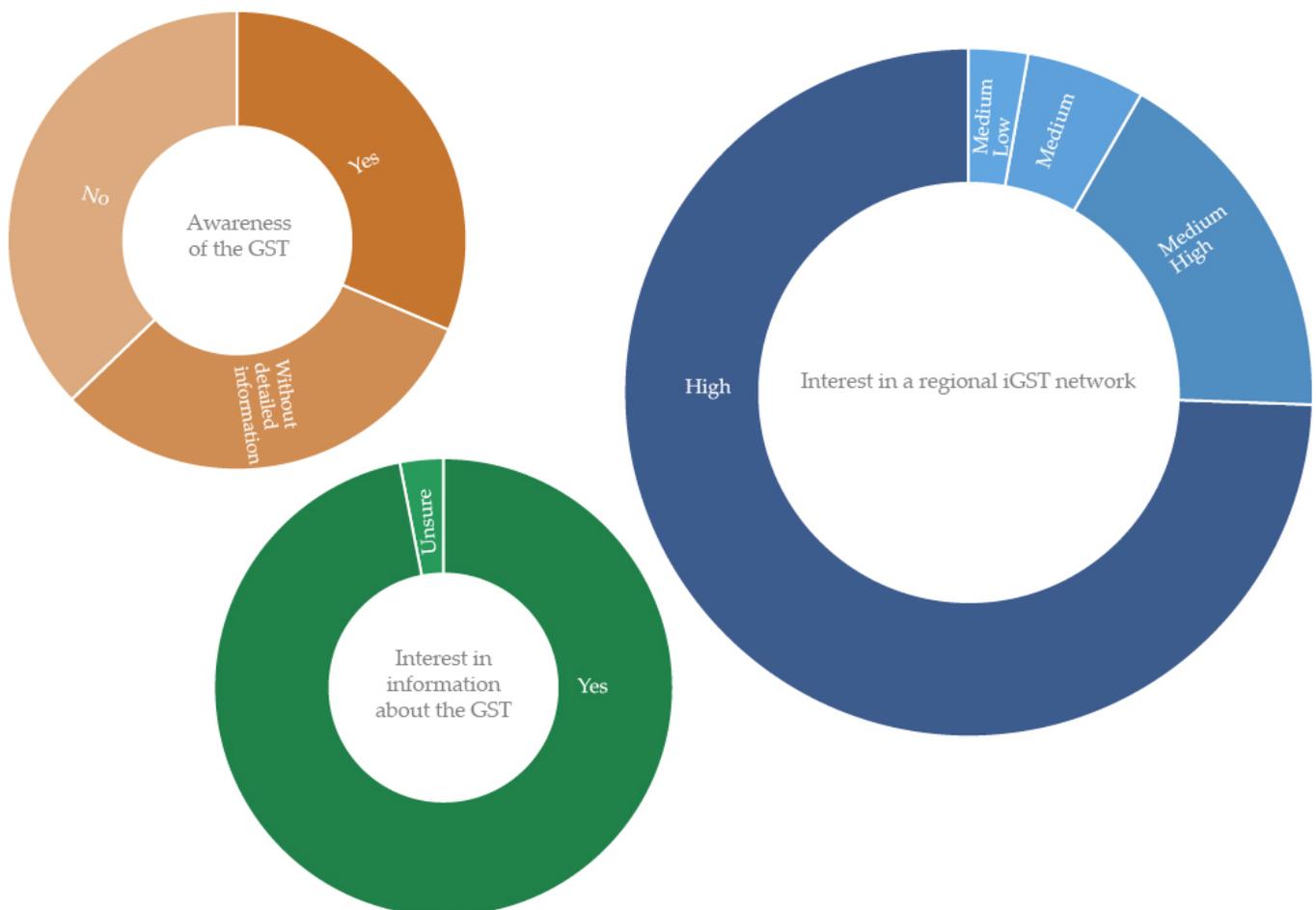




4.5 The iGST and a regional network

The actors who stated that they are familiar with the GST represent 31.4%, while those remaining did not have detailed information (31.5%) or were unaware of the subject (37.1%) (see Figure 13). These results show the gap between the GST and LAC civil society, which constitutes a significant risk for this institutional process' salience. Additionally, the overwhelming majority expressed interest in accessing the information on the iGST (97%) and participating in independent actions toward NDCs (91.4%). However, considering actors are interested in the GST and willing to engage with it, conditions are favorable to undertake the existing informational gap that surrounds it.

Figure 13. Perspectives regarding the iGST





Based on the semi-structured interviews, a series of factors and potentialities for a regional network for the iGST came to light. These include the following:

- **Co-production of knowledge that favors social action** – The network can conduct different studies, including a GST shadow report, diagnoses on the gap between the NDCs and domestic policies, pathways for developing regulatory and planning tools, and proposals for an institutional design to include civil society in monitoring climate policy.
- **Diversity and inclusion** – The network can be a means to provide a strong voice from the Global South, identify regional priorities for their inclusion in the GST, and create a dialogue between civil society and the institutional process.
- **Extend the GST's impact** – The network can disseminate the GST's importance among civil society actors and public opinion, particularly to exert pressure on governments with low commitment to climate goals.
- **Advocacy** – The network can be a means for coordinating domestic advocacy campaigns and transnational actions aimed to favor political and institutional action toward the GST and their consideration of guidance from the UNFCCC. Furthermore, it can, importantly, be a means for the international dissemination and collective learning from these experiences.
- **Learning and capacity building** – The initiative can provide a platform for exchanging information, sharing methodologies, complementing capacities, and developing transnational conferences and workshops on GST and NDCs, among other aspects.
- **Transnational and domestic social accountability** – The network can channel national and international demands for climate accountability and transparency, where it would initially be focused on improving governmental compliance. Greater transparency can catalyze public awareness and public demand for political action.



Despite its clear potential, some factors related to the iGST in general and the regional network in particular can limit the engagement of climate organizations. Some of the most crucial challenges identified are the following:

iGST

- 1. The iGST's vision and implementation path** – A clearer definition of the specific objectives and routes of influence of the iGST is required. These elements are essential for climate organizations to visualize the outputs that their involvement could generate.
- 2. Distance from social climate groups and the general public** – The iGST is perceived as an analytical and research initiative aimed to inform the GST, but without activities and communication channels for a broader community of NGOs and audiences (e.g., workshops, conferences, talks at universities). These activities would be necessary to communicate the importance of the GST and the iGST's outputs, therefore generating interest, relationships, and, potentially, the participation of youth movements, researchers, small organizations, and local groups. Moreover, these activities can also reduce the gap experienced by some organizations between information about international climate processes and capacities, particularly in groups that act at the local level.
- 3. NDCs vs. domestic politics** – International commitments do not necessarily translate into domestic institutional and regulatory arrangements for their implementation. Thus, it is perceived that the iGST can develop more specific actions and proposals to undertake the enforcement gap. NDCs could increasingly become social, economic, and development planning instruments that guide decision-making in the region.
- 4. Ambition vs. performance** – If there are already significant gaps between NDC targets and actual domestic policy outcomes, what does it mean for LAC countries to increase ambition? How are guidelines for feasibility and effectiveness integrated into NDCs to achieve more ambitious climate goals and address current underperformance? It is perceived that more definition into these questions may play a critical role in the iGST impact.



iGST network in LAC

- 1. Local meaning and contextual relevance** – Due to the GST time frame, the regional network may have a low priority for climate organizations working in the changing national dynamics. Thus, climate national objectives, short-term goals, and a vision that transcends the GST (2023) are crucial for the regional iGST initiative.
- 2. Initiative niche** – Considering ongoing climate networks and already existing South-South cooperation initiatives (e.g., OLAC, GFLAC, CANLA),⁵ the definition of complementary goals is crucial to avoid fragmentation of actions, duplication of efforts, and the competition for resources and groups' interests.
- 3. Participation needs** – LAC NGOs and climate groups work with limited human and financial resources. A network's organization is highly demanding (e.g., meetings, information, and logistics), which can be an obstacle to most groups' engagement. There are also variations in the intensity of participation related to contextual aspects (e.g., relative interest in activities) and changes in groups' priorities. Therefore, the definition of different levels and types of involvement, from information and specific participation to groups that constitute the organizational core, is crucial to guarantee participation that suits varied levels of involvement due to given capacities.
- 4. Construction of the initiative** – A process in phases or stages can favor both social groups' articulation and appropriation of the network. On the one hand, a phase dedicated to communication of crucial elements of international climate processes (e.g., GST, NDCs, or national trends) and their relevance for national and subnational actors might establish relationships and trust and contribute in co-producing an agenda aligned with local priorities. On the other hand, the organization of specific public actions and collaborative studies that undertake NDCs local issues can build on the aforementioned relationships and complementarities. Finally, the initiative could spearhead a broad campaign and advocacy actions framing the GST.

⁵ GFLAC stands for the Climate Finance Group of Latin America and the Caribbean, while CANLA is the acronym of Climate Action Network in Latin America.



5. Organizational development – A layer-based organization can provide operability and flexibility during the initial stage. At the core, a working group integrated by NGOs and regional social groups could conduct the first actions and advance toward the accomplishment of the previous points. Another group for organizations, activists, experts, and other stakeholders with some engagement or interest could have a supporting role. It would be crucial to establish clear and open channels for the flow of information and members between both groups and the expansion of the core working group.



5 Challenges and Opportunities

Challenges

- The post-COVID scenario may distract governments from national climate policies and affect governments' involvement in the UNFCCC processes.
- The contraction in funding affects NGOs and climate groups and may constrain their capacity to engage in iGST initiatives.
- Some organizations' financial structures make it more difficult for them to engage in long-term international climate processes or sustain transnational cooperation initiatives.
- Declining US relations with LAC affect incentives for governments to advance climate goals.
- There is a tendency to perceive international climate initiatives as analytical exercises with little practical relevance and contextual pertinence for organizations of national or local scope. The gap between the diffusion of climate science and policy recommendations and the everyday activities of climate organizations in the region should be addressed.

Opportunities

- The widespread support that the climate agenda has gained in LAC societies is propitious for a regional initiative.
- Such an effort can strengthen NGOs and groups related to NDCs and provide a channel of involvement for interested climate groups.
- Accountability initiatives in LAC can fill the gap between NDCs and the domestic political development toward climate goals.
- The demand for transparency and participation mechanisms in domestic climate policy can strengthen the region's iGST agenda.
- Access to reliable climate information and improved links between climate actors could increase interest and extend social climate action.
- Social actors are open to get involved in climate reports and perceive them as favorable for their impact. They also share a



positive disposition toward the organization of workshops, conferences, and other activities that simplify access, interpretation, and possible applications of the information and analysis contained in the reports.

- The involvement of social actors and the consideration of local knowledge needs, among other strategies, can improve the influence, usability, and local pertinence of the GST and independent knowledge-making initiatives that follow this process.
- Social actors have a low level of recognition of the GST and information about this process's role in advancing climate goals. Therefore, awareness-raising to increase involvement, which is called for in the regional context, can help alleviate this issue.
- The high level of interest among social actors to access information on the GST and engage in the subject allows for greater efforts to articulate climate civil society actors in the region.



6 Conclusion

This working paper aimed to analyze the context of climate policy and civil society in LAC to explore the possibility of articulating a regional epistemic community around the iGST. Our findings suggest that NGOs and social groups are dissatisfied with the current ambition of the NDCs and the implementation of national climate policies. They also show that NGOs and social groups perceive significant domestic and international short-term risks in the area, demand transparency and social involvement mechanisms, and, crucially, consider knowledge as a strategic resource for their activism. Despite the low recognition of the GST, the climate social groups have a high level of interest in both the subject and future engagement in climate report production, such as the GST's outputs. Therefore, the conditions are favorable for the formation of an epistemic community.

An effort of this sort could link and enhance the goals of both the iGST and regional activism. Some of the potential benefits for the iGST epistemic community are:

1. the dissemination of the relevance of the GST and the iGST working groups' outputs among diverse social groups in the Global South;
2. the facilitation of the inclusion of outputs produced for the iGST into the agendas and priorities of the NGOs that target national NDCs;
3. the promotion of the GST to be included in climate groups' agendas that currently do not have direct/specific goals in the subject;
4. the creation of a channel for the engagement of local groups and the general public;
5. the definition of a clearer strategy to translate the iGST's outputs into social action, public awareness, and domestic contexts necessary for the accountability of governments' climate commitments.

Some of the potential positive effects for NGOs and climate groups are:

1. identifying regional priorities and preferences for their inclusion within the iGST working groups and, ultimately, the GST;



2. the iGST outputs delivering resources for domestic agenda-setting and political influence;
3. strengthening the groups' capacities to translate the GST's results into elements that can be directly useful in their local contexts and taking advantage of its international momentum to advance national climate agendas;
4. co-producing knowledge that undertakes critical gaps and needs for local activism;
5. delivering transnational social actions to hold LAC governments accountable.

However, the formation of an iGST LAC epistemic community faces various challenges. For instance, the development of short-term activities and specific goals that recognize the diversity in the visions and interests of NGOs and groups, and, simultaneously, that internalizes local meaning and contextual relevance. This agenda's scope must support existing regional networks and avoid fragmentation or duplication of actions and resources. The epistemic community's structure requires flexibility and low operability demands due to the variations in resources, capacities, and engagement levels. Consequently, the next working paper will undertake these potentialities, opportunities, and challenges through an analytical and participatory process for delivering defined strategies and actions toward constructing a viable and meaningful iGST initiative in LAC.



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Annex 1

Participant organizations

AILAC

AMEXGEN, A. C.

ANCON

Asociación Interamericana para la Defensa del Ambiente (AIDA)

Blog Cultura Green

Centro de Desarrollo Humano y Tecnológico, A. C. (CDHT)

Ciudadanos Reforestando Querétaro

Climate Reality Project

Colectivo Jóvenes Peruanos Frente al Cambio Climático

Fundación Ambiente y Recursos Naturales

Fundación Avina

Fundación BUAP

Fundación Gaia Pacha

Fundación Planeta Azul Caribe

Global Shapers Rosario

Greenpeace México, A. C.

Iniciativa Climática de México (ICM)

Latin American and the Caribbean Youth Climate Movement

Observatorio Latinoamericano para la Acción Climática (OLAC)

ONG Cverde

Pacto por el Clima y Youngo Ocean Voice

Reacción por el Planeta

Red de Sustentabilidad Energética, Medio Ambiente y Sociedad (Red SUMAS)

Terra IntegraMX

Universidad Militar Nueva Granada

Voces Unidas de Puerto Morelos

WEEDS, A. C.

WRI México



Annex 2

Interviewees

Asociación Interamericana para la Defensa del Ambiente (AIDA)

Climate Action Network Latin America

Fundación AVINA

Fundación Ambiente y Recursos Naturales (FARN)

Grupo de Financiamiento Climático para Latinoamérica y el Caribe (GFLAC)

Transforma Global

Observatorio Latinoamericano para la Acción Climática (OLAC)



iGST

Independent Global Stocktake



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