Feedback to the Climate High-Level Champions and the Marrakech Partnership on **the five-year vision and plan for the Global Climate Action Agenda**

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Non-State and subnational voluntary climate action plays a vital role in advancing the Paris Agreement by complementing state-driven efforts, creating synergies with national policy, and strengthening pathways for the Global Stocktake (GST), Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs).

In our feedback to the High-Level Climate Champions on the five-year vision and plan for the Global Climate Action Agenda (GCAA), we recommend steps to keep it relevant,

impactful, and inclusive. Specifically, we suggest it to be complementary to state action, catalytic in mobilizing diverse actors, collaborative across UN conventions, research, and civil society, comprehensive in engaging all actor types—including non-governmental organizations, Indigenous Peoples and local communities, and underrepresented groups, particularly in the Global South—and credible through robust reporting and the phase out underperforming initiatives. The GCAA can enhance engagement between Parties and non-state and subnational actors through regular dialogues tied to NDC updating cycles, tools for visibility, expertise sharing, capacity-building, standard-setting, and coalition-building. Inclusivity can be strengthened through targeted programs, representation requirements, and participation tracking, collaboration and learning across the Rio Conventions, while transparency can be improved by refining indicators, expanding coverage, ensuring open data, and collaborating with climate data communities to boost credibility and scalability.

What should success look like for the GCAA in the next five years, and how can it be measured effectively?

Over the last decade, the GCAA has mobilized unprecedented numbers of transnational initiatives, such as individual corporate commitments, as well as cooperative climate initiatives (Figure 1), but progress has been uneven.

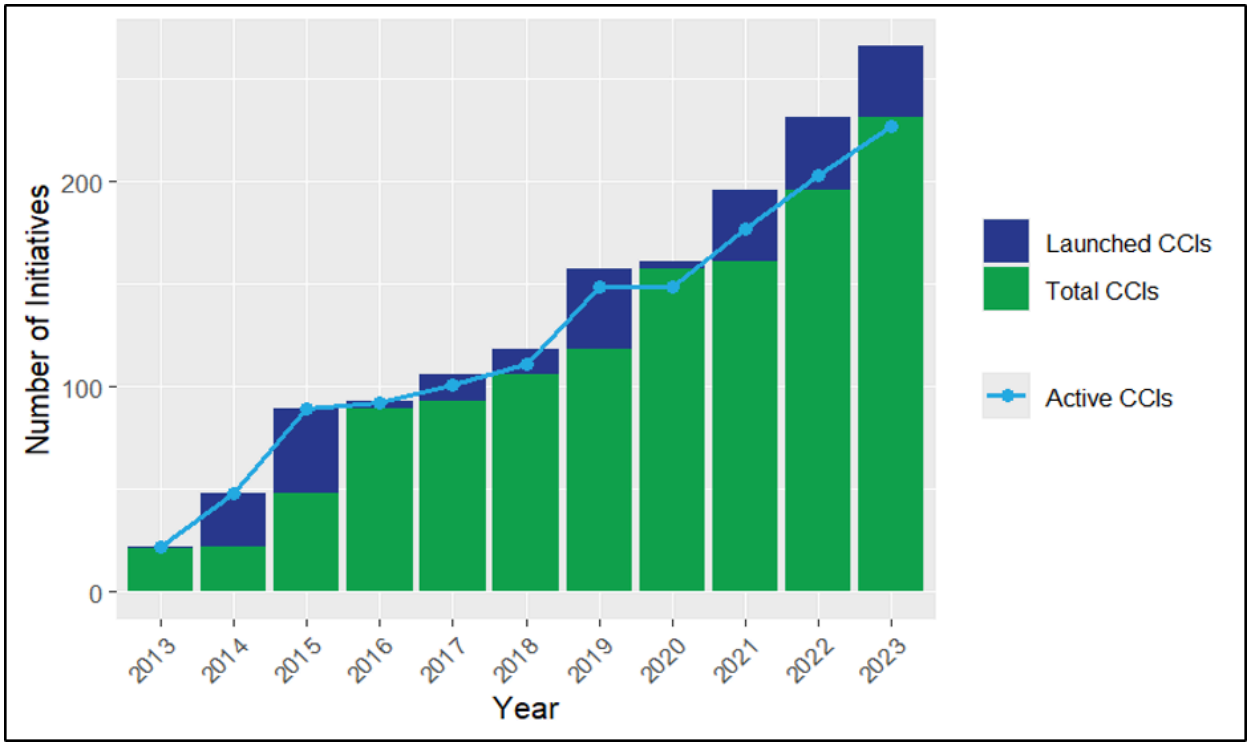

Figure 1. Cumulative growth of active Cooperative Climate Initiatives (CCIs) recorded in GCAP and launched at COPs since 2013. Preliminary data (Chan et al. 2024; ACHIEVE 2024).

Studies show that while the GCAA helped launch thousands of actions, it lacked systematic tracking, leading to neglect of underperforming initiatives, e.g., particularly adaptation actions in developing countries (Chan & Amling, 2019; Chan et al., 2021). Performance among initiatives has not shown marked improvement over the years, highlighting a need for better orchestration, accountability, transparency, and evaluative capacity of initiatives' effectiveness (Figure 2).

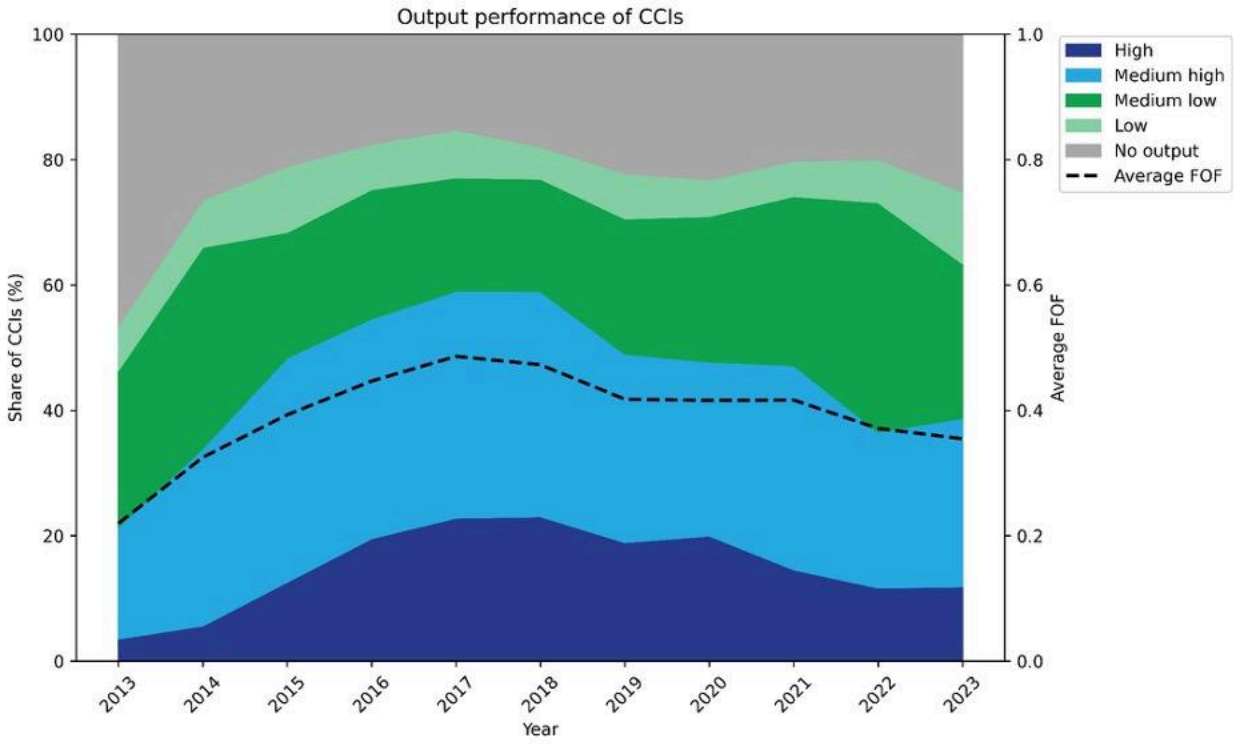

Figure 2. Output performance of CCIs recorded in GCAP and launched at COPs since 2013, measured by Function-Output-Fit, which shows to what extent the indicated CCI's declared functions match with relevant (fitting) outputs. Note: only the CCIs that were active in the corresponding year were considered; initiatives that did not have any outputs are shown in grey; the dashed line shows the average FOF for each year; low performance: FOF < 0.25, medium low: 0.25 <= FOF < 0.5, medium high: 0.5 <= FOF < 0.75, and high: FOF >= 0.75. Preliminary data (Chan et al. 2024; ACHIEVE 2024).

Success in the next five years should mean a GCAA that is **complementary, catalytic, collaborative, comprehensive,** and **credible** (Chan et al. 2021; 2022):

- *complementary* in working alongside governments to accelerate implementation of internationally agreed climate goals, while also aligning to other sustainability goals;
- *catalytic* in inspiring societal (non-state and subnational) actors to take action and facilitating interfaces with governments to raise ambition through long-term mobilization;
- *collaborative* in involving other UN conventions, scientists, civil society, and existing initiatives in the design, mobilization, recording, and evaluation of the agenda;
- *comprehensive* in mobilizing diverse actions, including from NGOs, and Indigenous Peoples and local communities, and marginalized groups, particularly in the Global South—while enabling learning across governance levels and regions; and,
- *credible* in requiring regular and transparent reporting to track and evaluate actions, ensure individual and collective progress, and phase out underperforming initiatives.

To reflect these qualities, measures should include:

- Indicators of *complementarity*, such as evidence that initiatives contribute to the implementation, and higher ambition, of nationally determined contributions, national adaptation plans, and other national and international sustainability commitments.
- Metrics of *catalytic effects*, including qualitative evidence of scaled solutions, integration into regulatory frameworks, and/or replication across sectors and regions.
- Assessments of *collaboration*, for example the extent to which initiatives engage with other sustainability domains, scientific communities, and networks.
- Data capturing *comprehensiveness*, such as geographical and actor-type participation metrics (e.g., inclusion of under-represented actors, Indigenous Peoples and local communities, and Global South-based initiatives).
- Measures ensuring *credibility*, including annual reporting on outputs and outcomes (mitigation, adaptation, and beyond), governance quality, integrity indicators (e.g., responsible use of carbon credits), and attention to synergies or trade-offs with nature and other sustainability aspects.

How can the GCAA facilitate direct and impactful engagement between Parties and NPS to support implementation efforts at both national and sectoral levels, in order to advance the full delivery of the GST, NDCs, and NAPs?

Impactful engagement between Parties and NPS

While non-state and subnational voluntary climate action can make important contributions, it cannot replace government-led action. Its greatest value lies in complementing and catalyzing state-driven efforts under the Paris Agreement by creating synergies with national policy processes. Past orchestration under the GCAA has mobilized thousands of cooperative initiatives, yet systematic engagement with national implementation remains limited (Chan & Amling, 2019; Chan et al., 2022a). Building on evidence that cities and regions participating in multiple high-integrity initiatives tend to adopt more ambitious targets (ACHIEVE Project, 2024), the GCAA can convene recurring, purpose-specific dialogues and initiatives aligned with NDC update cycles, NAP revisions, and sectoral workstreams.

To strengthen these linkages and achieve catalytic impacts (cf. Bernstein & Hoffmann, 2018), the GCAA should leverage mechanisms that actively promote scaling—such as recognition and award schemes (Teunissen & Chan, 2024), matchmaking platforms, and "climate action fairs"—which connect Parties with non-Party stakeholders, provide relevant expertise and resources, facilitate the adoption and development of standards, build capacities, and foster the formation of new or stronger coalitions. Such mechanisms can spotlight high-performing actions and accelerate replication or expansion across regions and sectors.

The UNFCCC Secretariat can further build on regional moments, such as at Regional Climate Weeks, to bring these efforts closer to national decision-makers. At these events, researchers and practitioners - including Indigenous Peoples and local communities - could present lessons directly to national focal points. Strengthening regional networks in developing regions—such as the African Non-State Climate Action Platform, Fundación Avina, and various Alliances for Climate Action, can help surface valuable lessons, identify promising initiatives, and find partners to strengthen initiatives and scale action.

Engagement across the Rio Conventions

Equally important is that engagement transcends silos among multilateral regimes. For instance, academics and practitioners (Pettorelli et al., 2024; Boran et al. 2024) underscore the need to align climate and biodiversity action, encouraging Parties to connect NDCs, NAPs, and National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) through shared platforms and cross-ministerial coordination (Boran & Pettorelli, 2024). The GCAA can facilitate this by hosting joint sessions with biodiversity focal points, encouraging NPS to design initiatives that deliver co-benefits for both climate and nature (Chan et al., 2021; Obergassel et al., 2022), and possibly extending to include focal points for reversing desertification and land degradation. Developing shared indicators and registries, moreover, would allow Parties and NPS to track progress across Rio Conventions—the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the UN Convention on Combating Desertification—ensuring that efforts to implement the Paris Agreement are aligned with broader sustainability transformations.

Systematic mobilisation of NPS across GST effort areas

The first GST outcomes document has identified several specific effort areas and targets to achieve the Paris Agreement's long-term goals (para 28, 33, 35, 36). Currently there is limited knowledge available about the coverage of each GST effort area by cooperative initiatives. For effective mobilisation of NPS through initiatives and the consequent effective implementation of mitigation actions across all GST effort

areas, it is important to identify the effort areas where cooperative initiatives are lacking or not active. Existing databases including the UNFCCC NAZCA portal and C-CID could be utilized for the necessary mapping exercise.

How can the CGAA promote an inclusive and equitable engagement, in particular from underrepresented groups and regions?

Promoting inclusiveness within the GCAA itself.

A key challenge for the GCAA has been the persistent underrepresentation of actors from the Global South, Indigenous Peoples and local communities, Afro-descendants, youth, and women-led organizations. Analyses of CCIs reveal that implementation, leadership and funding are heavily concentrated in high-income regions, while many initiatives lack governance mechanisms that ensure broad participation (ACHIEVE Project, 2024; Chan & Amling, 2019; Figure 3).

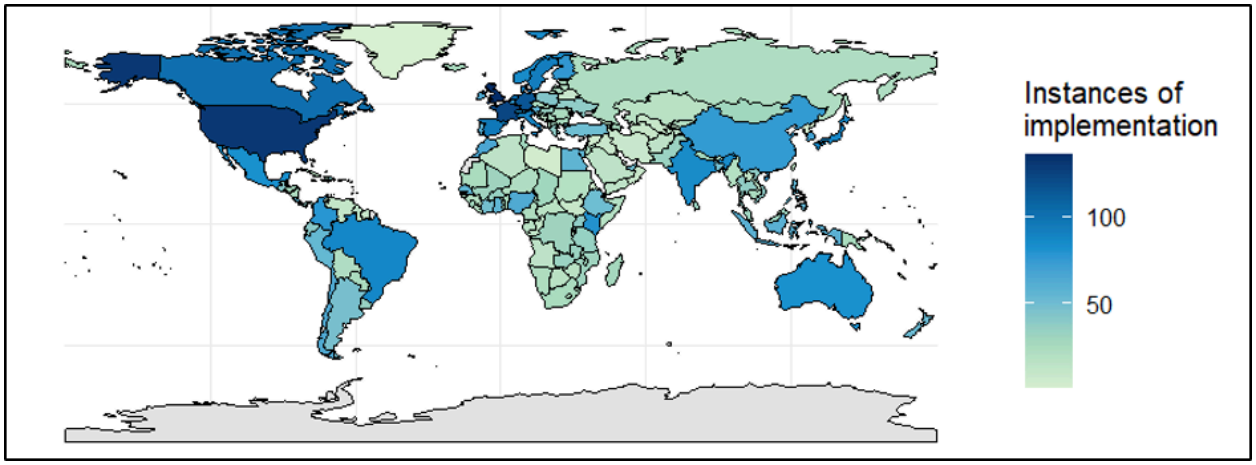

Figure 3. Instances of implementation by country or territory. Preliminary data (Chan et al. 2024; ACHIEVE 2024).

To address these imbalances, the GCAA can establish targeted engagement programmes, such as bursaries for participation, translation and technical support, and structured mentorship between established networks and emerging actors. Moreover, setting clear criteria for equitable leadership, embedding representation requirements in initiative registration, and tracking participation metrics over time would help shift influence to a more diverse set of actors (cf. Chan et al., 2021; Hsu et al., 2020).

Working across conventions to strengthen equity.

Inclusiveness can be further enhanced by connecting efforts under the UNFCCC to those under other Rio Conventions, particularly the CBD. NBSAP processes under the CBD already emphasize indigenous knowledge, equity, and fair benefit-sharing (Chan et al., 2022a; Boran et al. 2024). Coordinating GCAA engagement with these processes—through joint events, special joint initiatives and events during Regional Climate Weeks, shared registries, or integrated reporting—can amplify voices from marginalized regions and align climate action with broader sustainability priorities (Obergassel et al., 2022). Cross-convention learning can help the GCAA avoid repeating exclusionary patterns and build a genuinely global action agenda.

What improvements can be made to ensure better transparency, reporting and follow up of the GCAA, including in existing tools such as the Global Climate Action Portal (a.k.a NAZCA) and the Yearbook of Global Climate Action?

A decade of experience with the GCAA shows that while mobilization of initiatives has been impressive, monitoring and follow-up remain weak, undermining credibility and learning (Chan & Amling, 2019; Chan et al., 2022b). Existing tools such as the NAZCA/Global Climate Action Portal and the Yearbook of Global Climate Action can be significantly improved to close these gaps.

Support reporting and collaborate with the climate action data and analytical community

There is a growing gap between the rapid expansion of non-Party action and the limited capacity of existing processes to track, evaluate, and integrate these efforts into formal UNFCCC implementation frameworks (Walker & Groen, 2025). This underscores the importance of collaborative approaches to data collection, analysis, and evaluation. Non-Party actors and initiatives would benefit from stronger reporting support to NAZCA, for example through streamlined templates, practical guidance via webinars and written instructions, and complementing self-reported data with inputs from the wider community of data providers and analysts. Collaboration with the broader climate action data and analytical community can also play a vital role in breaking down silos, enabling shared learning, developing fit-for-purpose data-collection methodologies, and supporting the scaling of effective initiatives.

However, engagement opportunities for this community are shrinking. While COPs continue to grow in size, access is becoming increasingly difficult for underrepresented observers, practitioners, and members of the climate action data and analytical community. To address these challenges, the UNFCCC should actively support access for these groups and create dedicated spaces where non-Party stakeholders can engage meaningfully with Parties and feed evidence into decision-making.

Finally, regarding the scope of NAZCA's climate action tracking, clear decisions are needed on whether to prioritize comprehensive coverage, including inactive non-Party initiatives and commitments, or to focus on active initiatives, while avoiding selection bias. This will ensure visibility of ongoing action while still acknowledging inactive or sunsetted initiatives, providing either a comprehensive or a more curated view of the CCI landscape.

Refine indicators and categories towards high-integrity voluntary climate action

NAZCA and other platforms should align their climate action tracking to growing demands for high-integrity voluntary climate action. The ACHIEVE project under the Horizon Europe research programme, for instance, is developing a framework for high-integrity climate action (Figure 4).

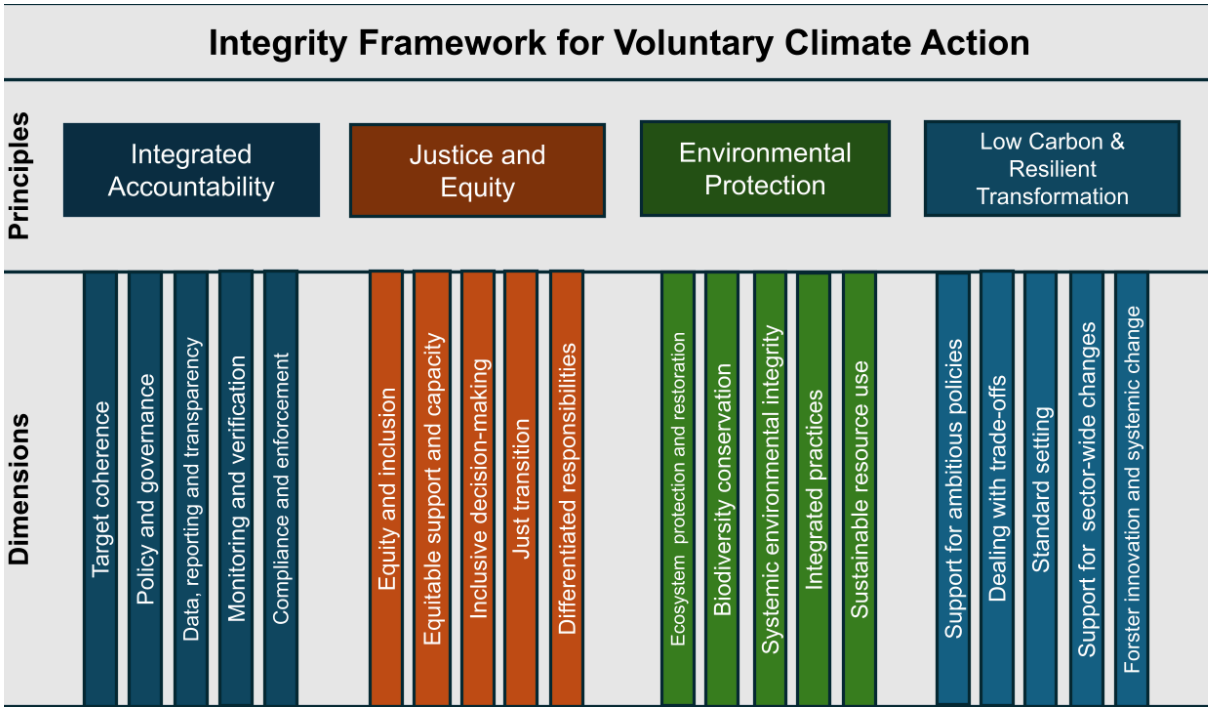

Figure 4 ACHIEVE's integrity framework for voluntary climate action groups integrity into four principles: Integrated Accountability, Justice and Equity, Environmental Protection, and Low Carbon & Resilient Transformation, each illustrated by example dimensions (e.g., target coherence, inclusive decision-making, biodiversity conservation). Categories are not exclusive, and dimensions overlap across principles, serving as indicative rather than exhaustive elements of integrity. Preliminary data (ACHIEVE 2025).

Tracking for high integrity encompasses not only the traditional dimensions of accountability and responsiveness across different types of voluntary climate action, but also the need to assess whether such actions advance justice and equity, safeguard environmental protection, and contribute meaningfully to a low-carbon and climate-resilient transformation.

This includes tracking beyond mitigation/adaptation impacts, capturing broader environmental, social, and economic effects—including justice, equity, trade-offs, and synergies with biodiversity (ACHIEVE Project, 2024; Figure 5).

Figure 5. Linkages to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a share of CCIs recorded in GCAP and launched at COPs since 2013. Note: CCIs can have linkages to more than one SDG, so percentages do not add to 100. The size of the pie chart slices reflects the share of all linkages to a specific SDG vs all other possible associations. We omitted SDG 13 (Climate Action) from the figure, as all CCIs have an explicit link. Preliminary data (Chan et al. 2024; ACHIEVE 2024).

Indicators on governance quality and net-zero linkages (e.g. the promotion or demotion of use of carbon credits by cooperative initiatives) can strengthen integrity assessments. Actor typologies should also be expanded: Indigenous Peoples and local communities, and domestic NGOs should be recognized separately rather than subsumed under "organizations," which currently biases visibility toward powerful actors like multinational companies and large cities. Moreover, geographic data on non-Party actions—such as ICIs—are currently aggregated only at the national level. More granular, sub-national data would enable more accurate estimates of impacts and potential, as well as a better understanding of differentiated within-country effects, which are often critical for assessing justice and equity outcomes.

Expand coverage, interoperability, and open access data

NAZCA can expand its coverage by integrating data and improving interoperability with other projects and platforms, including N/C-CID (with ~900–1000 CCIs), CAMDA, ACHIEVE partners, and others. While NAZCA data is open to access, the GCAA can play a stronger role in facilitating and promoting openness across the climate action data and analytical community, for example by improving visibility of existing datasets, providing clearer user guidance, and encouraging broader use by researchers, practitioners, and policymakers. Promoting greater access also helps ensure that data can be easily reused, verified, and built upon, especially by actors in the Global South who may face resource constraints.

The wealth of practical knowledge gained through interoperability and mutual acknowledgment can be further enhanced by producing joint policy briefs, co-authoring analytical reports, and ensuring integration into the GCA Yearbook—particularly when research communities and communities of practice are involved early in the process.

In parallel, artificial intelligence offers significant potential to analyze large datasets, detect patterns, and generate actionable insights from the growing universe of CCIs. AI could help track implementation trends, highlight under-represented regions or sectors, and support evidence-based decision-making. However, AI systems come with risks, as they can amplify biases present in underlying data, obscure decision logic, or overlook smaller initiatives with less digital presence. The use of AI in the tracking of climate action should therefore follow clear ethical guidelines, ensure transparency in methodologies, and include continuous oversight to guarantee data integrity and credibility of climate action.

Consolidate reporting for UNFCCC moments

To inform GSTs and NDC implementation cycles, the Secretariat could help create dedicated spaces at Regional Climate Weeks to bring together the policy, research and practitioner communities. Better alignment with UNFCCC timelines and milestones would allow inputs (e.g., policy briefs, CCI status updates) to meaningfully feed into COP 30 and beyond. Tangible milestones could include major database updates, and special thematic foci (e.g., on Latin America/South America, integrated nature-climate action, or finance and investors) feeding into the COP 30 Action Agenda and beyond.

GCAA Short-, Mid- and Long-term Action Items

Timeframe	**Action Points**
Short-term (<1 year)	● Support access for underrepresented observers, practitioners, and climate action data/analytical communities at COPs and other events ● Offer streamlined reporting templates and practical guidance (webinars, written instructions) to CCIs for continuous reporting to NAZCA ● Engage early with research communities to co-produce joint policy briefs and analyses for the GCA Yearbook ● Revise NAZCA actor categories to distinguish Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and domestic NGOs
Mid-term (1–3 years)	● Align database updates and thematic analyses (finance, Latin America, integrated nature-climate action) with GST and NDC cycles ● Provide bursaries, translation services, and technical support for Global South actors, including Indigenous Peoples and local communities, women-led groups, and youth ● Improve interoperability between NAZCA and and other datasets (e.g. N/C-CID, CAMDA, ACHIEVE) ● Highlight high-performing CCIs through recognition schemes, matchmaking platforms, and climate action fairs. ● Integrate governance quality indicators and net-zero linkages (e.g., carbon credit use) into NAZCA and Yearbook reporting ● Incorporate sub-national spatial data to estimate impacts, potential, and equity effects ● Track broader impacts (justice, equity, biodiversity co-benefits, other environmental/social dimensions) ● Organize recurring dialogues aligned with NDC updates, NAP revisions, and sectoral workstreams ● Host joint sessions with biodiversity focal points and other Rio Convention bodies for integrated action ● Strengthen and link regional networks (e.g., African Non-State Climate Action Platform, Fundación Avina, Alliances for Climate Action) into global reporting.
Long-term (<5 years)	● Demonstrate a GCAA that is complementary, catalytic, collaborative, comprehensive, and credible ● Demonstrate catalytic effects via scaled solutions, regulatory integration, and replication across sectors/regions ● Maintain comprehensive coverage of diverse actor types and geographies, emphasizing marginalized groups and Global South initiatives ● Institutionalize annual output/outcome reporting and phase out underperforming initiatives ● Integrate interoperable datasets and AI-assisted analyses into the GCA Yearbook and GST analyses

More information

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About us

ACHIEVE – Achieving High-Integrity Voluntary Climate Action
ACHIEVE is a Horizon Europe project (2024–2028) led by Radboud University. Its consortium includes NewClimate Institute, Öko-Institut, CDP Europe, WWF Colombia, University of Eastern Finland, Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency (PBL), Tropical Agricultural Research and Higher Education Center (CATIE), Stockholm University, University of Oxford, Holistic, and E3-Modelling. Together they develop methods, datasets, and guidance to assess and strengthen the integrity, governance, and broader environmental and social impacts of voluntary climate action by cities, regions, and companies.

BioCAM4 – Biodiversity Integration in Climate Adaptation and Mitigation Actions for Climate, People, and Human Health
BioCAM4 is coordinated by Dahdaleh Institute for Global Health Research (York University, Canada), with consortium partners IDOS – German Institute of Development and Sustainability, Institute of Zoology (IoZ, UK), Radboud University and project partners Tropical Agricultural Research and Higher Education Center (CATIE, Costa Rica), African Research Impact Network (ARIN), and Greater Virunga Transboundary Collaboration (Africa). The project advances knowledge and policy on nature-based climate actions that deliver co-benefits for biodiversity, human health, and local livelihoods through global mapping and regional case studies.

CAMDA – Climate Action Tracking for Non-State and Subnational Actors
CAMDA is an international research collaboration comprised of NewClimate Institute, Data-Driven EnviroLab (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), Copernicus Institute of Sustainable Development (Utrecht University), Radboud University Nijmegen, and the Blavatnik School of Government (University of Oxford). The project tracks and analyses the progress of cities, regions, companies, and other non-state actors, assessing their contributions to closing the emissions gap and enhancing ambition beyond national commitments. Through comprehensive datasets, indicators, and annual assessments, CAMDA provides evidence to the UNFCCC, supports policy dialogues, and connects local and transnational climate action to global climate governance.

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