

# Open Government and Climate Change: Leveraging Transparency, Participation, and Accountability for Effective Climate Action

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# 01

## Introduction

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**The world needs more urgent and ambitious action to address climate change.** Seventy-one countries<sup>1</sup> have pledged to reach net-zero emissions by mid-century. Nevertheless, achieving decarbonization and adapting to climate change will require fundamental changes in the production of goods and services by firms and the consumption patterns and behavior of citizens. Climate change poses difficult challenges for policy makers, and three particular challenges make the open government principles of transparency, participation, and accountability especially important. First, countries often face the political challenge of credibly committing to climate action over the long term, in that they must commit to action over multiple electoral cycles if the private sector, households, communities, and public entities are to adopt new technologies and change behavior. Multiple countries have done this by setting climate targets in their laws, developing mid-century decarbonization and resilience strategies, and establishing independent expert advice bodies to ensure that climate policy is based on the best available evidence. This requires trust, as well as effective participation mechanisms, to make the necessary course corrections and manage uncertainty. Second, climate change requires coordination between government and nongovernment actors, as there will be winners and losers along the way and governments will need to work toward consensus to balance the outcomes. To address this challenge, countries have established specialized coordination bodies and citizen engagement mechanisms to ensure that stakeholders have a voice in climate policy. Third, governments have to translate promises into climate action. To this end, they can draw on a range of policy instruments, including information campaigns, regulation, taxation, and public spending, to achieve their climate goals.

**The principles of open government can be especially useful in tackling all three challenges by harnessing and ensuring citizen trust in government and in the legitimacy of climate-directed policy decisions.** Open government has shown to improve government performance (OGP 2018; Williamson and Eisen 2016). Although there is a recognized intrinsic value to openness, open government reforms are also instrumental in achieving broader policy objectives, such as good governance and inclusive growth (OECD 2016). For example, in view of the impact of climate change on vulnerable and disadvantaged communities, open government can be used to ensure that these groups are properly informed, heard, and represented. What is more, wide-ranging, inclusive engagement between governments and citizens is essential if governments are to better understand citizens' needs. Inclusive engagement also enables governments to build trust with citizens, deliver solutions to challenges, and provide communities with the goods and services that they require. For open government to be effective, it must bring citizens on board with the decisions that are made through intentional accountability, guarantee much more than just transparency, and ensure that disclosed information is useful, usable, and employed to change government performance (OGP 2019).

**Open government is structured around three interlinked principles:**

1. **Transparency:** Public access to government-held information, for example, through access to information laws, open data portals, budget transparency portals, and open contracting
2. **Participation:** Formal public and inclusive participation in decision making, for example, through citizen consultations, beneficiary feedback, and social accountability mechanisms
3. **Accountability:** Mechanisms for public accountability, for example, through the role of access-to-information commissions, ombuds offices, and supreme audit institutions, as well as through the adoption of ethical standards and codes of conduct for public officials and the establishment of grievance redress mechanisms

**The benefits of open government have been documented through evidence presented by the Open Government Partnership, which shows that:**

- Public engagement improves public service delivery in education, health, water supply, and infrastructure. It makes services more accessible and effective.
- Civic monitoring contributes to corruption prevention. The impact of transparency is small but statistically significant. There is also a positive correlation between the strength of civil society and a decline in corruption.
- Open procurement increases cost-effectiveness as better data, public feedback, and oversight over public contracting processes can help detect corruption and improve the quality of service delivery. Greater competition also results in cost savings.
- Public participation in policy making strengthens the legitimacy of decision making and citizen trust in government. Transparency also enhances this public trust, facilitating the implementation of key policies and increasing compliance with laws and regulations.

## 1.1 Objective and Scope

**This note will show how the use of open government principles and mechanisms can make a notable contribution to climate change action.** It provides examples of such measures as well as an inventory of existing good practices and tools, which can serve as a source of inspiration for policy makers and citizens alike. It does not include detailed case studies, a framework for intervention, or specific guidance at the sectoral level, nor does it provide a rigorous review of the impact achieved from the application of the measures, tools, and practices outlined. Rather, the note is part of a broader effort to enable stakeholders to harness the benefits of open government to strengthen the design, implementation, and monitoring of climate change policy, and it is aimed at government institutions that play a role in climate action and/or in open government reform, both at the central and subnational levels. The note is structured in three parts in accordance with the three principles of open government: transparency, participation, and accountability. Each part is organized in subsections that focus on relevant climate governance areas and provide country examples.<sup>2</sup> The examples were selected through desk research of documented and pertinent open government and climate change initiatives under each category, promoted by governments around the world.

The three open government principles can play an important role in supporting action on climate change, especially in improving the awareness and commitment of society as a whole to ambitious climate objectives. Transparent processes enable citizens to identify environmental and climate change issues, engage in decision making, and hold governments accountable to their climate pledges (Transparency & Accountability Initiative 2014). Public participation can improve the legitimacy of decisions on actions against climate change, help build stakeholder capacity, facilitate implementation, and enhance the sustainability of decisions (UNEP 2012). And accountability mechanisms enable oversight of government action and support compliance with climate commitments.

Open government can contribute to improving management of climate change issues, but its application requires rigor so that it does truly build trust in government action. Transparency requires that the right to public access to information is guaranteed by law and that records are well kept so that the available information is reliable (Council of Europe 2018); it should also be timely, relevant to stakeholder needs, and ideally published in open data formats that allow for its use and re-use. Participation should not be limited to just informing or consulting citizens but also involving them in decision making and collaborating with them so that they are empowered in the process. Civic space should be open, and whistleblowers protected. To close the loop of the oversight process, accountability should ensure that the actions of public officials are scrutinized and that there is a tangible response to citizen complaints.

### Box 1. The Open Government Declaration

Open government as a concept and as a global movement crystalized in the creation of the Open Government Partnership (OGP) in 2011, with its [Open Government Declaration](#). By endorsing the declaration, countries commit to “foster a global culture of open government that empowers and delivers for citizens and advances the ideals of open and participatory 21st century government.” This includes efforts to increase the availability of information about governmental activities, to support civic participation, to implement the highest standards of professional integrity in public administrations, and to increase access to new technologies for openness and accountability. To date, 78 countries and 76 local governments—across different regions and income levels and representing more than 2 billion people—have endorsed the declaration and become members of the OGP. Between governments and civil society organizations they have co-created open government action plans, through which over 4,000 open government reforms have been implemented.

Source: OGP (2011).

**Many countries have implemented open government measures that support climate action, often as part of broader open government reforms.** The World Bank’s Climate Change Institutional Assessment (CCIA) helps countries identify the strengths and weaknesses of the institutions needed to support climate action. The CCIA covers five pillars: organization; planning; public finance; subnational governments and state-owned enterprises;

and accountability. The fifth pillar is particularly relevant to open government reform, as it assesses the availability and transparency of key climate information in addition to stakeholder engagement mechanisms in climate-related planning, policy, and evaluation processes. This report should constitute a useful resource for identifying possible actions to address the issues identified in the accountability pillar of a country’s CCIA.

## Box 2. Open Data Principles

Open government action is supported by innovative technologies for information sharing and open access to data. In 2007, a working group of advocates developed the Open Data Principles, which remain relevant today. Government data are to be considered open if the information is made public in a way that complies with the principles below:

1. **Complete:** All public data are made available. Public data refer to information that is not subject to valid privacy, security, or privilege limitations.
2. **Primary:** Data are collected at the source, with the highest possible level of granularity, not in aggregate or modified forms.
3. **Timely:** Data are made available as quickly as necessary to preserve the data's value.
4. **Accessible:** Data are available to the widest range of users for the widest range of purposes.
5. **Machine processable:** Data are reasonably structured to allow automated processing.
6. **Non-discriminatory:** Data are available to anyone, with no requirement of registration.
7. **Non-proprietary:** Data are available in a format over which no entity has exclusive control.
8. **License-free:** Data are not subject to any copyright, patent, trademark, or trade secret regulation. Reasonable privacy, security, and privilege restrictions may be allowed.

Source: <https://opengovdata.org>

# 02

## Transparency and Climate Change

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**Transparency is crucial to the effort to engage citizens in the challenge of addressing climate change, to generate trust, and to enable collective action at the local, national, and global levels** (Transparency & Accountability Initiative 2010). Good access to information is fundamental to achieving these objectives. Data and information from the public sector need to be easily accessible and understandable, timely, complete, and reliable and should also underpin the justifications for government’s decision-making processes. Assessments of physical climate risks and transition-related risks must be made public. Transparency is also key for climate change action when it comes to developing the relevant regulatory frameworks; implementing budgeting, expenditure, and fiscal policy measures; and applying monitoring, reporting, and verification mechanisms.

### 2.1 Transparency of Regulatory Frameworks and Planning Instruments

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**Regulatory framework and planning documents related to climate change include climate and environmental legislation, national and sectoral policies, and medium- and long-term strategies.** Transparency in regulation and planning is important to providing clear signals to the private sector, households, and individuals, to encouraging their contribution when defining climate change priorities, and to promoting compliance with climate standards. It can also contribute to building trust and enhancing the level of ambition for climate action.

### Box 3. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Enhanced Transparency Framework

The Paris Agreement established the Enhanced Transparency Framework (ETF) as a mechanism to promote transparency, build trust, and ensure that all countries are contributing their share to combat climate change. The ETF ensures that all parties regularly provide reports on greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, information related to climate change impacts and adaptation, and progress made on implementing and achieving the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). The ETF also ensures that all information provided undergoes technical expert review and that all parties participate in multilateral facilitative consideration of progress.

The ETF provides detailed guidance on the reporting, review, and consideration processes that can support both developed and developing countries in making reports publicly available in a timely manner while ensuring that progress can be tracked consistently across countries. Outlines for Biennial Transparency Reports (BTRs) are also made available to promote accuracy and transparency. The transition to the ETF will contribute to an effort to build a Global Stocktake of the Paris Agreement (GST), a process to assess the world's collective progress toward achieving net-zero emissions by 2050.

Source: UNFCCC, "Reporting and Review under the Paris Agreement," <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/transparency-and-reporting/reporting-and-review-under-the-paris-agreement>; and "Global Stocktake," <https://unfccc.int/topics/global-stocktake/global-stocktake>.

- **Disclosure of relevant laws, decrees, regulations, strategies, policies, and plans** to make them easily accessible to all stakeholders and the general public.
  - The European Union's (EU) [Climate ADAPT](#) platform provides access to adaptation strategies and plans across Europe. These strategies and plans cover the EU level, transnational regions, member countries, and municipalities. The platform also provides access to information on current and future vulnerability and tools to support adaptation planning.
  - Paraguay's [National Direction of Climate Change](#) presents climate relevant legislation, policies, and plans on its website. The website also provides regular updates on climate policy priorities, thematic deliberations, coordination events, and progress in developing and implementing climate plans.
  - Uruguay's [Ministry of Environment](#) hosts a climate change portal that includes information on climate change plans, international commitments, programs, and publications.



## Box 4. Climate Change Planning Instruments: Long-Term Strategies and Nationally Determined Contributions

In 2015, 196 countries adopted the Paris Agreement as a legally binding international treaty under the UNFCCC. Its goal is to limit global warming to well below 2 degrees Celsius. This implies that countries aim to achieve a carbon-neutral world by mid-century. The Paris Agreement introduced two key planning instruments: the NDCs and the long-term low GHG emission development strategies (LTS or LT-LEDS).

The Paris Agreement ensures that open government principles are reflected in countries' commitments to combat climate change. Article 7(5) states, "Parties acknowledge that adaptation action should follow a country-driven, gender-responsive, participatory and fully transparent approach, taking into consideration vulnerable groups, communities and ecosystems, and should be based on and guided by the best available science and, as appropriate, traditional knowledge, knowledge of indigenous peoples and local knowledge systems, with a view to integrating adaptation into relevant socioeconomic and environmental policies and actions, where appropriate" (UNFCCC 2016).

In their NDCs, countries adopt action plans to cut emissions and adapt to climate impact. BTRs associated with NDCs report information on emissions levels, domestic actions to mitigate and adapt to climate change, and the status of financial, technology development, and transfer and capacity-building support for mitigation and adaptation activities in the country.

Long-term strategies help to better frame the efforts toward the 2050 goal of carbon neutrality. They place the NDCs into the context of a country's long-term planning and development priorities and provide a vision for future development.

Sources: UNFCCC, "What is the Paris Agreement," <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement>; UNFCCC, "Reference Manual for the Enhanced Transparency Framework under the Paris Agreement" (Bonn: UNFCCC, 2022), <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/ETFReferenceManual.pdf>; and United Nations, "All about the NDCs," <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/all-about-ndcs#:~:text=Simply%20put%2C%20an%20NDC%2C%20or.update%20it%20every%20five%20years>.

- Assurance that **Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) are clear, transparent, and understandable, in compliance with the requirements of the Paris Agreement** and its accompanying decisions. In particular, this includes providing a precise description of the greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduction target, addressing fairness and ambition, making a clear link to the Paris Agreement goals, detailing the planning processes, and describing the implementation plans for the NDCs.
    - Climate Transparency has developed a [methodology](#) to assess the transparency of NDCs that can also be used or applied by governments as a self-check. [Pilot assessments](#) have been conducted with the support of Climate Transparency in 13 countries. The methodology evaluates whether NDCs contain a) quantifiable information on reference indicators and targets and clear time frames; b) information on the scope and coverage of the targets; c) a description of the planning processes; d) an explanation of the assumptions and methodological approaches used; e) an assessment of fairness and ambition considerations; and f) a clear link to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Paris Agreement. Categories are assessed as "yes," "partly," or "no," with further assessment options depending on the area of analysis.
- ## 2.2 Transparency of Risk Information
- Disclosure of **climate risks and vulnerability assessments** and underlying forecasts for key sectors or regions to support adaptation planning.
    - The Danish [Climate Atlas](#) provides data by municipality, drainage basin, and coastal stretch, showing likely future changes in temperature, precipitation, extreme precipitation, relative sea level, and storm surge heights. It thereby gives an indication of areas with a particular risk of being impacted by extreme weather events in the future. The tool provides fundamental

climate data so that municipalities can take the necessary precautions to guard citizens, infrastructure, and buildings against extreme weather, and businesses and citizens can make informed private investment decisions.

- New Zealand's National [Climate Risk Assessment](#) identifies priority risks across different sectors and makes [climate change projections](#) for each region. It is published along with a technical report and the methodology. A summary report and the translation of key messages into the Maori language make the findings of the report more accessible to the general public.
- Argentina has created [an interactive tool](#) to identify climate change-related risks during strategic, sectoral, and investment planning processes and to support project design. The tool generates risk maps for various climate change impacts at the district level under different climate change scenarios and time horizons. It allows triangulation with health and social indicators to identify highly vulnerable areas and populations.

## 2.3 Transparency of Budgeting and Fiscal Policy

**Increasing the transparency of fiscal policy and budgeting processes can raise awareness of climate change issues and demonstrate government commitment to climate action.** Governments need to show that they are allocating resources to adaptation and mitigation in line with their publicized strategies and plans. Transparency in the use of resources can support procedures to raise taxes on fuel and other sources of carbon emissions. Useful fiscal information needs to be relevant to citizen interests, understandable, timely, reliable, and sufficiently specific so that average citizens can grasp the benefits of fiscal measures and take action to demand accountability where needed (McCullough 2017).

- Publication of climate change **budget reports** that identify climate related expenditures and financing.
- Bangladesh tags its climate-relevant expenditures and presents the data in an annual

analytical [Climate Financing for Sustainable Development Report](#). The publication of the tagging data has raised awareness of the government's commitment to climate action among citizens, parliament, academics, and civil society. The tagging is part of a broader reform to better integrate climate change aspects into the budgeting process.

- Honduras tags its climate- and disaster-related budget and presents the data in a detailed annex to the national budget: the [Presupuesto de Cambio Climático](#). The tagging system has increased knowledge and awareness of climate change issues among government institutions, and publishing the data is aimed at fostering more involvement from the private sector and the general public in climate action.
- Colombia's [MRV de Financiamiento Climático](#), an interactive platform, provides information to the public on domestic and international climate finance. It was established by the National Planning Department. Through an interactive map, data and information on climate finance and projects are easily accessible.
- Inclusion of climate change and environmental income and expenditure as part of **citizen budgets**.
- The Ministry of Finance of [Bangladesh](#) prepares Citizens Climate Budget Reports to make information on climate expenditure more accessible to the public. The data in the report are derived from the country's climate budget tagging system.
- The NGO Forum, a Cambodian civil society organization, published the country's first [Citizens Climate Budget](#) in 2020. It used the data from the government's annual climate public expenditure review showing trends in climate finance over the previous five years.
- The Department of Budget and Management in the [Philippines](#) presents a chapter on environmental programs in its Citizens Budget. It highlights not only expenditures but also results of key programs on forestry, solid waste management, water, and disaster risk management.

- Introduction of **environmental financial accounting** to assess financial statements and report on the exposure to, and management of, the financial and non-financial impacts resulting from climate change.
  - The Canadian Public Sector Accounting Board has [published a tool](#) to help cities and public entities **assess the financial reporting implications** of climate-related impacts. Entities are required to recognize and disclose climate concerns in their financial statements.
  - The Australian Accounting Standards Board has issued [guidance](#) on assessing financial statements to determine the financial implications of climate risks and opportunities.
- Disclosure of information on the use of a **carbon tax (or levy) and sovereign green bonds** proceeds.
  - Switzerland's Office for the Environment publishes information on the [redistribution of the carbon levy](#) proceeds and explains the rationale behind the levy and the redistribution. Around two-thirds of the levy revenues are redistributed to the public and the private sector, while one-third support energy efficient building renovations. A carbon tax (or levy) directly sets a price on carbon by defining a tax rate on GHG emissions or, more commonly, on the carbon content of fossil fuels.
  - Indonesia's annual [Green Sukuk Allocation and Impact](#) report provides detailed information on how the proceeds from the country's sovereign green bond are used. Sovereign green bonds are debt securities issued by governments that are used to finance activities with defined environmental benefits. Frameworks for sovereign green bonds require authorities to define eligible expenditures and to put in place institutional arrangements to select and report on expenditures.<sup>3</sup>
- More transparent **fossil fuel subsidy structures** and systematization of subsidies data, including information on direct transfers of funds, tax expenditures, price supports, and non-monetized supports (e.g., lowered insurance requirements, clean-up costs borne by the public sector).
  - Italy's Ministry of Environment publishes [annual inventories](#) on environmentally harmful (and favorable) subsidies.
  - From 2008 to 2016, Germany's Environmental Agency published bi-yearly analytical [reports on environmentally harmful subsidies](#), including fossil fuel subsidies.
  - France publishes certain information on tax exemptions for fossil fuel consumption in an [annex](#) to its national budget, though the data are not summarized or analyzed.
- Publication of **climate-related financial disclosures** by the central/national bank. The [Task Force on Climate-Related Financial Disclosures](#) recommends disclosure of the following: a) how climate-related risks and opportunities are governed; b) the actual and potential impacts of climate-related risks and opportunities on strategic and financial planning; c) how climate-related risks are identified, assessed, and managed; and d) which metrics are used to assess and manage climate-related risks, impacts, and opportunities.
  - The Bank of England published its first [Climate-Related Financial Disclosure](#) in June 2020. The report sets out the bank's approach to managing the risks from climate change across its entire operations and explains what it is doing to improve its understanding of these risks. Climate-related risk disclosure will be integrated into the annual reporting of the bank.

## 2.4 Transparency of Measurement, Reporting, and Verification, Information, and Climate Research

**Measurement, reporting, and verification (MRV) systems generate information to track progress toward national and subnational climate change targets and monitor compliance with international commitments.** They generally include an inventory of GHG emissions and sinks, provide estimates of emissions at the subnational and sectoral levels, and provide information on mitigation and adaptation actions, including climate financing. An effective MRV system

plays a critical role in climate change data management. It not only helps to create indicators and measures for achieving NDC targets, but also acts as a useful tool to identify gaps, track progress, and enhance international and national reporting (e.g., Biennial Transparency Reports). Climate research provides insights on future challenges and possible solutions. When research, information, and data are available, evidence-based contributions to the debate on policy and practice are enabled. Transparent MRV and research data can also contribute to building trust and solving collective action problems at the core of the global climate change agenda. Transparency efforts based on effective MRV systems will highlight emerging gaps between existing policies and measures and could help policy makers review these policies to ensure that countries are advancing toward NDC implementation and compliance.

- Disclosure of easily accessible information on climate indicators and **GHG emissions** through online platforms.
  - Argentina's [interactive Greenhouse Gas Inventory platform](#) generates graphs and maps for GHG emissions by gas, by province, and by sector, as well as combinations thereof.
  - Chile's [National Environmental Information System](#) makes regulations, reports, and data on environmental and climate indicators easily accessible.

- Canada provides the raw data from its national [Greenhouse Gas Inventory](#) online.
- The Philippines' [National Integrated Climate Change Database and Information Exchange System](#) provides detailed information on NDC actions.
- Costa Rica's [National System of Metrics for Climate Change](#) is the government's official platform to coordinate and link institutional and sectoral climate change information. It provides information on emissions data, climate finance, and climate policy, plans, and actions at the national, subnational, and sectoral levels.
- **Sponsorship of research on climate change** and low-carbon transitions, and publication of findings to make them available to the general public.
  - The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency provides access to research publications under its [Climate Change Research](#) program.
  - Switzerland publishes synthesis reports of the studies funded through the National Research Program (e.g., on [Energy Transition](#)).

# 03

## Participation and Climate Change

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**Participation can foster public support for policy implementation.** Climate change and the actions taken to address it affect different people in different ways, and the wide variety of interests often make climate policy measures controversial. Including various societal groups in political and administrative decisions enhances their legitimacy and acceptance and also helps to gather better information about the costs and benefits of various actions. Inclusive participation processes give voice to diverse actors, ensuring that the voices of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups are heard, and also positions governments to promote inclusive growth. Participation in all stages of climate action enhances the sustainability of policy measures across political mandates since an engaged civil society can maintain climate change on the political agenda, even as governments change. There are entry points for participation in both planning and budgeting for climate action, as well as in monitoring government climate change strategies.

### 3.1 Participation in Policy and Planning

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**Participation can enhance policy design and planning by raising awareness and enabling a better understanding of the complex issues involved in addressing climate change.** It can be a key element in reinforcing the definition (or review) of NDCs or climate change long-term strategies. It can also build trust and ownership in, and support for, proposed policies and plans and facilitate their implementation. Participatory processes allow governments to draw on the knowledge and experience of a variety of stakeholders, thereby enhancing the quality and comprehensiveness of policies and plans and ensuring that the needs of a wide range of actors are taken into account (ICAT 2020).

The Initiative for Climate Action Transparency has published [practical guidance](#) on designing and implementing effective participatory processes for climate policies. This guidance addresses the key elements of stakeholder participation, including planning, identifying, and understanding the various actors, establishing multi-stakeholder bodies, providing information to partners, designing and conducting consultations, and establishing grievance redress mechanisms. Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE) was adopted by the UNFCCC to encourage and empower members of society to engage in climate action through education, training, public awareness, public participation, public access to information, and international cooperation. To provide youth with a platform to influence international climate negotiations and national climate action plans, the Official Youth Constituency of the UNFCCC (YOUNGO), CliMates,<sup>4</sup> and the International Institute for Sustainable Development have launched the Youth Climate Action initiative.<sup>5</sup>

- Provision of adequate space for **inclusive public participation** in the design and implementation of climate change strategies, policies, and plans. Special consideration should be given to ensure the participation of women, youth, and vulnerable or marginalized groups, including those most affected by climate change policies or the impacts of climate change.
- The UK's 2020 [Climate Assembly](#) was commissioned by the House of Commons to provide recommendations for meeting the 2050 net-zero target. It was designed to ensure that politicians and policy makers have the best possible evidence available to them on public preferences on reaching the net-zero target. The assembly's 108 members were selected to be representative of the UK population in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, educational level, residence, and concern about climate change.
- France's [Citizens' Convention for Climate](#) was mandated by the French president to define measures to reduce climate change emissions by 2030. Its 150 members were randomly selected to represent the diversity of French society. The Convention submitted its 149 [proposals](#) in June 2020. Measures proposed by the Convention may be submitted to parliament or a public referendum or implemented directly through executive regulations. As of October 2021, 75 measures [had already been implemented](#).
- Kenya's [Climate Change Act](#) requires public awareness and consultations in the development of all strategies, laws, and policies related to climate change. The law stipulates that "Public consultations shall be undertaken in a manner that ensures the public contribution makes an impact on the threshold of decision making." Kenya's [2018–2022 National Climate Change Action Plan](#), for example, was developed through extensive consultations with over 1,000 stakeholders from the parliament, national and county governments, civil society, the private sector, youth and women's groups, and representatives from marginalized and minority groups, including persons with disabilities, pastoralists, forest resource users, and fisher communities.
- The province of British Columbia, Canada, created an Indigenous Climate Adaptation Technical Working Group that has ensured that indigenous perspectives are considered and integrated into the province's adaptation strategy. British Columbia's [Climate Change Website](#) provides dedicated information on climate change adaptation for indigenous communities.
- Pakistan's [Ministry of Climate Change](#) conducts youth consultations and is putting together a youth task force at both the national and provincial levels to enhance the participation of younger members of society in NDC design and implementation processes.
- In Colombia, the Ministry of Environment has enabled youth, including those in rural areas, to participate in the country's NDC process by putting the [National Youth Network](#) in direct contact with the national government.
- Mexico conducted a [National Consultation on the Revised NDC](#) through an online forum. The Secretariat for the Environment and Natural Resources also organized a national [youth dialogue](#) on the revised NDC with representatives from 11 federal states to identify proposals for mitigation and adaptation.

- In Argentina, the city of Buenos Aires fosters public participation in climate action through an [online platform](#) that provides access to information and invites the population to comment on the city's climate action plan and to make suggestions for government support to private climate action.
- Recognition of the **interests of future generations** and assurance that they are adequately represented in policy and planning processes through specifically designated agents (principle of intergenerational equity).
  - The [Well-Being of Future Generations Act](#) in Wales requires public bodies to think about the long-term impact of their decisions. Its implementation is supported by a Future Generations Commissioner tasked with safeguarding the interests of future generations. The Commissioner carries out reviews, makes recommendations, and publishes regular Future Generations Reports that cover climate change and decarbonization.
  - The Finnish [Committee for the Future](#) is a standing committee of the country's parliament. Its mission is to generate dialogue with the government on major future problems and opportunities. Each Finnish government also publishes at least one report on long-term future prospects and targets to which the Committee prepares comments that feed into the parliament's response.
  - Malta's Sustainable Development Act has established a [Guardian of Future Generations](#) commission to safeguard inter- and intra-generational sustainable development. It is composed of a chairperson, an expert with a background in environmental activism, an expert with a background in commerce, economy, and industry, and an expert in social and community affairs. All members are appointed by the prime minister.
- Creation of a permanent **multi-stakeholder consultation mechanism** to advise on climate change policy and implementation.
  - Mexico's [Consejo de Cambio Climático](#) is a permanent consultation body made up of representatives from social organizations, the private sector, and academia. It advises the government on targets, policies, and other climate actions and promotes informed participation through public consultations.
  - Costa Rica created the [Consejo Consultativo Ciudadano de Cambio Climático](#) as a permanent platform for citizen participation. As a consultative space, it contributes to the design and implementation of national climate change policy and the NDCs. It is composed of representatives of social organizations and the private sector covering seven key sectors. The Ministry of Environment and Energy, as well as the Director of Climate Change within the same ministry, is represented but does not have voting rights.
  - Argentina created the [Mesa Ampliada](#) as a permanent consultation mechanism under its National Climate Change Cabinet. The Mesa includes representatives of civil society, the private sector, trade unions, academia, political parties, indigenous communities, and municipalities, among others. It is complemented by an ongoing [Climate Change Dialogue](#) bringing together a broad range of actors.
  - Scotland's [Just Transition Commission](#) advises Scottish ministers on how to apply just transition principles and maximize economic and social opportunities in the move to a decarbonized economy. The Commission is comprised of representatives from the private sector, academia, labor unions, and environmental nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). In forming its recommendations, it is mandated to engage with workers, communities, NGOs, businesses, and industries.

## Box 5. What is a Just Transition?

A just transition is an integral part of many of the global climate commitments adopted by countries. The [Paris Agreement](#), in its preamble, acknowledges “*the imperatives of a just transition of the workforce and the creation of decent work and quality jobs in accordance with nationally defined development priorities.*”

Calls for a just transition recognize that different parts of society will experience different costs and benefits from changes to address climate change, and that the costs in many countries will fall more heavily on those least able to bear them. The International Trade Union Confederation (2017) defines a just transition as “*an economy-wide process that produces the plans, policies and investments that lead to a future where all jobs are green and decent, emissions are at net zero, poverty is eradicated, and communities are thriving and resilient.*”

In 2016, the International Labour Organization issued guidelines for a just transition to environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all. It identifies seven guiding principles for just transitions: 1) strong social consensus on the goal of and pathways to sustainability; 2) respect for and promotion of fundamental principles and rights at work; 3) consideration of the gender dimension of environmental challenges and opportunities; 4) an enabling environment for enterprises, workers, investors, and consumers to drive the transition; 5) provision of a just transition framework, including social protection, skills development, and social dialogue; 6) context-specific design of policies and programs; and 7) the promotion of international cooperation.

Similarly, the World Bank’s “Just Transition for All” initiative calls for a collective effort by government actors, employers, workers, and communities to drive policies, plans, and investments for a fast and equitable transition. The initiative comprises three pillars: 1) policy and strategy development; 2) people and communities; and 3) land and environmental remediation (World Bank 2018).

Social dialogue is a key instrument in just transition processes. Governments should provide opportunities for the participation of social partners at all possible levels and stages of the policy process and actively promote dialogue mechanisms and structures.

- Promotion of **public participation in impact assessments**, including environmental, social, and health impact assessments. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) has identified [good practice recommendations](#) on public participation in strategic environmental assessments.
  - Georgia’s [Environmental Assessment Code](#) mandates public participation in environmental assessments and environmental decision making. Environmental assessments include information on the impact of the activity/project on climate and the vulnerability of the activity/project to climate change.
  - Austria’s [Federal Act on Environmental Impact Assessment](#) (EIA) grants affected populations and citizens groups the right to participate and make appeals throughout the EIA process for a specific project. Citizens may also participate in post-approval monitoring of the project.
- Coverage of the EIA process includes climate-related impacts, such as GHG emissions and vulnerability to the effects of climate change.
- Reinforcement of **locally led adaptation planning** through capacity building and provision of financial resources.
  - The International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) has published a call for more [locally led adaptation action](#) and established [eight principles to support local adaptation](#).<sup>6</sup> The principles were developed under the Global Commission on Adaptation.
  - The World Bank has developed a [manual of participatory scenario development approaches](#) to support pro-poor adaptation planning. Participatory scenario development involves the participation of stakeholders to explore the future in creative and policy-relevant ways. It is used

to identify the effects of alternative responses to emerging challenges, to determine views of different groups on the range of options, and to identify appropriate public policies.

- Nepal has put in place [a national framework](#) for local adaptation plans for action, providing guidance on the preparation and implementation of local strategies and on the integration of adaptation options into sectoral and development plans. The framework promotes the active participation of local civil society organizations, NGOs, and community-based organizations.
- In Mozambique, the World Bank has supported the establishment of a [network of community-based natural resource management \(CBNRM\) organizations](#), with a focus on participatory governance. The network facilitates the implementation of CBNRM initiatives. It is complemented by a [dedicated grant mechanism](#) for community-based natural resource management programs.

## 3.2 Participation in Budgeting

**Public participation in fiscal processes can improve decision making and achieve better public financial management outcomes.** Where citizens and civil society organizations have effective opportunities to participate in debates over the design and implementation of fiscal policies and budgets, the outcomes can be more relevant to their needs and more ownership is created. Participation in budgeting also enhances accountability, if it is combined with adequate disclosure of information. When it comes to budgeting for climate action, public participation can increase trust and strengthen public ownership of common (environmental) goods and the measures taken to safeguard them. Giving people a voice in budgeting processes enables them to propose innovative ideas and solutions for the challenges posed by climate change (Cabannes 2020).

- Promotion of **participatory (climate) budgeting, especially at the subnational level**, through public hearings and consultations, working groups, written submissions, or even referenda.
- In Kenya, the World Bank and the governments of Denmark and Sweden collaborated to establish

the [Financing Locally Led Climate Action Program](#), which is the first national-scale model of devolved climate finance. It applies principles of meaningful citizen engagement in climate decision making and builds on the foundations and structures set up through Kenya's devolution efforts. Five county governments in Kenya have established [county climate change funds](#) that identify, prioritize, and finance investments to reduce climate risk and achieve adaptation objectives. The funds blend financial resources from international climate finance, the central government budget, and counties' own budgets. Community climate change planning committees prioritize adaptation needs and monitor the use of resources. The pilots are being scaled up through the [Financing Locally Led Climate Action Program](#).

- The city of Cuenca in Ecuador introduced [participatory budgeting](#) for residents in rural parishes with high poverty levels in 2001. An analysis of 683 projects approved in the 2016–19 period found that over 75 percent were climate relevant, responding to the population's vulnerability and immediate needs.
- As part of its [action plan for sustainable development](#) (Agenda 21), the city of Metz in France has introduced climate-focused [participatory budgeting](#) ("eco-citizen"). Project eligibility criteria include a contribution to sustainable development and urban ecology.

## 3.3 Participation in Monitoring

**Policies that are subject to public monitoring are more likely to be designed and implemented in the interests of current and future generations.** Civil society organizations can play a key role in overseeing budget allocations, procurement decisions, and implementation procedures. For this to happen, information needs to be made available by governments and analyzed, used, and discussed by civil society. Dialogue mechanisms and spaces for interaction between the government, civil society, and oversight institutions can enable a productive, evidence-based conversation to improve decision making and foster sustainable development.

- Reinforcement of **social accountability mechanisms** by incorporating public information sharing, as well as participatory monitoring and evaluation of climate change action and policy, as part of citizen monitoring of public service delivery.
- Nepal has introduced local-level [public hearings and social audits](#) on development interventions, including projects relevant to climate change adaptation. Public hearings promote dialogue between authorities (duty bearers) and citizens (rights holders) and strengthen downward and upward accountability at the local level. They are open to all citizens and led by an independent external facilitator. Frequently discussed topics are the use of development budgets, the quality of service delivery, and timely payments.
- Indonesia is [piloting community-based evaluations](#) of development programs that include climate action. The mechanism allows direct community involvement in assessing the implementation and impact of a program through a structured discussion with communities and experts. The initiative includes capacity building for village governments and village consultative bodies.
- Under the Open Government Partnership, Guatemala has committed to [enhancing transparency in its Integrated Management for Disaster Risk Reduction](#), including through social audits of resources allocated to disaster risk reduction. These include open information on budget allocation for disaster risk reduction, reports on the use of funds and in-kind humanitarian aid, and the promotion of participatory auditing spaces.
- Uruguay, as part of its Open Government Partnership commitments, is developing a publicly accessible [environmental complaints management system, including complaints related to climate change](#). The system will facilitate the filing and follow-up of complaints by the population and will replace the currently existing mechanisms that are dispersed across different ministries and levels of government. It will also streamline the procedures for addressing environmental complaints and allow the government to systematize related data.

# 04

## Accountability and Climate Change



**Accountability mechanisms can support demands for more ambitious climate targets and more decisive action on climate commitments.** They are implemented through grievance redress systems, access to information commissions, ombuds offices, supreme audit institutions, legislative oversight, and the courts. Building on transparency and participation, they can contribute to rebalancing power asymmetries (World Bank 2020) and enhancing checks and balances within the state. Accountability mechanisms in climate change framework legislation are necessary conditions for building trust between and within nations. For example, climate change framework laws can provide for parliamentary oversight of executive actions (and inactions) on climate and outline provisions for regular independent assessments of progress on the implementation of climate legislation (World Bank 2020). Accountability mechanisms are associated with the implementation of higher standards (OGP 2011), including anticorruption policies, ethical standards, codes of conduct, assets disclosure, and independence measures, such as the prevention of revolving door practices, especially for regulators. By effectively playing their roles and by themselves applying open government practices within their organizations, accountability institutions can successfully contribute to bridging the relationship between citizens and governments in holding public officials to account. To be effective, they often require modernizing through the use of new technology and increased capacity for data analytics. Entry points for accountability can be found in legislative oversight, improved auditing practices, and enforcement and legal action associated with climate change.

## 4.1 Legislative Oversight of Climate Action

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**Accountability mechanisms can strengthen the design and implementation of regulatory frameworks for climate change.** Policies that will be subject to legislative scrutiny are more likely to be effectively implemented. This is especially important in the context of climate change, which requires a long-term commitment, well beyond each electoral cycle.

- Strengthening of the **legislature’s engagement** on climate policy oversight.
  - Ireland’s parliamentary [Committee on Climate Action](#) scrutinizes climate-relevant domestic and EU legislation, oversees policy, expenditure, and governance matters of relevant government departments, and advises on climate change policy issues, including through hearings with third parties.
  - The Philippines’ senatorial [Committee on the Environment, Natural Resources and Climate Change](#) covers, among other activities, policies, programs, and strategies related to climate change, oversees compliance with international agreements and cooperation with other countries, and proposes regulations for climate-sensitive areas and sectors.
  - The Inter-American [Parliamentary Network on Climate Change](#) was created in 2016 with the objective of promoting parliamentary diplomacy on climate action. It fosters knowledge exchanges on effective climate action among parliamentarians, expert practitioners, civil society, and other stakeholders.

## 4.2 Auditing for Climate Change

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**Climate change is an increasingly important subject for supreme audit institutions, as a growing amount of public money is being spent globally on reducing emissions and adapting to climate change.** Climate change audits can provide governments with useful information on the efficiency and effectiveness of programs. Audits can also assess the risks of climate change to the achievement of government objectives

and targets and the capacity of governments to manage those risks. The International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI) has elaborated general [Guidance on Auditing the Government Response to Climate Change](#).

- Involvement of **supreme audit institutions** in the monitoring of climate change commitments and their effectiveness, including collaborating with civil society.
  - Bangladesh has adapted the INTOSAI guidelines for climate performance audits and published its own [Guidelines for Planning Climate Performance Audits](#), which are applied to climate-relevant projects identified through the climate budget tagging system.
  - The European Court of Auditors has published special reports on [wind and solar power for electricity generation](#), on [energy efficiency in buildings](#), and on [renewable energy for sustainable rural development](#), among other topics.
  - Georgia created an online [Budget Monitor](#) with information, data, and visualizations on the budget and audit findings that also allows citizens to suggest audits based on this information.

## 4.3 Grievance Redress Mechanisms for Climate Action

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**Grievance redress and complaints mechanisms can help address accountability problems in the implementation of climate change policies and also provide information to policy makers regarding policy effectiveness.** Redress and complaints procedures can operate through administrative venues within government agencies and through accountability institutions outside government.

- Establishment of **citizen complaint mechanisms** where citizens can report resource management issues or contribute to audits, including for climate change–associated investments.
  - Colombia’s supreme audit institution maintains an [online complaint mechanism](#) for citizens to report mismanagement of public funds. It

directly invites citizens to submit complaints regarding harm to the environment and/or mismanagement of natural resources.

- In Slovakia, the supreme audit institution has an [online mechanism](#) for collecting complaints and audit suggestions from the public.
- The Philippines' [environmental ombuds office](#) was created to investigate complaints regarding the violation of environmental laws and environmental conservation.
- The Government of Montevideo, together with the national government of Uruguay, is developing a publicly accessible [environmental complaints management system](#) as part of its Open Government Partnership commitments. The system will facilitate the filing and follow-up of complaints by the population.

## 4.4 Enforcement and Legal Action for Climate Change

**Civil society organizations, advocacy groups, and private citizens increasingly use courts to hold governments accountable for their climate inaction**

(see Global Examples of [Climate Change Litigation](#) and [Global Trends in Climate Change Litigation 2019](#)). Climate change litigation allows the public to hold the government to account and to demand more ambitious climate targets or more decisive action. Legal actions include cases to ensure that government policies and plans live up to the targets established under law.

- Strengthening of **legal mechanisms** to enforce climate policy and provision of measures for redress of climate-related harms, for example, by expanding the rights of people to bring a legal action and enhancing free legal assistance.
- [Climate change framework](#) laws have been enacted in at least 35 countries. They provide a basis for interested parties to bring cases seeking compliance with climate commitments under the law.
- India's [National Green Tribunal](#) facilitates the enforcement of environmental rights and accelerates the processing of legal cases pertaining to environmental protection. Although it does not explicitly cover climate change concerns, related issues, such as water management and deforestation, fall under the court's jurisdiction.

### Box 6. Climate Change Litigation

Civil society organizations, advocacy groups, and private citizens increasingly use courts to hold governments accountable for their climate inaction.

- In the Netherlands, an NGO and 886 individuals [won a case](#) demanding increased climate action by the Dutch government.
- Germany's [supreme constitutional court ruled that the government's climate protection measures](#) are insufficient to protect future generations and thus violated human rights. It mandated the government to improve its Climate Protection Act and to ensure that it would meet its 2030 emissions reduction goals. The case was brought by environmental groups.
- In Ireland, the Supreme Court [issued a ruling quashing the government's National Mitigation Plan](#). The Court determined that the Plan was not specific enough to comply with Ireland's Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act.

# 05

## Conclusions

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**Climate change action requires a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach.** Transparency, participation, and accountability mechanisms can foster trust and ensure inclusive engagement between governments and citizens when responding to climate change. Recognizing that this is a frontier issue, efforts need to be made to consider engagement strategies that bring open government to the forefront of the climate change agenda.

**The different examples included in this note depict the power of open government measures in enhancing the effectiveness of climate action.** They constitute a menu of initiatives that governments, through their regulatory and policy actions, can take to coordinate the commitment and support of different stakeholders, increase the legitimacy of these efforts, and improve their potential impact. The note also contains mechanisms that can help governments mobilize support at the local, national, and international levels, at the same time making clear the challenge of the long time frames that go hand-in-hand with climate action, the uncertainties involved, and the necessary course corrections that will be needed to achieve the desired objectives.

**As with any source of inspiration, not all of these measures are appropriate or applicable in all situations.** Clearly, each local context should be considered when selecting the measures to apply, as political economy factors can make some measures more suitable than others. The examples provided are also not a complete inventory of all possible open government strategies to address climate change. This note should therefore be viewed as a living document that can be updated as international experience continues to be gathered on other measures that point to the positive effect of open government on climate change action.

# Notes



1. See the “Net Zero Scorecard” at <https://eciu.net/netzerotracker>.
2. For an overview of climate change governance areas, see World Bank, “Climate Change Institutional Assessment,” Equitable Growth, Finance and Institutions Notes (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2021), <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/35438>.
3. The International Capital Markets Association’s (voluntary) [Green Bond Principles](#) provide guidance on use and management of proceeds, project evaluation and selection, and reporting.
4. CliMates is an international youth-led think-and-do tank that was established in 2011 and brings together volunteers, students, and young professionals to address climate change challenges.
5. For more information, see <https://www.youth-climate.com>.
6. The eight principles are: 1) devolving decision making to the lowest appropriate level; 2) addressing structural inequalities faced by women, youth, children, disabled and displaced people, indigenous peoples, and marginalized ethnic groups; 3) providing patient and predictable funding that can be accessed more easily; 4) investing in local capabilities to leave an institutional legacy; 5) building a robust understanding of climate change risk and uncertainty; 6) providing flexible programming and learning; 7) ensuring meaningful transparency and accountability; and 8) promoting collaborative action and investment.

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