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Workshop Summary: Understanding and Communicating the Groundswell of Climate Actions

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Executive Summary

As countries negotiate the post-2020 climate agreement, due in December 2015, there is growing attention to the thousands of actions that individual countries, cities, regions, private companies, and civil society groups are taking now to mitigate and adapt to climate change. This outpouring of climate action around the world offers an extraordinary opportunity to both implement current targets and catalyze greater ambition in the United Nations climate negotiations.

The workshop for Understanding and Communicating the Groundswell of Climate Action convened more than 70 analysts and communication professionals to discuss how to seize this moment of opportunity. These participants gathered in New York City on April 16 and 17, 2015, to address two central questions: (1) how can the groundswell of climate actions be understood and evaluated, and (2) how should it be communicated? Conversations about metrics delved into the challenges of comparing such a diverse array of climate actions, and of developing metrics to address existing data gaps. Messaging discussions honed in on strategies to contextualize the UNFCCC negotiations within the context of current action, and to reach new audiences.

In addition to addressing these questions individually, the workshop facilitated an exchange between metrics and communications professionals, to build the ability to translate rigorous analysis into effective communication, and to strengthen communication through good underlying metrics. It also brought representatives from the groundswell together with participants deeply engaged in the preparations for the upcoming COP 21. This exchange informed discussions about the most effective strategy for framing and integrating the messaging around the groundswell and the negotiations.

Through these conversations, the workshop produced a number of focused notes and recommendations around critical moments to showcase and communicate the groundswell; key audiences to target; and themes and narratives to highlight in this messaging. Participants also identified the central recommendations, questions, and research gaps that should guide attempts to measure and understand the groundswell's impact. Detailed accounts of these conversations, along with insights into the background of the groundswell and the current goals for the Paris COP, are described in detail below.

What do we know about the groundswell?

Presentations from Thomas Hale, of the Blavatnik School of Oxford University, Nicolette Bartlett, from the Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership, and Laura Carr, representing the California Governor's office, outlined several key findings and knowledge gaps around the groundswell of climate action.¹ Their presentations drew from their different areas of engagement on this issue.

A State of the Field of the Groundswell Movement

Dr. Hale's talk outlined the growth of groundswell climate action and the corresponding rise of reports, databases, and platforms to track this activity. He noted that momentum for new kinds of climate action comes from: *a desire to address climate change; the co-benefits of climate action; political, social, or peer pressure; personal leadership; and broader normative shifts*, among other sources. This momentum can be either enabled or blocked by *issues of orchestration; domestic policies and institutions; and the available resources and capacity*. Understanding the link between motivating, enabling, and blocking factors can help design a strategy to raise the ambition and scale of groundswell climate actions. The potential impact of these climate actions, and their interaction with sub-national, national, and international policies remain unknown, making this an exciting new front in global governance.

Dr. Hale also highlighted *several key challenges for monitoring the Groundswell movement*, including:

- *The uneven representation of climate actions*. Differences in the representation of climate action across geographical regions could be strengthened, particularly from the global South. Additionally, platforms such as the Non-State Actor Zone for Climate Action (NAZCA) only link to actions listed in official databases, and do not represent the full extent of initiatives.
- *The challenge of quantifying the cumulative impact of climate actions*. Since many platforms do not require a common reporting structure, it is often not possible to determine the aggregate affect of the groundswell of climate mitigation, adaptation, or finance.

A Review of Private Sector Groundswell Initiatives

Ms. Bartlett reviewed the findings of the Climate Initiatives Database (CID), a coalition between the Cambridge Institute for Sustainability, Ecofys, and the World Resources Institute (WRI), to review and quantify private sector climate action initiatives. They focused on five case studies, evaluating: the World Business Council for Sustainable Development's (WBCSD) Cement Sustainability Initiative; En.lighten; The Consumer Goods Forum's (CGF) Tropical Forests Alliance 2020 (TFA 2020) initiative; World Wildlife Foundation's (WWF) Climate Savers initiative; and Refrigerants Naturally! These case studies include issue-focused, sector-specific, and cross-sectoral initiatives. The researchers noted a

¹ This meeting was conducted under the Chatham House rule, and so statements are not attributed

need and space for more private climate action that works across and within sectors, rather than honing in on a specific issue.

The team took a comprehensive look at the performance of the case study projects, and assessed their ability to drive ambition. Their analysis revealed that three interlocking functions – *tracking, sharing, and seeding and strengthening* – were necessary for an initiative’s success. Crucially, these three components did not operate independently, but enabled and propelled each other.

Some key findings and continuing questions from this assessment include:

- *The role of target-setting.* Determining targets can be fundamental to efforts to establish and measure the impact of private sector initiatives. However, it may also act as a barrier to innovation, if conversations begin to focus solely on negotiation of the target.
- *The importance of company ownership of and involvement in the project.* The greater a company’s ownership of a project, the greater their participation in it, and investment in its success.
- *The role of corporate behavior in driving political change.* Private sector leaders can help define and raise the standard of climate action, so that policy conversations begin with more ambitious targets.

A Review of a New Initiative to Engage Sub-National Governments

Ms. Carr described a joint project between California and several German states, to help raise the ambition of sub-national actions in Paris, by bringing together sub-national governments with ambitious targets, defined as a 80-90 percent or 2 metric ton per capita reduction target. Governments participate by signing onto a Memorandum of Understanding, and submitting an appendix that outlines their proposed implementation. The project aims to demonstrate that sub-national governments are engaging in many simultaneously ambitious and achievable goals. The initiative works with the Compact of States and Regions, encouraging signatories of the Memorandum of Understanding to join the compact.

Organizing Themes and Question About the Groundswell

The discussion that followed these presentations flagged several themes and questions about the nature of the groundswell, which oriented and continued throughout the conference:

The Definition and Inclusion of the Groundswell

- Many commitment actions include both national and sub-national actors. How can we come up with a definition of groundswell that takes *the interaction between national and sub-national actors* into account?
- The groundswell should *include all climate action*, and address adaptation, resilience, and finance activities, as well as efforts towards mitigation.
- Who will define the *boundaries or criteria for inclusion* in the groundswell movement?
- There is a need to include a *broader set of perspectives and representation from developing countries* in the groundswell. Peer-to-peer exchanges of experience, and dialogues between the global North and South, should be facilitated.

- The groundswell should support and help construct *multi-stakeholder networks*, made up of participation from governments, the private sector, and citizens.
- The goal of the groundswell should be to make its activities a *mainstream part of cities and companies' activities*, and to normalize the tracking of emissions and development of high-impact climate actions.

The Structure, Organization, and Presentation of the Groundswell

- *How should the groundswell be structured?* There has been a proliferation of many different platforms for tracking bottom-up climate action, all of which have different functions, and many of which need links built between them. Is the best approach to create more platforms, or a platform dashboard, that organizes and synthesizes these tools? Which approach is most appropriate and would have the largest impact?
- The groundswell should consider *how to package and communicate its data*, perhaps via a visualization tool.
- Metrics and data should be considered and presented in terms of *the different audiences* – such as grant donors, the private sector, and the public – that the groundswell hopes to reach. It is critical to find out what would motivate different audiences to participate and engage with these efforts, and to target messaging accordingly.

The Groundswell's Relationship with the UNFCCC Process

- The stalling of international climate negotiations has generated excitement for potential for external action to fill this gap. However, it is important to note that the groundswell is not capable of and *should not been seen as a substitute for national and international action*, and that it may be less equipped to address social equity issues, such as those involved in adaptation, than national governments.
- *Narratives should focus on the groundswell as a complement to, rather than a substitute for, global goals.* The groundswell must be careful about diverting the narrative away from United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) negotiations, and to ensure that the groundswell is not a distraction from the top-down discussions.
- *The groundswell should emphasize its focus on current climate action.* While countries are negotiating terms of the Paris agreement, which will govern action beyond 2020, the groundswell is taking action now. These current actions are both filling key gaps in current climate action, and laying the groundwork for a successful implementation of a post-2020 strategy.

The Groundswell's Contribution to Paris and Beyond

Input from the French Government

Representatives from the French government and the UNFCCC discussed how non-globally negotiated actions fit into the agenda of the Conference of the Parties (COP) 21 in Paris this December 2015. Sarah Benabdallah, from the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, spoke of the French government's desire to frame the UNFCCC negotiations around the idea of *The Paris Alliance*, which includes four key components:

1. The negotiating agreement;
2. Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs);
3. The financial package; and
4. The action agenda, which includes the groundswell of climate actions.

Paris will also host an Action Day, to highlight the groundswell of actions. Additional strategies for constructing a narrative around and integrating the groundswell into the negotiations are being constructed and developed.

Framing the Groundswell's Interactions with the UNFCCC Secretariat

The meeting identified several key principles to guide the interaction of the groundswell and the UNFCCC process:

1. Enable non-state actors to use their voice in calling for an ambitious Paris outcome.
2. Enable all actors to be visionary and take more action, by using the Paris COP to encourage an atmosphere of higher ambition regarding climate mitigation, adaptation, and finance.
3. Communicate who is taking action, as well as the scale of that action. Outside NGOs can be especially helpful in taking the lead on this issue.

While INDCs are only in effect post-2020, the groundswell is occurring now, and it is crucial to scaling up and bringing attention to these activities, in order to enable and lay the groundwork for the commitments outlined in INDCs. The messaging around the Paris COP can highlight this by framing the negotiations as a “runway” and launching point, rather than a landing zone, for climate actions.

Input from the United Nations Executive Office of the Secretary General

Dan Thomas, speaking on behalf of the Secretary-General's office, recapped the success of the September 2014 UN Climate Summit in New York City. Its goal, to change the atmosphere of the negotiations, and to raise the level of ambition and leadership from governments, civil society, pop culture and business, was an enormous success. The Climate Summit's message – that opportunities exist, and that action is occurring – continues to be a relevant and crucial one as the Paris COP approaches.

In the months ahead, Mr. Thomas noted that it will also be important to highlight the links between sustainable development and climate change, and to integrate them in the communication of the groundswell. The Secretary-General will be working to continue to involve developing countries, even more than they are already. Any suggestions for case studies to highlight, or for the Secretary-General to travel to and visit, to observe and showcase positive examples of climate actions, would be helpful and welcome.

Input from the Permanent Mission of France to the United Nations

Francois Gave, from the Permanent Mission of France to the United Nations, suggested that a central challenge of the Paris COP would be to make sure the agreement is strong and credible. A sense of ownership over the COP's outcomes constitutes a key strategy for facilitating this accountability, and the groundswell plays a crucial role in facilitating this attention and connection

to implementation activities. Showcasing that governments are not alone, and that cities, businesses, and sub-national actors support them, will help build a win-win perception. Groundswell activities also help make the case that the greatest risk lies in pursuing a fossil-fuel heavy path, rather than a low-carbon one.

Mr. Gave also spoke of the need to ensure a universal agreement in Paris to target the bulk of future emissions, which will come in large part from developing countries, and to lend credibility to the agreement, to avoid the mistakes of the Kyoto COP. The groundswell, he noted, also needs to include commitments from the global North and South in a balanced way, and to connect the discourse on climate change with the development discussion. The best way to ensure climate action will really work on the ground is to make sure that climate action is not an additional barrier to development, but is part of a national development strategy.

Incentives, Mr. Gave added, will also be crucial to developing momentum for change. Stronger messaging around incentives is crucial to both raising ambition and ensuring the long-term success of a strategy for combating climate change.

Communicating the Groundswell

What is the message, and for whom?

The groundswell both adds to globally negotiated goals and provides a way to implement them. These actions can make a significant impact not only through its direct effects on emissions and resilience, but by building a positive, pragmatic narrative around climate action that catalyzes further ambition by national governments in the post-2020 climate regime. However, much of the media discussion around Paris is focused solely on the legal agreement. How can we best communicate to the media and the public about the groundswell of actions and its critical importance in addressing the climate crisis? How can we ensure that governments, industry, and other key audiences hear this message?

In tackling these key questions, participants discussed what success in Paris would mean, and strategized about the best way to work with governments and media to create a positive narrative leading up to Paris. Several key themes emerged from this discussion: the group noted the importance of *aggregating and communicating existing efforts*, and of *inspiring new actions*, through platforms such as the upcoming Climate Week.

The ability of the groundswell to *inspire implementation* also emerged as a central conclusion of this discussion. Christiana Figueres' recent visit to support Canadian provinces calling for national climate action demonstrates the ability of sub-national activity to complement and spur – rather than substitute for – national commitments. Social science supports this call for simultaneous action, as both national and sub-national actions typically increase when countries set strong and ambitious goals. Additionally, the long-term thinking of business leaders engaged in the groundswell can help encourage longer-term thinking and planning than is typical in the public sector, where officials remain cognizant of shorter-term election cycles.

Part of the success in Paris, participants also noted, rests on successfully setting and managing the expectations for its deliverables. While crucial, it should be cast as the beginning of, rather than the culmination to, a new approach to climate action.

Identifying Key Audiences and Moments

Efforts to communicate the groundswell's impact must address the messaging that resonates with different groups. The workshop discussed how the positive narrative around the groundswell might relate to different audiences. Participants also identified communication opportunities that should be noted or, in some cases, created, on the road through Paris.

Key Opportunities for Communicating the Groundswell

The group discussed the importance of developing a coherent messaging strategy in both the lead-up to and the follow-up from the Paris COP in December 2015. While many additional moments exist, several key opportunities to highlight the groundswell emerged from the workshop:

- *Bi-weekly groundswell action highlight from June 2015 – December 2015.* During every two weeks leading up to the Paris 2015 COP, one “poster child” of groundswell movement could be highlighted, to build momentum towards the meeting and highlight positive climate action. These examples should align with and target key audiences. The upcoming G7 Summit, for example, offers an opportunity to highlight the action Tokyo and other Japanese cities are taking to reduce climate change, to urge the government of Japan to match it with more ambitious climate action of their own, in a strategy that builds off of the Canadian provinces’ attempt to pressure their national government to address climate issues.
- *The June 2015 “report deluge.”* A number of key reports and articles are scheduled to be released throughout June 2015. These will provide both new examples of climate action, and opportunities to build on media coverage of groundswell activities. Specifically, messaging during this time has an opportunity to highlight how climate activities are moving towards more rigorous implementation and monitoring based off of methodologies that participants of the groundswell are helping to form.
- *A series of key global events throughout 2015.* Specifically, the G20; June 2015 G7 Summit; various UNFCCC meetings leading up to the Paris COP; Live Earth Road to Paris event on June 18, 2015; the Business and Climate Summit in Paris on May 20-21, 2015; Vatican’s climate encyclical in June 2015; US Conference of Mayors in June 2015; and the International Conference on Financing for Development in July 2015 might be especially key moments to plan for.
- *The December 2015 COP in Paris.* The groundswell movement should build cohesive messaging strategies around COP 21, as the moment of the greatest political will for action will likely be just before the conference.
- *The post-Paris time frame, from January 2016 - March 2016.* Communication strategies should work to avoid another media “dead zone,” like the one that occurred in the January to March following the 2009 Copenhagen COP. Promoting groundswell activities could be key to either maintain momentum for groundswell actions to accelerate and complement a successful agreement, or to highlight strategies to counteract a less successful outcome.

Key Audiences

Several key audiences emerged over the course of the workshop's discussion. While the list, which follows below, is not exhaustive, it highlights key demographics to target (some groups are listed twice, if they fall into more than one potential category).

The Private Sector

- Businesses
- Investors
- Oil and Gas Industry

Policy-makers and Analysts

- Academia
- Civil Society
- Country governments
- Military
- Negotiators
- Politicians
- Research Analysts
- Subnational governments

Communicators

- Celebrities
- Civil Society
- Media

Interest Groups

- Faith groups
- Military
- Philanthropic organizations
- Youth

Broadly Defined Audiences

- Audiences that oppose climate action (this category identifies those who are not yet convinced of the benefits of climate action, rather than devoted climate deniers)
- Civil Society
- General public

Key Messengers

The workshop's discussions noted that communication efforts should make use of new kinds of messengers, facilitating peer-to-peer, business-to-business, and customer-to-business conversations around climate action. For businesses, in particular, the use of messengers with real economic stature within their industries may be most effective in capturing attention and generating support.

Messaging Around Paris and Beyond

The upcoming COP 21 in December 2015 provides an opportunity and calls for a careful strategy for communicating the groundswell. As the conference in Paris draws closer, how should the groundswell be structured to fit into the larger narrative around this gathering? How is it best explained to the media and to the engaged public? What risks are associated with too much focus on the negotiated agreement alone?

As the workshop considered these questions, they identified several key messages and narratives around the groundswell and its relationship with narratives around the Paris COP:

Interaction with National and International Goals

- Groundswell actions *complement – rather than substitute for – national commitments*.
- The groundswell can act as hammer to *drive additional ambition* from the national, sub-national, and non-state actors. Rhetoric that echoes the sentiment of “we’re ambitious; why aren’t you?” could help spark a race to the top.

The Groundswell’s Relationship with the Paris COP

- *The Paris COP should be defined holistically*, within a longer-term and broader context for climate action. Rather than being portrayed as a “landing pad,” it should be seen as a “launching pad” for continued ratcheting up of climate commitments and action.
- The groundswell should be cast in terms of its ability to *help close the mitigation gap* between what national governments have proposed and the actions necessary to cap global temperature rise at 2 degrees Celsius.
- The groundswell can help *highlight the real changes that are occurring now*, to broaden the discussion of climate action beyond future targets for action.

Thinking Beyond the Paris COP

- The groundswell group should ensure that *communication strategies stretch beyond the Paris COP*, to engage audiences over the longer term, and within different contexts. Instead of the “road to Paris,” communication strategies should think in terms of the “road through Paris.” Messaging strategies for 2016 should begin to be developed now.
- More specifically, the groundswell should *develop a post-Paris narrative*, which focuses on strategies to ramp up ambition beyond December 2015 (e.g., a story about a large investment to finance a mitigation or adaptation activity, that occurs as a result of discussions at the COP).
- The communication on the groundswell should *focus on businesses, sustainable development, and other co-benefits*, so that the messaging is broadened beyond climate and mitigation.
- “*Unusual suspects*” can help deliver key messages regarding the groundswell, in a way that is more likely to be trusted and to resonate with key target audiences, such as businesses.

Measuring the Groundswell

Many questions dog the evaluation of the actions taken by non-state and sub-national actors, which in some cases are taken in collaboration with nation states. Given the diversity of these actions,

estimating their potential impact and providing mechanisms for accountability requires new methodologies and research. Moreover, as countries prepare their intended nationally-determined contributions (INDCs), it is unclear how current activities and future non- and sub-state actions contribute to national mitigation pledges. Additionally, how can the financing, technology-transfer, and sustainable development co-benefits of initiatives be assessed? To realize the full potential of the groundswell, analysts and decision-makers will require effective tools to evaluate the range of actions and initiatives and track their delivery.

Why measure? What to measure?

Participants began their exploration of these central questions by considering the role of measurement, the most promising metrics, and the limits of monitoring the groundswell. Several organizing thoughts emerged from this discussion:

1. There is a need to investigate *what kinds of innovative methods or platforms might help track groundswell initiatives*.
2. There is currently *not enough finance* to implement these platforms adequately.
3. There is a need to *quantify the impact and the implementation* of committed initiatives.
4. *Overlaps in targets, and between initiatives, platforms, and scales of reporting* represent a major challenge to quantification efforts.
5. More research needs to explore *the right incentives* to encourage participation; to collect data and share data; and to incentivize transparency.
6. Discussions about the groundswell *should not exclude national contributions*; rather, they should focus on current action (as opposed to proposed or future activities).

Accurate mitigation metrics

The workshop discussed which “next generation” tools that might be used to incentivize additional climate action, while lending transparency and credibility to these efforts. Additionally, participants devolved into how to assess whether groundswell efforts are additional to business-as-usual scenarios; how to account for overlaps between initiatives; and how to differentiate climate actions from national ambitions.

As they explored these issues, participants noted the need to balance the desire to aggregate information with the risk of losing important detailed and contextual information through this process. The idea of *determining “nestedness”* – the ways initiatives sit within other initiatives or actions – emerged as one approach to maintaining contextual information in aggregation efforts. Platforms with block chain technology (the technology behind Bitcoin) could also help overcome some of these challenges by providing real-time transactional data. Whatever the final approach, being *transparent about what action is being taken, and by whom*, will be a key challenge and a crucial part of attempts to aggregate data.

In addition to being transparent, the data must be easy to understand, interpret, and act on. Data tools face the challenge of targeting specific audiences, while avoiding data portal proliferations. Some best practices of existing tools, that can guide future attempts to meet these goals, include:

1. Data openness and accessibility.
2. Communicating context and supplying relevant information for each audience.

3. Building networks and connecting people.
4. Highlighting successful actions.

A key question for climate action data revolves around *the selection of centralized or decentralized tools*. The breakout group suggested that centralized tools involve benefits that may make them the better choice. Specifically, they:

1. Provide a higher level of context.
2. Connect different data points, to make it possible to view the data in terms of one's city, state, or business, in a way that may make them more engaging to users.

An *approach to developing a centralized tool* might begin by:

- *Convening the key participants* in the groundswell movement, representatives from the NAZCA platform, data organizations such as Google, and potential funders, to discuss possible strategies and next steps.
- Additionally, *a survey on what kind of analysis, data, and tracking is available to support new tools and data visualization* could identify strengths and gaps in existing approaches. The World Resources Institute has begun this process.
- *Convening a data communication-specific meeting*, to examine strengths and gaps in data communication and visualization efforts, would also be crucial to attempts to form and launch a new strategy.

Metrics for Finance and Co-benefits

Evaluating and aggregating the sustainable development co-benefits of climate action represents a crucial challenge to efforts to understand and grow the groundswell. Similarly, measuring the financing and implementation of climate commitments and actions has proven to be very difficult. In discussions and breakout groups, participants honed in on several key challenges and themes facing attempts to evolve this field of metrics:

- There is a need for *better information on the co-benefits* that accompany climate action. For many cities, for example, the economic benefits of climate action form the main driver for change, and the carbon mitigation is seen as a co-benefit. Metrics that hone in on this could support efforts to communicate and promote climate activities in terms of their economic or development gains.
- There is a *need to track the financing* of groundswell activities – both in terms of its overall impact, and in terms of the contributions of different sources (i.e., public funding, private funding, loans, and grants).
- Metrics do not currently measure all of the groundswell activity across different sectors and different geographies. There is a need to incorporate this “*unseen groundswell*” or co-benefits into existing metrics, to help bring them to light.
- *Measuring and fostering equity* in the groundswell remains a key concern. Though tools as the World Resource Institute's CAIT map help visualize some of these issues through historical emissions, there is a need for more metrics to help track and foster discussions about equity.

- The opportunity to focus on the *interaction between climate actions and the Sustainable Development Goals* should be seized.
- A *typology of the groundswell* would be a helpful starting point in understanding the key actors and types of monitoring activities already occurring. This undertaking could more strategically identify gaps and opportunities for additional analysis and collaboration.
- There is a need to better understand *what metrics should be used to track cooperative initiatives*.
- *There is a need to better understand – and to quantify the result of – the implications of failure to respond to climate change*, so that the costs of climate action can be more directly compared to the costs of inaction.
- How can *new metrics for financing and co-benefits attract new actors, and increase the understanding of motivations* for participating in the groundswell of climate mitigation, adaptation, or financing activity?

Next Steps

The meeting closed with the identification of several next steps. In the coming months, interested parties will:

1. Contribute suggested survey questions about the groundswell to the Yale Project on Climate Communication, to inform the Project’s outreach and research efforts.
2. Take the next steps in considering and creating a “Faces of the Groundswell” campaign, which showcases the “unusual suspects” of climate action.
3. Analyze and communicate the development benefits of the groundswell.
4. Foster linkages with sustainable development initiatives and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
5. Refine a set of “talking points” about the groundswell.
6. Develop a set of criteria to guide the development of credible and effective initiatives.
7. Create a taxonomy of initiatives and research around the groundswell.
8. Consider the next steps in data exchange and visualization.