Platform design options: a survey of models

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A number of countries and organizations have contemplated the possibility of designing an online platform, registry, or clearinghouse for sub- and non-state climate actions, multi-stakeholder alliances, and action coalitions. Indeed, several organizations are already doing so in their areas of work. Most recently, paragraph 15(c) of the ADP co-chairs drat text of July 2014 (Doc. ADP.2014.8.DraftText) requests the Secretariat to:

"Make available a user-friendly and dynamic web-based tool summarizing the identified policy options in a manner that allows Parties to communicate their selected options and subnational authorities, including cities, international organizations, civil society, private sector entities, and cooperative initiatives to communicate the actions they are taking and the support available to Parties for implementation"

How might such a platform or set of platforms develop, and what could it hope to achieve? How might it fit into a larger framework of support and engagement around sub- and non-state actions, action coalitions, and other cooperative initiatives?

This memo reviews a number of existing online platforms related to climate change and other topics. The goal is to highlight options and considerations for the design of a broader climate platform. We hope to familiarize the reader with the various characteristics that many platforms share, and to emphasize various design choices. *The memo is purely informational. It should not in any way be read as circumscribing the discussion at the workshop, nor does it endorse a certain outcome*.

Five key features of existing platforms are identified: *goals, stakeholders, criteria for inclusion, data sources, and monitoring, verification, and compliance arrangements*. The memo then discusses three additional considerations: *operational requirements, external conditions for effectiveness, and incentives for participation*. It concludes with an appendix listing the various platforms that have been reviewed.

Platform characteristics

Goals

Existing platforms strive toward a number of distinct goals. Some aim to provide a vehicle for sub- and non-state actor to make or record new commitments. For example, the UN's Sustainable Development in Action registry collects the various initiatives announced at the Rio+10 and Rio+20 conferences, along with other similar commitments. Others aim simply to highlight a number of inspirational success stories, like the UNFCCC's Momentum for Change Website. Others, like ICLEI's carbon*n* Cities Climate Registry aim to quantify commitments/actions/inventories in order to facilitate peer-benchmarking and allow commitments/actions/inventories to be aggregated into a single unified measure. Still others aim to document and share information, like weADAPT, an online open space for researchers and practitioners working on climate adaptation. Many platforms hold a mix of different goals.

Distinct goals derive from different strategies for effecting change. For example, an aggregative platform seeks to demonstrate impact by adding up a number of separate commitments/actions into a whole. A platform that aims to increase the number of actions taken by sub/non-state actors would instead create reputational, financial, or other incentives for actors to join the platform. An accountability-oriented tool, in turn, may impose stringent criteria for participation. Clarity on goals is important because these strategies (and others) imply different design choices, as discussed below.

Stakeholders

Who is included in a platform, and who is its audience? Some platforms collect actions/commitments from a single kind of actor, such as national governments, cities, ministries, companies, investors, or individuals. For example, by focusing on companies, the UN Global Compact is able to build a community that is tailored to the attitudes and challenges faced by firms. Others, such as the Climate Registry, which sets standards and publicly reports greenhouse gas emissions in North America, include various actors on a single platform. This increases the potential scale of the project but requires the platform use a reporting mechanism that is sufficiently universal across the different participants.

A platform's goals may lead it to speak to multiple audiences. Some are geared toward the participants in the platform. For example, Luum, a user-driven data platform to encourage sustainable transportation, requires users to create profiles and then rewards progress towards particular challenges with badges, prizes and recognition. Others, instead, aim to communicate the sub/non-state actors' commitments and actions to a broader community of external stakeholders including like-minded parties facing similar challenges, potential supporters (e.g. funders and donors) or critics (e.g. monitoring NGOs). Some platforms pursue both of these functions at once. Momentum For Change, by highlighting success stories in certain focus areas, simultaneously motivates the participants whose progress is highlighted while also showcasing success and sharing lessons with a broader community.

Criteria for inclusion

Platforms vary significantly in how stringently they screen actions/commitments. Some allow essentially anyone to register any type of action, provided it fits within the subject area of focus. Others make specific requirements regarding format and, less commonly, content of the action/commitments they include. The Climate Registry, for example, is a prescriptive platform: it dictates a thorough process for measuring and reporting greenhouse gas emissions. The UN's Sustainable Development in Action registry, instead, simply asks participants to specify "deliverables" and the resources that will be dedicated to them.

Data sources and process

A crucial but often overlooked characteristic of platforms is the process through which they identify and register commitments and actions. Some platforms rely on individual participants to submit their own actions or commitments, or, like DevelopmentCheck, use trained community volunteers to monitor actions and collect data. Others, for example, more informational networks, record information about different participants based on staff research, or simply "scrape" information from existing data sources for aggregation on the platform. Many platforms employ some combination of these techniques. The Sustainable Development in Action platform aggregates commitments from various other UN platforms while also allowing participants to submit commitments themselves. Each strategy of course entails a different balance of operational requirements for platform hosts and participants.

Monitoring, verification and compliance

How much does a platform invest in ensuring that the actions it registers are accurate and demonstrate meaningful progress? Many platforms do very little on this front, with several simply taking self-reported commitments and actions as given. Others employ moderately more stringent processes. The UN Global Compact, for example, requires companies to submit annual communications on their progress toward the Compact's principles. Companies that fail to report are de-listed. Most stringently, a platform may require independent, third-party verification of compliance (for example, the UN's Every Woman Every Child platform). In the attached Table, HarassMap, Global Forest Watch and Development Check use citizen reporting as an accountability mechanism.

Broader considerations

Operational demands

What is required to operate a platform? None of the platforms surveyed involve particularly significant investments of time and money, though an initial investment in development and conceptualization is key. Most operate with a relatively small staff and budget. Anecdotally, several platforms report that they find it difficult to fulfill their very broad mandates with the relatively modest level of resources they possess.

Conditions for effectiveness

Thus far the memo has evaluated different design options of existing platforms. But to succeed, many platforms are nested in a broader community, of which the online platform was only one part. Many of the significant commitments made on the Every Woman Every Child platform were made, not online, but

during the 2010 launch of the project at the UN Millennium Development Goals Summit in September 2010. If a platform relies upon commitments being communicated to a wider audience in order to inspire greater momentum from similar actors, then a prominent, visible, and ongoing relationship with those actors is necessary in order for the platform to achieve its goal. Similarly, proper monitoring and verification may be improved if there is an engaged community with sufficient expertise to track commitments. In the case of Global Forest Watch, civil society and citizens, aided by satellite photos, provided such a community. Within the community, sufficient scale and experience may be a precondition for success. For example, if one goal is to build a learning community amongst participants, that goal requires a significant number of participants facing similar kinds of challenges who see enough value in each others' experiences to want to learn from each other.

Incentives to participate

A key consideration for all platforms is what incentives actors have to engage with them. For those that depend on sub/non-state actors to make submissions, the question of incentives is particularly important. What benefits do sub/non-state actors obtain from registration? Legitimacy and recognition? Access to material support? Access to information? Under what conditions are these various benefits likely to be of more or less use to sub/non-state actors?

Appendix one: Comparison of related platforms

Initiative and Initiator	Goal of the Registry or Platform	Stakeholders/participants	Number of commitments/ actions/partici pants	Criteria for inclusion	Monitoring, verification, and compliance	Source of data	Who is the target audience?
Sustainable Development in Action UN	Register and promote voluntary commitments and partnerships seeking to further sustainable development and poverty reduction.	Any organization, grouped according to Major Groups, Member States, and UN entities & IGOs.	1455	Any organization can set up an account, they must then register their commitment/partnership with: Description of commitment; Implementation methodologies; Deliverables & timeline	Voluntary progress reporting; UN will publish progress reports on the online registry.	Aggregated from existing UN registries and/or "action networks": Sustainable Energy for All (119), the UN Global Compact (124), the Higher Education Sustainability Initiative (284), the Sustainable Transport Action Network (14 - including from the Partnership on Sustainable, Low-Carbon Transport), Every Woman Every Child (144), Partnerships for Sustainable Development (196), Rio+20 commitments (251), Sustainable Cities (6), Green Economies, policies and commitments (317)	For the registry, the international community engaged with sustainable development. For the action networks, participants themselves are the focus as lessons can be shared within certain areas.
Cloud of Commitments Natural Resources Defense Council	Aggregates commitments from a variety of registries to enhance transparency.	Any participant in the listed platforms.	261	Participation in the chosen platforms, and also Description & Implementation of commitment; Date delivered; Amount of commitment	"Cornerstone commitments" from Rio+20 will be tracked and NRDC advocates their integration into the two 2015 UN processes.	Aggregated from existing registries: 2014 Climate Summit (0), Sustainable Development in Action (0), the Small Island Developing States partnerships (0), Sustainable Energy for All (87), the UN Global Compact (55), the -- Corporate Eco Forum (23), The Access Initiative (1), and the Partnership on Sustainable Low Carbon Transport (SLoCaT) (15), Earth Summit Watch (19).	International sustainable development community, civil society and interested citizens.
Sustainable Energy for All UN-initiated, independent		Public sector, private sector, civil society, academy	163	Publishes commitments made by all levels and sectors of society (governments, civil society, and business) with regards	1) Top-down: a 'Global Tracking Framework' report, which is a global regional assessment of progress on the initiative's objectives (energy access,	Voluntary registration. Annual conference may encourage such registration.	Governments, business, policy community working on energy issues.

				to one or more of the Initiative's sustainable energy-related objectives - Energy Access, Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy. Commitments include: description of commitment; Deliverables & date delivered; Resources	efficiency and renewable energy). Updated biennially. 2) Bottom-up: an Accountability Framework, which tracks individual voluntary commitments and their progress in advancing the initiative's objectives. On an annual basis. Commitments delisted if off track or not being seriously pursued.		
UN Global Compact UN	Promote corporate social responsibility through commitment to key principles and stakeholder collaboration.	Business, civil society.	10,000+	Statement of commitment to ten principles and small financial contribution (required annually).	Companies must submit Communications of Progress annually. This is a statement by Chief Executive, a description of practical actions; and measurement of outcomes. If a company does not submit a CoP, it will have status changed and face possible expulsion.	Voluntary registration.	Business community and business stakeholders.
Momentum for Change UNFCCC	Interesting ideas are highlighted, with the expectation that these will provide role models for other actors to scale up.	Applicants welcome from target area - e.g. "Women For Results".	99	Applications welcomed based upon focus areas - e.g. Finance for climate-friendly investment.	N/A: focus is on lighthouse activities that are demonstrating success rather than prospective commitment.	Voluntary applications.	Organizations working on the highlighted issues; wider sustainable development community interested in success stories.
Portal on Cooperative Initiatives UNFCCC		Governments, international organizations, civil society and businesses working on cooperative climate action.		Decision by UNFCCC secretariat; applications welcomed by e-mail. Must be cooperative climate action.	Activates profiled online, but no formal monitoring process.	Application to UNFCCC secretariat.	
weADAPT	To communicate information to a network of people engaged in adaptation and to connect those people.	Practitioners, researchers and policy makers working on adaptation.	520 participating organizations; 472 adaptation case studies; hundreds of climate data station	Relevant information on climate adaptation.	Pieces of information curated by a locally distributed network of editors.	Open space contribution.	Practitioners, researchers and policy makers working on adaptation.
Climate Registry California	Allow cities and states in North America (including some companies) to measure their emissions	Sub-national jurisdictions, governmental entities, private companies, non-profits.	294	Detailed inventory of GHG emissions.	Optional third-party verification.	Submissions by participants.	Organizations and their constituents, shareholders, board members, etc.

	using a common framework and have them verified.						
[carbonn Cities Climate Registry](#) ICLEI	Report commitments, hold cities accountable to commitments and encourage further commitments.	Cities	423 reporters	Submission of detailed report on emissions, targets, and commitments. Tailored to city's needs	ICLEI staff.	City submissions	Cities and their stakeholders
[Carbon Disclosure Project (CDP)](#) UK government - independent	Measure and track city and companies emissions	Cities, companies, investors	207 cities; 767 investors; 3200 companies	Submission of questionnaire	Verification increases the score a company is given.	Participant submissions	Investors, participants
[Global Methane Initiative](#)	To track entity's emissions reductions and connect methane reductions to markets. Share information on best practices.	Countries, international organizations, private companies	1306 members	Participate in a methane reduction project		Participant submissions	Participants
[Global Partnership on Waste Management (GPWM)](#) UNEP	Information-sharing on who's doing what on waste management.	International organizations, Governments, businesses, academia, local authorities and NGOs		Submit information on waste management practices	None	Participant submissions	Policy-makers involved in waste management and interested in wider policy space.
[Local Government Self Assessment Tool](#) UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction	* Help local governments engage with different stakeholders to map and understand existing gaps and challenges in disaster risk reduction in their city or locality. * Set a baseline and develop status reports for cities and municipalities that have committed to the Making Cities Resilient Campaign and its Ten Essentials.	* Cities - defined as urban areas in general; and * Local governments - defined to include 'both urban and rural communities of different scales (i.e. regional, provincial, metropolitan, cities, towns, municipalities, districts and villages).'	1953 cities from app. 109 countries	No criteria as such; all cities and local governments are invited to sign up for the campaign, which they can do online, or by submitting a nomination form available online. In signing up, they must provide information such as: * which local institutions will be engaged in the Campaign; * their hazard and vulnerability profile, listing	Does not appear to have external monitoring or verification; self-assessment based.	Participants.	* Principally, mayors and local government leaders of cities and towns of different sizes, characteristics, locations and risk profiles. * But the campaign is also calling on civil society, planners and urban professionals, national authorities, and community groups to develop innovative solutions and engage with local governments

	.			their achievements and plans			to reduce disaster risks.
DevelopmentCheck Integrity Action	To improve development outcomes by providing 'bottom-up' accountability for development projects, via the sharing of 'on the ground' project information and assessments. In doing so, it seeks to empower and collectively engage 'all stakeholders' (inc citizens).	Civil society.	55 projects in 11 countries, across 23 sectors	The community identifies priority development projects to monitor. The main criteria appears to be that the projects are under construction or in early implementation, so that the monitoring is capable of influencing their delivery and outcomes.	Integrity Action and country partners train community volunteers, who monitor development projects in their communities and collect data on the projects. The trained community volunteers enter the data for each project monitored into DevelopmentCheck, either through the website or mobile app. Integrity Action's country partners verify the data. Data is then also reviewed and projects published by Integrity Action staff.	Trained community volunteers.	* civil society organizations in 11 countries * the general public, who can submit feedback on monitored projects.
Sanitation and Water for All (SWA) UNICEF	The aim of the SWA overall is for its global partners to 'work[] together to catalyze political leadership and action, improve accountability and use scarce resources more effectively.' Its publication of countries' commitments, and indicators of their progress, would fit into that overall aim.	SWA partners comprise: developing country governments; donors; civil society organizations; multilateral bodies (the UN and regional government bodies); development banks (global and regional); international organizations focused on a research and learning agenda; and international specialist organizations with recognized water and sanitation technical and policy expertise and global and/or regional influence.	* SWA has over 90 partners (full list, and their categories, listed at http://sanitationandwaterforall.org/about/partners) * The commitments are those arising from the 2014 High Level Meeting: 309 commitments from 43 developing countries, and 70 commitments from 12 donors	Being an SWA partner.	SWA partners can make two types of commitments: * 'Primary commitments' state the number of people who will be provided with access to improved sustainable sanitation facilities and drinking water sources by a certain date. These are measured through the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme, 'which uses data from national standardized large-scale household surveys' * 'Specific commitments' 'relate to the concrete steps that developing countries and donors will take to remove barriers to expanded access to sanitation and water services.' These 'are self-assessed by the countries and donors themselves. The SWA Secretariat works with these partners to track the implementation of specific commitments on an annual basis	Participants.	Not explicitly stated who the target audience of the commitments registry is - participants, governments, the general public perhaps?

					and analyze the results. It also produces an annual global report on the progress of the implementation of commitments and other advocacy materials tailor-made for country use.'		
Global Water Partnership

The World Bank, UNDP, and the Swedish intl Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) | [Note: This is not a commitment-based platform/registry - it is an information-exchange platform.]
The GWP generally is a 'global action network'.
The goal of the database specifically is to provide a place for water-related practitioners and professionals around the world to:
* share information, knowledge and experiences;
* improve their network of contacts; and
* assist each other to implement ideas and solutions. | Water related practitioners and professionals | Unclear how many participants (partners/memb ers). Over 400 case studies. | Seems to be GWP membership - but not clear whether that is necessary to contribute. | Contributions are peer reviewed. | Participants. | * Water related practitioners and professionals
* Also intended for use by 'anyone who is interested in implementing better approaches for the management of water or learning more about improving water management at a local, national, regional or global level.' |
| Global Forest Watch

World Resource Institute and partners | To 'empower[] people everywhere to better manage forests', by providing a 'dynamic online forest monitoring and alert system' that 'radically improve[s] the availability, quality, and accessibility of forest data for everyone.' | * 'a diverse partnership of organizations ... contribute data, technical capabilities, funding, and expertise.' They include Google and UNEP, while funders include USAID, etc. (full list of partners/funders at http://www.globalforestwatch.org/about/partners). | N/A | N/A | All of the data provided on GFW have been assessed with respect to several indicators of quality, including timeliness, accuracy, completeness, geographic coverage, innovation, and objectivity.' | Satellite technology, open data and crowdsourcing. | Governments, companies, NGOs, researchers, communities, and others seeking to better manage forests and improve local livelihoods. |
| HarassMap

Ushahidi | * 'To help support on-the-ground community mobilization to activate the public to be watchful against sexual harassment and to take | Volunteers | 1304 reports of sexual harassment | Anyone can report an incident online. | * Unclear if/how reports of sexual harassment are verified before publication on the website. | Civil society. | General public. Doesn't appear to be targeted at just Egyptians, as the website is available in English. |

	action by speaking up against it.' * 'To end the social acceptability of sexual harassment in Egypt.'						
Luum	To 'motivate commuters and travelers to make sustainable transportation choices through mutual encouragement and friendly competition'. More generally, 'to engage commuters, incentivize behavior change, and generate actionable reports'.	Commuters, travelers	Depends on the challenge; most popular seems to have had 2500 participants. Others have less than 100.	Anyone can sign up (although residential restrictions, etc, apply).	Unclear if there are any.	Participants.	Travelers, commuters, employers
Every Woman Every Child UN	To improve women and children's health by motivate additional commitments from various partners.	Governments, philanthropic institutions & foundations, UN and multilateral organizations, civil society, business community, academic institutions, healthcare workers.	213 commitments by 198 partners.	Commitments must advance goals in the GlobalStrategy, in particular those which are long term, sustainable, innovative, and showing measurable impact.	Commission on Information and Accountability Coria and an Independent Expert Review Group (iERG) to track commitments. Commitment makers report annually on progress related to implementing their commitment. UNSG Executive Office is working to make a single reporting process.	Voluntary application by submission of form.	Other governments and large institutional actors - e.g. companies like body shop. The general-public: examples prominently displayed on the website.