



Kofi Annan  
FOUNDATION

# Outcome document 1: Roundtable on Democracy and Climate

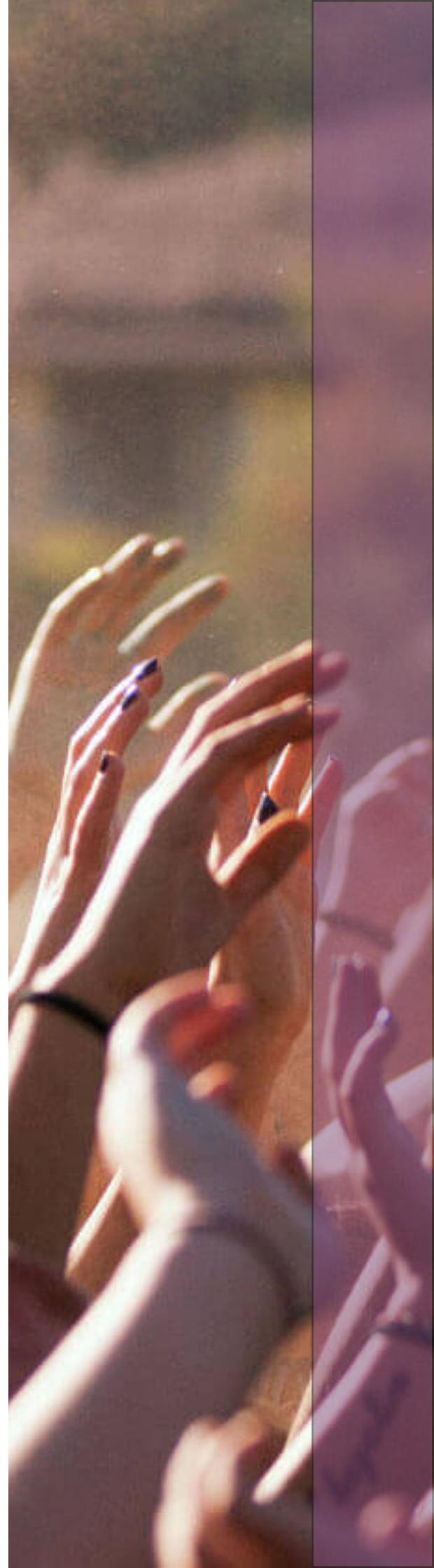
## How to foster democratic practices for climate action?

Understanding the links  
between multilateralism &  
democracy to tackle global  
challenges more effectively

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On 16 April 2024, the Kofi Annan Foundation and the Graduate Institute's Albert Hirschman Centre on Democracy convened the first of a series of thematic roundtables on the common challenges faced by democracies and the multilateral system worldwide. Close to twenty experts from international organisations, foundations, civil society, and academia participated in the discussion, which consisted of a comprehensive exploration of the relationship between climate change and democratic governance. Participants reviewed an issue brief on the theme prepared for the session, and outlined some of the suggestions and recommendations below in response on three key themes that structured the discussion.

#### THEME 1: Democratic practices for just transition

*Use of the term:* This term needs to be used with care, especially in contexts when stakeholders and lobbies attempt to influence its meaning. The debate around adaptation and the transition away from fossil fuels should not overshadow the justice dimension.

It is important to *emphasize justice* in the energy transition but also to think of environmental justice beyond procedural justice to also include distributive, intergenerational, restorative, and other forms of justice. For example, transition to solar, wind, lithium and batteries, raise important questions for marginalised communities: this aspect gets often neglected.

*Recommendation:* Use a comprehensive frame of “Just transition” that includes all its different dimensions.

*Capacity to interpret global knowledge in local contexts and vice-versa:* Global knowledge must be contextualised locally. This involves connecting experts at various levels with local specialists to ensure information is both understood and shareable. “Best available science” must be understood as coming from expert judgements at local levels, who need to have capacity, enabling them to lead negotiations about just transitions. Focusing on local expertise and local knowledge is central.

*Examples:* Niger's success since the 1980s in doubling tree cover through farmer-managed regenerative processes initiated by an agricultural scientist who discovered that simple measures like fencing could protect young trees. This project spread by word of mouth and became widely adopted.

In the U.S., the Inflation Reduction Act, which mandates that 40% of environmental benefits from federal legislation reach marginalised communities, has led to experimentation of just transition. Inclusive design and implementation processes were put together in Kentucky and Jackson, Mississippi.

*Access to data:* Just transition requires equal access to data, as well as climate literacy at local and global levels in order to effectively understand what the challenges and the roles are. National frameworks have been established but they are often confined to scientists: the issue is about science-policy interface.

*Recommendation:* Establish national frameworks for building partnerships in order to mainstream the flow of climate information.

## THEME 2: Practices of deliberative democracy

Citizen participation is crucial to accurately assess the crisis and develop solutions. This also links with action geared towards “just transition”, which needs to include democratic participation. Research has shown that public opinion of climate change taxes and laws is informed by (1) individual environment concerns; (2) the perceived effectiveness of these policies and (3) their perception of these policies as fair and just<sup>1</sup>.

Deliberative democracy may be experimented at all levels of governance, from the subnational to the global. The first global citizens' assembly on climate was held in 2021 at COP26, with 100 citizens from 46 countries deliberating solutions during 3 months. Their output, the People’s Declaration, serves as both a proof of concept and inspiration for future initiatives. While impact on the COP negotiations was very limited, it served as inspiration in side events. Similarly the citizens’ assembly on food systems had a positive outcome on advocacy.

*Lessons learned:* Citizens Assemblies should not be assessed solely through their policy impact. Instead, my emphasizing deliberation and discussion, climate assemblies could contribute to shielding down the aggressive atmosphere in climate policy debates

*Example:* In France, the Citizens’ Assembly can be understood as having contributed to the French transition by emphasising the issue of justice and fairness.

## THEME 3: Democratising multilateral spaces

*Civil society engagement* has led to democratising processes at different levels.

*Examples:* Best practices coming from different parts of the world about what national societies have done across political contexts, underscoring the variety of mechanisms that may be leveraged by democracies on Nationally-Determined Contributions (NDC) and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) processes. For example, the Ghana Red Cross supported the government-led NAP process, while the Ugandan government organised a national civil society symposium, setting up a technical advisory group from civil society to participate in COP negotiations.

*Decision-making procedures:* Consensus-based decision-making is desirable on paper but, when observing how it is implemented, it becomes clear that some parties use their vote as a form of veto power, which grants them disproportionate power. Every COP involves discussions about reviewing decision-making procedures, but these are often deferred to a later date, partly due to a select few parties. Yet to democratise climate multilateralism, it is key to address decision-making procedures at COPs.

*Leadership* remains a critical topic, enduring beyond the Paris Agreement. Frequent changes in participation and leadership stances, especially by countries like the U.S., pose problems: strategies

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<sup>1</sup> Bergquist, M., Nilsson, A., Haring, N. *et al.* (2022). Meta-analyses of fifteen determinants of public opinion about climate change taxes and laws. *Nat. Clim. Chang.* 12, 235–240. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-022-01297-6>.

concerning financing, technology transfer, and capacity sharing continue to be demanded by the Global South, and stable leadership is crucial to heed these calls.

*Finance and means of implementation* are questions that will define what will happen in the next years.

*Capacity-building* is crucial: soft skills are also a barrier and delegations from more vulnerable countries should also be equipped with technical and communication training.

*Recommendation:* Encourage capacity building programmes and the sponsorship of fellows

*On the communication side*, journalists from climate vulnerable countries often report that their delegations are tiny and not able to bring communicators. This leads to a lack of information flow on what is happening in the rooms to get back to home countries.

*Recommendation:* Parties in the negotiations should bring government officials but also journalists to climate negotiations.

*Rethink the overall context/system and the underlying norms:* It is essential to rethink how to build trust back with civil society in multilateral spaces. As observers, representatives of civil society are observers in negotiating processes at COPs are sometimes excluded from the negotiating rooms, or allowed in in very small numbers. There is increasing disappointment from minority and young representatives about their participation modalities as they often feel they have not been given adequate attention – with parties sometimes leaving the room when observers speak. This thus calls for a broader change of culture and relationship with civil society observation. Parties must recognise that their active engagement is a real asset for negotiations. More diversity in participation must be promoted in these spaces, as well as rethinking what qualifies as a “stakeholder”, such as non-human forms of life. There are also barriers for access: notification for meetings are sent late, there is limited or no support for visa application, finance, translation.

*Recommendation:* Democratisation multilateral spaces should be thought as moving from a party-system that has not just “stakeholders” but also “rights-holders”.

*Youth and minority groups* should be empowered within and beyond negotiating spaces.

*Example:* While training negotiators at the Youth Climate Negotiators Academy, a spirit of collaboration has taken shape. With young delegates forming a spirit of comradery, they were respecting and interacting better during actual negotiations. It is also important that these young negotiators enhance their connections civil society groups in their countries.

## **Conclusion:**

The discussion’s offered many concrete examples of best practices and ways forward, with some participants noting that, while calls to democratise climate negotiations are valid and urgent, the wealth of examples and best practices cited is telling of the fact that there is already a strong presence of civil society organisations in the space. This contains lessons for other multilateral spaces, where civic space is historically lesser, and even currently shrinking.