

# The Tie that Binds: How Inclusion Strengthens the Integration of Climate and Sustainable Development

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This summer we participated in two events where discussions centered on strengthening connections between climate change and other sustainable development goals (SDGs). The first was the High-level Political Forum (HLPF), a formal gathering of heads of state, business and civil society held at the United Nations Headquarters in New York to review the status of the SDGs. The second was the International Forum for a Sustainable Asia and the Pacific (ISAP) that our home institute, the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES), holds once a year in Yokohama, Japan to showcase the work IGES and partner institutions are doing to make Asia and the Pacific more sustainable. This briefing note draws upon our experiences in New York (at HLPF) and Yokohama (at ISAP) to demonstrate the need to delineate the differences and relationships between the terms “interlinkages,” “integration,” and “inclusion” when discussing the SDGs. In so doing, it contends that inclusion can offer political incentives to integrate climate-sustainable development interlinkages into policies within and across levels of decision-making.

At the HLPF, climate change featured prominently on the agenda. This was a result of the fact that SDG 13 on climate action was one of the six SDGs up for an in-depth review at the HLPF. It also reflected plans to hold a second HLPF (this time under the auspices of the United Nations General Assembly) that being held back-to-back with the high level Climate Summit in September. Perhaps because climate change was a focal point of both the HLPF in July and the meetings in September, policymakers from many countries underlined the important interplay between climate change and other dimensions of sustainable development. This was evident as numerous countries emphasised efforts to achieve goals under the Paris Agreement and other development objectives when they presented their voluntary national reviews (VNRs). Mongolia’s VNR, for example, made clear that reducing air pollution can also help mitigate climate change.

Less obvious climate-development linkages were also a point of emphasis outside of the presentations of VNRs and other formal discussions. In a side event on “Climate, Growth and Well-being to Achieve the SDGs” (convened by the Permanent Mission of New Zealand), many speakers reflected on the importance of considering the social dimensions of climate change. It was noted, for example, that one of the ways to make our transport systems more sustainable is to invest in public transport as a viable alternative to personalized motor vehicles; however, if public transport is not designed to cater to women and families, it is likely to miss a key demographic in the ridership base. Hence, there needs to be a greater emphasis on providing mobility for all; expanding mobility will require transport systems with adequate space and seating for families with children, appropriate safety protections, and routing that allows access for caregivers to essential services beyond work and business.

At ISAP in Yokohama, there was also an emphasis on the linkages between climate change and sustainable development. The plenary session on the second day of the meeting focused on the same interlinkages theme discussed at the HLPF. In that session our colleague, Dr. Zhou Xin, presented thought-provoking work her team has developed on the synergies and trade-offs between climate change and the other SDGs in Japan’s climate actions. The message from this presentation resonated with some of the VNRs: countries are already aligning their climate and sustainable development plans.

Also similar to the HLPF, the links between climate and social dimensions were raised in a panel discussion that followed Dr. Zhou’s talk. That dialogue concentrated on some of the concrete steps to bridge scientists and policymakers when making the link between climate change and sustainable development. During the panel, it was underlined that one way of

strengthening the connection between climate change and sustainable development is thinking about the social dimensions of sustainability more carefully. This point was made eloquently by Dr. Alfred van Jaarsveld, the Director of the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA), when he noted that global efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate change have to fit within a broader drive to achieve a “dignified society.”

Both the HLPF and ISAP, then, impressed upon us the importance of considering the social dimensions of climate change in policy and practice. Each event also convinced us that strengthening those relationships would require greater reflection on the mediating role of politics. To understand this mediating role, we think it is important to differentiate and discuss the relationships between three terms that are often used interchangeably:

- 1. Interlinkages** refers to the positive or negative interrelationships between climate and different goals and targets (including climate change).
- 2. Integration** involves strengthening coordination between agencies and/or national and local levels of government to ensure interlinkages between climate and other dimensions of development are reflected in policy decisions across and within different levels.
- 3. Inclusion** concerns creating opportunities that enable multiple and often marginalized voices (outside of relevant government agencies) to meaningfully participate in decisions on issues affecting their livelihoods (including climate change).

While these terms are distinct, they are also interrelated when there is an additional consideration of how including social groups alters the politics of those decisions.

In terms of interlinkages, this connection exists because routinely acting upon knowledge of these relationships will require not simply translating science into policy but including stakeholders other than scientists and policymakers in decisions where there are linkages. This could be achieved, for instance, by allowing social groups more influence on even seemingly technical decisions such as infrastructure plans, safety protections, and family-friendly routing for public transport. This will create incentives for politicians to adopt truly sustainable climate solutions and hold them more accountable for the implementation of those decisions.

By the same token, a greater effort to include diverse voices in these decisions can also enhance integration within and across levels of decision making. For instance, Kitakyushu, Japan has an SDG Promotion Headquarters that is led by the mayor and empanels representatives from different sectoral departments in the city administration. The Promotion Headquarters works with an SDGs Council that is made up of an equal number of men and women and serves as an external advisory body on the SDG-related plans. Last but not least, Kitakyushu hosts an SDGs Club that includes other stakeholders (such as representatives of schools and industries) to exchange views and information. The creation of the SDGs Council and SDGs Club will help again to not only include different voices, but create political incentives to improve inter-sectoral coordination in the SDG Promotion Headquarters so that relevant policies integrate low carbon development and other social concerns—such as an SDGs model project that integrates social issues into renewable energy activities.

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