

Roadmap for climate civil society in Latin America and the Caribbean toward the Independent Global Stocktake (iGST)

June 2021

About the Independent Global Stocktake

The Independent Global Stocktake (iGST) is a consortium of civil society actors working together to support the Global Stocktake (GST), the formal process established under the Paris Agreement to periodically take stock of collective progress toward its long-term goals. The iGST aligns the independent community — from modellers and analysts to campaigners and advocates — so we can push together for a robust GST that empowers countries to take greater climate action.

www.independentgst.org

Table of contents

Executive Summary

3

A roadmap for climate civil society in LAC toward the iGST

4

Next steps for the iGST in LAC

6

Challenges and opportunities for climate civil society in LAC
toward the iGST

16

References

19

Executive Summary

As part of an initiative sponsored by the ClimateWorks Foundation, this working paper is an effort to establish strategies and actions for climate civil society in Latin America and the Caribbean toward the iGST. It follows from an initial assessment that consisted of a thorough and horizontal consultation among various climate civil society stakeholders in the region through semi-structured interviews and an online survey and a conscientious analysis of the sociopolitical circumstances for climate action.

As a result of that appraisal, a series of conditions, challenges, and opportunities were identified. It was suggested that forming an epistemic community around the iGST in the region would be the best course of action in order to maximize involvement and seize available opportunities.

The logic, steps, and strategies to move in that direction are elaborated on in the sections ahead, always keeping in mind the need to develop a participatory, inclusive, and bottom-up approach in order to incorporate a Latin American vision into the international climate debate. These will enable climate actors in the region to increase ambition in their respective countries' goals and policies and promote greater climate transparency and accountability.

A roadmap for climate civil society in LAC toward the iGST

The core of this proposal is to constitute an epistemic community around the iGST in LAC. An epistemic community usually takes the form of a network of experts, professionals, scholars, NGOs, grassroots organizations, and other actors with practical experience, expertise, and authoritative claims to policy-relevant knowledge in an issue area (Haas, 1992; Cross, 2013). These communities go beyond merely trying to advise officials or appeal to the public in favor of their cause. In contrast, members of an epistemic community try to locate their members in different countries and public and civil society positions with diverse backgrounds, expertise, and types of knowledge (academic, practical, traditional, etc.). They are united by a shared set of norms, beliefs, and aims, which lead them to mobilize coordinately toward a political goal (Dunlop, 2016; Maliniak *et al.*, 2020).

Such an organizational scheme could be beneficial by promoting the dissemination of how the GST and iGST outputs are relevant for diverse social groups in the Global South and facilitating their inclusion into the agendas and priorities of the NGO's that target national NDCs from the national and grassroots level. Consequently, it could increase pressure on national governments to increase ambition and comply with their stated commitments. An iGST epistemic community could also broaden the scope of smaller or local organizations, allowing for the creation of a channel for the engagement of local groups and the general public. Most importantly, an iGST epistemic community may set the stage for the definition of a clearer strategy to translate the iGST's outputs into social action, public awareness, and the domestic conditions necessary for effective accountability of governments' climate goals and commitments.

However, the formation of an iGST LAC epistemic community faces various challenges, such as the development of short-term activities and specific goals that recognize the diversity in the visions and interests of NGOs and groups, and, simultaneously, that internalizes local meaning and contextual relevance. This agenda's scope must support existing regional networks and

avoid fragmentation or duplication of actions and resources. The epistemic community's structure requires flexibility and low operability demands due to the variations in resources, capacities, and engagement levels.

The formation of an epistemic community requires interaction between its members, the establishment of spaces of practice and learning, the creation of channels for sharing cognitive resources, and the collective production, dissemination, and use of knowledge (Cross, 2013). These will be dealt with in the following sections.

Organizational conditions for success

Studies conducted from different disciplines have established a set of conditions that allow an epistemic community to be successful in its goals (Cross, 2013). They are more likely to be persuasive when:

- There is uncertainty surrounding the policy issue because it is complex or new and perceived as a politically salient crisis.
- The decision-makers targeted are unhappy with past policies and present problems related to the issue.
- They have access to all or most necessary top decision-makers.
- They have greater cohesion and certainty of aims than the networks they are competing against.
- They share a high level of professional norms and status.
- There is respected data.

Even if the international climate debate is most definitely a politically salient crisis, its position in national governments' priorities varies greatly and current policies do not necessarily meet the gravity of the crisis or are not fully enforced. Emergent issues like the present pandemic have displaced climate policies and allowed reluctant governments to sideline or postpone the issue. Similarly, climate civil society in the region does not always have access to all or the most crucial decision-makers due to domestic political tensions or the intrinsic limits of each organizations' scope and capabilities.

The greatest opportunities for a LAC epistemic community toward the iGST lie in the last three elements mentioned in the list above. Even though they

are diverse in scope and immediate goals, the regional climate debate has evolved in such a way that LAC climate organizations and groups share a significant level of professional norms and status and there is respected data backing their claims in terms of policy and social action. Similarly, the iGST epistemic community may become a powerful instrument to strengthen transnational cohesion and certainty of aims.

Next steps for the iGST in LAC

The main goal of the iGST in LAC is to identify and enact the best way in which Latin America and the Caribbean can influence the global iGST and introduce regional issues, concerns, and priorities into the international debate on climate transparency and climate action. As such, it is crucial that the organizational structure of the regional iGST initiative is sensitive to the need to *develop cohesion, address internal inequalities, and produce accessible and usable outputs*. In other words, since only some of the known conditions for an epistemic community to succeed are identifiable at present, there is ample opportunity to intervene directly in order to develop the ones that are yet to be seen.

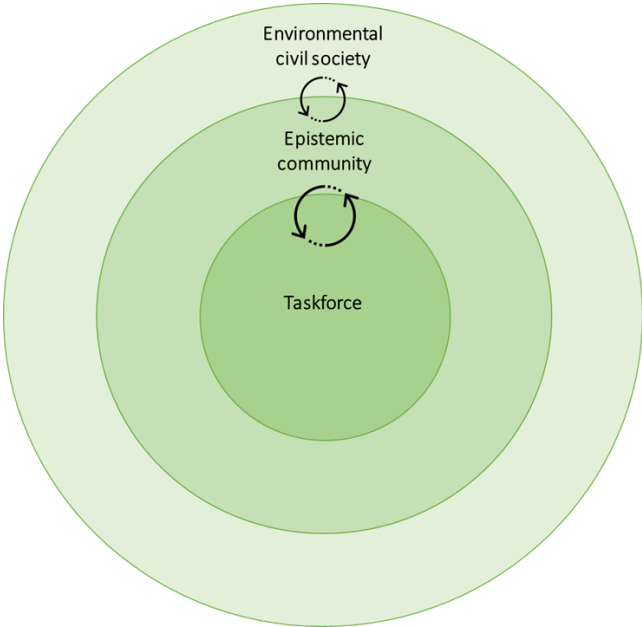
In consequence, and bearing in mind the results of our assessment and the continuous we propose ***three parallel workstreams for the iGST*** in the region:

1. A broad community for the dissemination of the goals and work of the GST and iGST among the **environmental civil society** in the region.
2. A flexible, horizontal, and inclusive **epistemic community** formed by a wide network of climate organizations in LAC.
3. A **taskforce** or core group of Latin American and Caribbean climate organizations.

Such an organizational structure could be useful to strengthen the links between the interested parties, better understand and address their particular needs and capacities for involvement and guide the collaborative production of

relevant and pertinent materials. It would also be consistent with the interest of making this a participatory and horizontal process (Ashman and Luca Sugawara, 2012; Ashman, 2005; Ramalingam, 2006; Greenspan *et al.*, 2021). As it will become clear in the sections ahead, an organization can move easily from one workstream to another depending on its level of involvement and capacities. The structure proposed is meant to be flexible and open, always willing to include the experience and opinions of as many climate organizations as possible to further our common goals. The following paragraphs will outline the proposed activities and responsibilities of each workstream and how they could interact among themselves.

Three parallel workstreams for the iGST in the LAC region



Environmental civil society: The first workstream relates to the nurturing of a civil society that is well aware of the most crucial issues in the climate agenda and with particular detail for issues concerning Latin America and the

Caribbean. Our assessment revealed that, while many organizations were available and willing to participate in an iGST regional initiative when asked about it, they were not fully aware of the GST and iGST. As a result, it is crucial to deliver as much information about both processes to as many regional climate civil society actors as possible, in order for them to include the matter in their agendas and widen the effect of these initiatives.

The figure above shows that the proposed environmental civil society is meant to interact with the epistemic community. This could take place through the suggestion of events or activities that may promote the work of the iGST in the region. The environmental civil society will thus be able to introduce topics that are particularly relevant for it into the wider discussion of climate policy in LAC, as well as suggest meetings, conferences, or seminars that represent their interests, concerns, and grievances in terms of the climate agenda.

Epistemic community: The second workstream has to do with the continued articulation of a network of Latin American and Caribbean climate organizations that are related through a flexible, horizontal, and inclusive community. Reflecting the inequalities of Latin American and Caribbean societies, the assessment also revealed that not every organization interested in participating in the iGST has the human, financial, and organizational resources to do so. Initially, this community could be formed by the 35 organizations and climate groups that participated in the assessment by responding to the online survey; it may grow as new organizations transition from being part of the environmental civil society into members of the epistemic community as a consequence of their interest and capabilities for involvement.

In turn, the epistemic community is meant to interact with the environmental civil society through the diffusion of an informational campaign composed of documents, videos, or newsletters to disseminate the goals and contents of the GST and iGST. If these organizations conduct conferences, seminars, regional events, or workshops related to the climate and iGST agenda, the epistemic community would be able to include fellow activists and advocates in order to widen the discussion and ensure the incorporation of their points of view, arguments, and grievances. This would make certain that

diverse perspectives are encompassed in the iGST processes in a bottom-up fashion.

Taskforce: The third workstream is related to the formation of a close-knit group of Latin American and Caribbean climate organizations that can lead the process of the iGST in the region and steer the relationship between climate activists and the transnational transparency initiative. This taskforce is planned to be a core group interacting with the epistemic community and the iGST working groups and steering committee. Initially, this taskforce could be formed by the 8 climate organizations that participated in the interviews for the assessment; it may evolve as new organizations transition from being part of the epistemic community into fully-fledged members of the taskforce as a result of their interest, institutional and technical capabilities, and regional role.

On the one hand, the epistemic community will communicate with the taskforce through the suggestion of events, activities, and topics of interest for the taskforce to work on or the iGST working groups to consider for their particular outputs or discussions. This would help introduce a Latin American and Caribbean perspective on the climate agenda and introduce a wider array of perspectives in international environmental politics. Additionally, the organizations that belong to the epistemic community will have the possibility to partake the products of their research, fieldwork, or organizational experience with the taskforce, as well as information on the particular contexts and local situations where they work. In such a way, the taskforce will have a sharper perception of what is really happening on the ground through the work and experience of the organizations that belong to the epistemic community and, therefore, will be able to transmit that to the iGST agenda and working groups in the transnational sphere. This, in turn, will transform the international climate agenda in such a way that the priorities, concerns, and issues of the LAC region will be considered in the global discussion.

On the other hand, the taskforce is meant to interact with the epistemic community by divulging information on what the iGST workgroups are producing and discussing through newsletters and meetings. These could be aimed at informing about relevant events, milestones, and outputs from the

iGST workgroups and the taskforce itself, as well as the dissemination of iGST regional and interregional initiatives and documents.

Regarding the link between the taskforce and the iGST steering committee, the taskforce could undertake a process of technical, peer-review of the main outputs coming from the iGST working groups before their publication. Having the information relayed by the environmental civil society and the epistemic community, the members of the taskforce would be able to comment on the working groups' papers and analysis in order to include a Latin American and Caribbean vision. Having knowledge of what the iGST core organizations are doing could also allow the taskforce to present proposals on how to translate and adapt the technical materials developed by the iGST for the LAC contexts, considering the needs, concerns, and priorities expressed by the environmental civil society and the epistemic community and the experience of its members. The taskforce would also be in a propitious position to recommend events and activities that can strengthen the epistemic community, as well as suggest and prepare materials, events, and activities that can increase interest and activism among members of the environmental civil society.

Timeline

The chronogram presented below is a proposal of the activities, events, and other engagements that each workstream could be involved in during the following months of 2021 in order to establish the foundations of the Latin American and Caribbean iGST epistemic community. Naturally, they would all depend on the first meeting of the Taskforce (highlighted), where the core group of organizations could provide feedback and agree on more specific aspects of the timetable. At present, our proposal has the following features for each tier:

- **Taskforce:** A core set of organizations that also belong to the epistemic community would operate as a sort of steering committee or leading group. In fact, the whole process will be set in motion by a meeting of the taskforce to discuss these proposals. After incorporating all the

members' feedback and contributions, the taskforce could be officially constituted. As described below, its activities would involve:

- Taskforce meetings (bimonthly)
 - The technical review of outputs from the iGST's working groups to incorporate a Latin American and Caribbean vision (continued).
 - The preparation of an iGST newsletter (bimonthly) and basic dissemination materials (FAQs, videos, two-pagers, etc.) to be distributed throughout a three-month period among the epistemic community and the environmental civil society (June-September 2021).
 - The preparation of iGST materials for COP26 in Glasgow to be distributed on October among the epistemic community and the environmental civil society.
 - Conferences, workshops, or seminars on crucial elements of the agenda (iGST and climate transparency, COP26, etc.)
 - Participation in international events (LAC Regional Climate Week, Climate Week NYC, COP26).
- **Epistemic community:** formed by a wider network of organizations, the community would be in charge of:
 - Check-in meetings with the Taskforce every three months to ensure a continuous feedback process and suggestion of next steps (events, activities, topics of interest for research or activism, national climate policies or issues, etc.) for the whole initiative, as a result of the organizations' knowledge and first-hand experience of national contexts and climate politics.
 - The circulation of the newsletter prepared by the Taskforce.
 - The dissemination of the iGST basic materials to inform as widely as possible on what it is and how it can be relevant for LAC climate civil society, as well as the diffusion of other materials prepared by the Taskforce or the iGST working groups around events related to climate politics (COP26, Climate Weeks, etc.).

- The organization of conferences, workshops, seminars, or other events on the iGST, its activities, and climate action and transparency in the context of the Paris Agreement.
- **Environmental civil society:** integrated by the broadest group of actors, this tier of the initiative would be responsible for:
 - The circulation of the newsletter prepared by the Taskforce.
 - The continued dissemination of the basic materials on the iGST prepared by the Taskforce.
 - Participation in events organized by the epistemic community.

The previous timeline and its components are designed to enhance the possibilities of success of an iGST epistemic community in LAC. One of the factors that is most helpful for epistemic communities to be politically influential is their availability of support from actors located in different political, social, and transnational sites. Diffusion of the GST and iGST among these networks could widen its reach to more organizations and enlist the support of more organizations and networks.

Events such as conferences, roundtables, and seminars/webinars could provide technical and scientific knowledge for all the members of the epistemic community to benefit from and to apply in their particular agendas or to promote the work done by the member organizations in their respective contexts. These meetings should be aimed at being based on rigorous, usable, and accessible outputs for all kinds of organizations (transnational, local or grassroots) that translate the best available knowledge for its use by organizations in their particular national circumstances.

Besides enabling greater coherence through partaking and coproducing knowledge, these events could be useful for two further objectives. Firstly, they may serve the purpose of strengthening internal cohesion in the epistemic community and establishing similar technical standards, thematic priorities, and a common language. Additionally, they could be opportune moments to reinforce links between the organizations and other key actors outside civil society, such as climate researchers, communities of practice, grassroots activism, and politicians at various levels of involvement in climate decision making.

Workshops could be helpful to collaboratively develop finer analyses of the information contained in international climate reports or to elaborate on more specific data and necessary actions to address the particular groups of interest of each organization throughout the region. Additionally, they could be useful to gather elements and aspects of the domestic knowledge gap that require greater consideration in international climate reports. The epistemic community and Taskforce could channel these needs and concerns to the

relevant parties as feedback. Furthermore, they could constitute crucial criteria to develop the regional iGST outputs.

Another set of workshops could be oriented towards capacity-building and cohesion-building. Exchanging views, approaches, and capabilities could help member organizations develop a closer dynamic as an epistemic community and as a network. If some of them have more specialized technical personnel or direct experience on the ground, exchanging these would surely be useful to mutually inform their daily activities and provide new inputs for their work.

The tiered structure can also be a means for organizations at different levels to have more powerful channels through which to communicate their work, their message, and their publications or activities. Disseminating each organizations' efforts and outputs outside their usual circle of allies and partners will definitely be helpful to obtain feedback, to widen the audience each organization can reach, and to build a more regional outlook for climate civil society in Latin America. It could also reveal previously unknown complementarities, perspectives, and sources of information that reinforce organizations' activities and provide them with more reliable data and inputs.

Challenges and opportunities for climate civil society in LAC toward the iGST

Challenges:

- **Financial constraints:** the epistemic community must consider the difficulties detected in the initial assessment and how climate organizations throughout the region face different conditions to obtain financial resources to operate and develop their projects, particularly in the changing economic and political environment as national governments target post-pandemic recovery over other issues. The activities planned in the following months have to be mindful of and sensitive to these constraints and how they affect each climate organization's ability to get involved in the community as a whole.
- **Human constraints:** the assessment also showed how many organizations find themselves in complex situations in terms of their ability to develop their everyday activities and participate in national and transnational initiatives simultaneously. For some of them, involvement in the iGST would represent a greater challenge and demand further efforts from already thinning human resources. Others also reported to lack the technical or administrative capacities to transform information coming from international reports into usable materials for their everyday activities. The epistemic community must bear this in mind as it plans ahead.
- **Tensions arising from the organizational structure:** the three-tiered structure proposed here could cause certain friction between the members of the iGST initiative related to which organizations belong in the Taskforce and which do not. The criteria and justification for membership in the Taskforce should be clear and transparent from the beginning, always stressing the flexibility, openness, and bottom-up nature of the process to prevent unwanted hostility within the iGST regional community.

- **How to ensure continued involvement:** considering the financial and human constraints mentioned above, members of the three tiers proposed here should be cautious that the activities and events planned for the following months remain relevant, pertinent, and useful for the environmental civil society, epistemic community, and taskforce to be continuously involved. If the epistemic community is to be effective toward the first iGST (2022) and Global Stocktake (2023), it needs to develop mid-term and long-term strategies that guarantee durable and inclusive involvement and interest from different kinds of organizations and climate groups.
- **How to prevent redundancies with other networks or initiatives:** a concern voiced various times throughout the consultation process conducted for our first assessment was how the iGST initiative would differ or add to the existing set of networks and collaborative ventures in LAC climate civil society. To this effect, the iGST epistemic community must find how to prevent the duplication of efforts through the close contact with members of other networks and, instead, search for complementarities and ways in which each other's work can be strengthened.

Opportunities:

- **Building an initiative through a bottom-up, participatory process:** the iGST epistemic community could distinguish itself as a mechanism of articulation of various levels of climate civil society in the region that considers their various capacities and agendas by incorporating them into a Latin American and Caribbean vision striving to influence international climate politics. Instead of a vertical, hierarchical model, the iGST in LAC could gather its strength from diversity, horizontality, and continuous participation to further climate goals regionally and globally. This experience could be exemplary for other processes and regional strategies.
- **A flexible organizational structure:** such as it is, the proposal explained in the paragraphs above sets up a three-tiered community for

the iGST in Latin America and the Caribbean that will be able to respond to emergent needs and situations according to the circumstances, while maintaining a clear goal of participating as fully as possible in the iGST and including as many perspectives, inputs, and contexts as the regional climate organizations that wish to participate in the mechanism. Membership in each level is not fixed or unchangeable, but adaptable to the needs, issues, and capacities of climate civil society in the region.

- **A reinforcing effect:** the epistemic community will produce relevant and pertinent activities and outputs that may support the iGST process as well as the organizations' everyday agendas. As Keck and Sikkink (1999) have suggested, national and local organizations become stronger domestically when they can count on transnational support; in turn, international regimes and agendas have greater influence and manage better compliance when they are closely linked to what happens "in the ground" and the needs and concerns of organizations dealing with the immediate effects of the issues of concern. The LAC epistemic community for the iGST can thus be a great tool to increase climate transparency and accountability from national governments by articulating technically informed and well-supported demands both from within each country and from the transnational community at large.

References

- Ashman, D. (2005). Supporting Civil Society Networks in International Development Programs. Washington, D. C. AED Center for Civil Society and Governance.
- Ashman, D. and Luca Sugawara, C. (2012). Civil Society Networks. Options for Network Design. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, 23 (3), 389-406.
- Cross, M. K. Davis (2013). Rethinking epistemic communities twenty years later. *Review of International Studies*, 39 (1), 137-160.
- Dunlop, C. A. (2016). Knowledge, epistemic communities, and agenda setting. In *Handbook of Public Policy Agenda-Setting*. Edward Elgar.
- Greenspan, I. *et al.* (2021), NGO Roles and Anticipated Outcomes in Environmental Participatory Processes: A Typology. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, online content: [ps://doi.org/10.1177/08997640211008989](https://doi.org/10.1177/08997640211008989)
- Haas, P. M. (1992). Banning chlorofluorocarbons: epistemic community efforts to protect stratospheric ozone. *International Organization*, 46 (1), 187-224.
- Holz, C. *et al.* (2019). "Equity in the Global Stocktake and Independent Global Stocktake," iGST Designing a Robust Stocktake Discussion Series. Berkeley, Boston, Ottawa: Climate Equity Reference Project.
- Keck, M., and Sikkink, K. (1999). Transnational advocacy networks in international and regional politics. *International Social Science Journal*, 51 (159), 89-101.
- Maliniak, D., Parajon, E., & Powers, R. (2020). Epistemic Communities and Public Support for the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. *Political Research Quarterly*, August, online content: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912920946400>
- Northrop, E., Dagnet, Y., Höhne, N., Thwaites, J., & Mogelgaard, K. (2018). Achieving the ambition of Paris: Designing the global Stocktake. World Resources Institute (WRI), Washington, DC.
- Ramalingam, B. (2006). Tools for Knowledge and Learning: A Guide for Development and Humanitarian Organizations. London, Overseas Development Institute.