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New Research Reveals Pathways for Action on Climate Change

Paper offers options to scale up climate action globally in Durban, Rio and beyond

WASHINGTON 24 October 2011 — Studies show that the world’s aggregate level of effort on climate change mitigation is not in line with the science and existing country commitments are insufficient to adequately address climate change. A new paper published by the [World Resources Institute](#) (WRI) and the [United Nations Environment Programme](#) (UNEP), with the support of the Government of Ireland, entitled *[Building the Climate Change Regime: Survey and Analysis of Approaches](#)*, reviews more than 130 proposals put forward by governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and academics to design a climate regime capable of delivering adequate mitigation action.

The findings are crucial and timely because in less than a month countries will gather in Durban, South Africa, to try to reach agreement on an ambitious programme for tackling climate change. The report shows that there are far more options to counter climate change than acknowledged or promoted.

“The analysis provided in this new report offers many options that can happen either in the formal negotiations or as complementary measures elsewhere,” said [Achim Steiner](#), UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UNEP. “Options that can assist the more than 190 United Nations member states move quickly to harvest the opportunities of a transition to a climate resilient, low carbon, resource efficient Green Economy,” he added.

Building the Climate Change Regime clearly shows that there is a path forward for climate negotiators and offers a menu of options to national governments to mitigate climate change, both within and outside the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The report, which suggests that there are a number of pathways toward the desired level of ambition, also highlights the need to mobilize a range of public and private sector actors at the international, national and sub-national levels, who can contribute to climate governance, emission reductions, and adaptation investment.

“We know that more needs to be done globally to reach our long-term climate objectives. The reality is that there is no shortage of options and these proposals show the wealth of pathways available,” said [Manish Bapna](#), Interim President of WRI. “At the upcoming climate meeting in Durban, countries have the opportunity to turn these ideas into action and start to bridge the ambition gap needed to truly have an impact.”

“The publication of the paper is very timely. It presents real options for addressing difficult political issues that still remain to be resolved in the international negotiations, not least in relation to the legal form of a future international agreement, the timeframe for agreement, and the need to increase the level

of ambition on mitigation action”, said [Phil Hogan](#), Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, Ireland.

The report breaks down proposals into five key issues that have been major points of debate:

1. **Options under the UNFCCC to Increase Ambition:** Within the UNFCCC, new approaches could involve reducing the emissions of additional greenhouse gases, including additional sectors, and strengthening accounting rules for emissions and emission reductions. Utilizing tools within the UNFCCC can be beneficial because they minimize duplication and implementation costs while facilitating trust-building. However, other complementary options should also be considered.
2. **Options outside the UNFCCC to Increase Ambition:** Beyond the UNFCCC process, approaches include multilateral, plurilateral, bilateral and domestic strategies. These approaches offer prospects to mobilize actors around shared interests like development, trade, human rights, energy or food security. While these new strategies can generate greater ambition, one disadvantage of following approaches outside the UNFCCC is a risk of undermining existing processes and creating inefficiencies.
3. **Means for Sharing the Mitigation Effort Under the UNFCCC:** Various proposals could be used to allocate responsibility to bridge the gap between the current level of effort and scientific recommendations. Possible approaches include dividing mitigation efforts based on countries’ capacity or based on countries’ contribution to the problem. Setting a global carbon budget would help ensure that the climate regime meets the adequacy standard, but it could be difficult to implement new allocations for emission obligations.
4. **The Role of Various Actors in Tracking Country Performance on Mitigation:** Harmonized global accounting, reporting and verification standards are fundamental to progress. Two options are to use tools within the UNFCCC or outside the UNFCCC. Both options are discussed in detail.
5. **The Legal Form of a Future Climate Agreement:** The issue of legally binding commitments is central to the debates ahead of Durban. The paper presents multiple options for climate negotiators: to proceed without new, legally-binding commitments; to commit to achieving new legally-binding commitments immediately; or to strengthen the components of legal character over time to achieve new, legally-binding commitments as soon as possible.

An illustrative finding in the report is that it is possible to build upon existing UNFCCC processes to strengthen the climate regime and raise the overall level of ambition. For example, a review under the UNFCCC of aggregate progress towards the 2 degree goal could facilitate an increase in the ambition of countries’ commitments. The UNFCCC can also provide a strengthened institutional framework, possibly binding in nature, to anchor, coordinate and review the commitments of countries.

“Many institutions and actors can play a part in the broader climate regime,” said [Remi Moncel](#), Associate at WRI and one of the authors of the paper. “The proposals reviewed show that we can take an all-hands-on-deck approach where the UNFCCC and other actors work in tandem based on their respective strengths. We need to move the conversation from ‘we are not doing enough’ to ‘how can we do more collectively’, and these findings take us one step closer.”

Whilst a number of studies have demonstrated that the level of climate mitigation pledged to date is insufficient to limit temperature increases to 2 degrees C, this paper clearly demonstrates that there are a

range of good ideas and options available that could help correct the course and move toward a safer and more stable climate.

The paper is being launched at events in Washington, DC, and Dublin featuring key experts from WRI, UNEP, the Government of Ireland, and partners. To read the full report, visit: <http://www.wri.org/project/moving-unfccc-forward>.

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