


# Principles for Enhancing Earth System Governance and Sustainable Development Through Informality

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## ABSTRACT

Even though the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change introduced the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) framework as a novel mechanism for improving climate change governance and promoting sustainable development, some studies show that NDCs are still far from achieving the 2°C target. Non-state actors from the informal economy can potentially improve the implementation of the NDCs framework and Sustainable Development Goals framework as much of the urban population growth occurring in developing nations is taking place in slums/informal settlements. This paper is therefore an inductive inquiry to address knowledge gaps on how non-state actors can augment Earth System Governance and NDC implementation in the context of Global South cities. The paper highlights that Earth System Governance and climate change adaptation may be improved by increasing the use of South-South Climate Finance mechanisms in urban adaptation programmes and to facilitate institutional reforms that can lead to substantial increases in domestic tax collection.

## KEYWORDS

Environmental Governance, Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), South-South Climate Finance, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Urbanisation

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Climate change is a global development and global governance challenge as it is a collective action problem whose remedy is beyond the reach of any singular actor or country (Brechin, 2016). Furthermore, improving climate change governance has

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proven to be challenging due to the long time-scale over which the changes occur, the possible need for action well before the magnitude (and certainty) of the impacts is clear, the intrinsic global scale of climate change, and that action at the regional scale has limited prospects for ameliorating regional-scale impacts (Field et al., 2007). With respect to global development, climate change impacts have been shown to have the potential to make the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) unattainable in certain regions of the world by reinforcing inequalities and poverty and/or creating new forms of inequality and poverty (Nagoda, 2015; Wong, 2016). Additionally, recovery from climatic shocks is often slow and more so slower for the poor than for the non-poor. Reference can be made to the cases of Ethiopia and Tanzania where studies have shown that after the 1984 - 85 famine in Ethiopia, rural households took ten years, on average, to rebuild livestock holdings to the levels existing before the famine, and households affected by drought in Ethiopia and the United Republic of Tanzania had lower incomes than unaffected households even ten years later (FAO, 2015; Hallegatte et al., 2016). Consequently, it might be argued that efforts to alleviate poverty and promote sustainable development could prove to be futile if the global development and climate change governance architecture does not provide new innovations and policies that can reduce climate change vulnerability.

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) introduced the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) framework as a novel mechanism for improving climate change governance and promoting sustainable development (Levin et al., 2015; Mbeva et al., 2015). Through NDCs, both developed and developing countries are anticipated to state their ambitious climate change mitigation, adaptation and financing commitments in a bid to ensure that global temperatures reach the goals in the Paris Agreement and the global goal to limit temperature increase to 2°C above pre-industrial levels (Hood et al., 2015). However, the NDCs are still far from achieving a collective plan to keep the global temperature increase to well below 2°C and as such the world is also at risk of being caught in a cycle of low and uneven growth and, with it, of failing to reach the SDGs to eliminate poverty and provide a better life for all (Bak et al., 2017). Moreover, another drawback in the climate change policy domain is that many climate change policies emphasise the management of climate induced physical hazards such as floods, droughts and storms with little consideration of other factors that increase climate risk such as poverty rates, demographic characteristics, and governance structures (Barrett, 2014). Consequently, the Earth System Governance Project suggested that creating a climate compatible inclusive future will require the development of policies and development models that promote substantial transformations of existing socio-economic practices within today's societies in-order to eliminate the prioritisation of dominant economic and political interests (Boyd et al., 2014).

Some current research on climate change governance and environmental resources governance in the Global South include van Asselt (2016) who looked at the roles that non-state actors can play in improving the implementation of the Paris Agreement. Van Asselt (2016) concluded that regardless of many

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