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## **Submission on the Work Programme of the High-Level Champions and the Marrakech Partnership (CHLC/MP) 2025 and the Global Climate Action Agenda**

**South Centre**

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### **Introduction**

After the first Global Stocktake (GST) identified a significant and concerning gap in implementation, the next five-year phase of the Global Climate Action Agenda (GCAA) must undergo a strategic shift. It needs to become an active advocate for essential systemic reforms that are necessary for a fair and effective global just transition. The GCAA's success will depend on its ability to remove the structural obstacles blocking progress toward the Paris Agreement's goals, all while respecting international human rights law and the core principle of equity and global justice.

Led by the High-Level Champions, the GCAA is uniquely equipped to connect the formal commitments of Parties, such as their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), with real-world actions taken by cities, regions, businesses, and civil society. However, this potential can only be unlocked if the GCAA's framework is rooted in the principles of climate justice.

The South Centre seizes this opportunity to offer comments on legal and political frameworks from the perspective of the Global South, redefining climate action not as a policy choice but as a legally binding obligation under international human rights law. It emphasises the importance of the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC). The document also provides a strategic vision for the GCAA's future, focusing on defining success, promoting meaningful participation, ensuring genuine inclusivity and enhancing accountability.

### **What should success look like for the GCAA in the next five years, and how can it be measured effectively?**

The conventional approach of the GCAA has implicitly measured success by the number of non-party stakeholders (NPS) pledges and their combined potential for greenhouse gas reduction. From a justice-focused perspective, this is an incomplete and misleading measure. Climate action that

worsens poverty, increases inequality, or breaches fundamental human rights is both unsustainable and deeply unjust. Success cannot be separated from its developmental effects or its compliance with international law. Therefore, real success for the GCAA in its upcoming five-year term must be redefined. It should be judged by how effectively it enables climate actions that actively support and promote the inalienable Right to Development for nations in the Global South. This demands a shift in focus from simply collecting voluntary pledges to thoroughly evaluating the impact and fairness of these efforts.

A successful GCAA should promote a global transition that creates decent jobs, guarantees universal energy access, safeguards the sovereign policy space of developing nations, and actively reverses, rather than deepens, historical and structural inequalities. For achieving this objective, the GCAA must adopt and integrate a new suite of indicators into its primary reporting and tracking instruments, most notably the [Yearbook of Global Climate Action and the Global Climate Action Portal \(the Yearbook\)](#).<sup>8</sup> These metrics must be designed to track tangible progress in dismantling the systemic barriers that obstruct a just transition.

A justice-focused measurement framework could incorporate several essential metrics. For example, a **Financial Justice Metric** would evaluate the capitalisation of the Loss and Damage Fund by comparing it not to the initial, modest pledges of about \$700 million,<sup>1</sup> but as a fraction of the scientifically estimated needs of developing countries, which run into trillions of dollars annually.<sup>2</sup> This approach shifts the Fund's role to a matter of legal "reparation for the damage caused" by an internationally wrongful act -an increasingly recognised principle- rather than viewing it as only aid or solidarity.<sup>3</sup>

Likewise, a **Resource Justice Metric** could be designed to track the establishment and implementation of international governance frameworks for critical energy transition minerals. These frameworks must mandate human rights due diligence, local value addition, and the just sharing of benefits to prevent the onset of a new wave of "green extractives" that replicates colonial economic patterns.<sup>4</sup> It should also consider a **Policy Space Metric** that tracks the number of international investment agreements containing Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) clauses that have been terminated or substantively reformed by Parties to be able to take climate action without the threat of unwarranted investors' claims. This would provide a direct measure of progress in dismantling the "regulatory chill" that systematically deters ambitious and necessary climate action by sovereign states.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 'In an Era of Climate Extremes, Loss and Damage Finance Is a Must, Secretary-General Tells Baku Launch Event' in <https://press.un.org/en/2024/sgsm22448.doc.htm> accessed 17 August 2025.

<sup>2</sup> South Centre, 'Submission to the Expert Mechanism on the Right to Development on Climate Justice' (February 2025) [https://www.southcentre.int/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Submission-to-the-Expert-Mechanism-on-the-Right-to-Development-on-Climate-Justice\\_South-Centre.pdf](https://www.southcentre.int/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Submission-to-the-Expert-Mechanism-on-the-Right-to-Development-on-Climate-Justice_South-Centre.pdf) accessed 17 August 2025.

<sup>3</sup> Lukas Schaugg, Natalie Jones and Jeffrey Qi, 'Historic International Court of Justice Opinion Confirms States' Climate Obligations' (International Institute for Sustainable Development, 28 July 2025) <https://www.iisd.org/articles/deep-dive/icj-advisory-opinion-climate-change> accessed 17 August 2025.

<sup>4</sup> South Centre, 2025, op. cit.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

This shift in measurement is necessitated by a fundamental misalignment between the GCAA's current operational model and the evolving legal reality of climate change. The GCAA and the Marrakech Partnership were designed to "enable collaboration" and "support implementation" of primarily voluntary actions by NPS, framing climate action as a cooperative endeavor.<sup>4</sup> However, recent developments in international jurisprudence point toward a "hardening of State obligations," where climate action is increasingly understood as a non-discretionary, legal duty of "stringent due diligence" to protect human rights.<sup>3</sup> This creates a profound strategic contradiction: the GCAA's primary tool is encouragement, while the legal reality for states should be one of binding obligations. A state cannot simply *encourage* a non-Party stakeholder to act if its inaction causes the state to breach its international legal duties. Consequently, a successful GCAA cannot remain a passive platform for showcasing voluntary actions. It must become an active instrument that helps states meet their binding obligations by addressing the systemic barriers—such as unbalanced investment regimes and inadequate finance—that prevent them and their domestic actors from complying with international law. The proposed metrics directly addresses this strategic misalignment by focusing on the removal of these barriers as the accurate measure of success.

**How can the GCAA facilitate direct and impactful engagement between Parties and NPS to support implementation efforts at both national and sectoral levels, in order to advance the full delivery of the GST, NDCs, and NAPs?**

To enable direct and meaningful engagement between Parties and NPS, the GCAA must first recognise and actively address the significant power imbalances that shape the current landscape. The GCAA's approach to multi-stakeholder engagement often assumes a level playing field.<sup>6</sup> In reality, NPS from the Global North, usually transnational corporations, hold disproportionate influence through advanced lobbying strategies that frequently undermine climate policy<sup>7</sup> and the persistent threat of ISDS litigation that dampens regulatory ambition.<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, NPS from the Global South, including local communities and civil society organisations, face considerable structural barriers to genuine participation, such as severe capacity limitations and chronic financial constraints.<sup>9</sup>

The High-Level Champions should act as a catalyst for shifting power dynamics, which involves establishing structured mechanisms that elevate and highlight the voices of Southern NPS. A vital move is to champion specific funding sources, like the Green Climate Fund or the Adaptation Fund, to ensure direct financial backing for the participation of developing country stakeholders in the

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<sup>6</sup> Ministère de la Transition écologique et solidaire, *Global Climate Action Agenda: A Tool at the Service of the Paris Agreement* (November 2019) [https://www.ecologie.gouv.fr/sites/default/files/documents/19041\\_RULE%20BOOK\\_AgendaAction-guide\\_GB\\_def\\_print.pdf](https://www.ecologie.gouv.fr/sites/default/files/documents/19041_RULE%20BOOK_AgendaAction-guide_GB_def_print.pdf) accessed 17 August 2025.

<sup>7</sup> Nina Lakhani, 'UN Expert Urges Criminalizing Fossil Fuel Disinformation, Banning Lobbying' *The Guardian* (30 June 2025) <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/jun/30/un-expert-urges-criminalizing-fossil-fuel-disinformation-banning-lobbying> accessed 17 August 2025.

<sup>8</sup> South Centre, 2025.

<sup>9</sup> NDC Partnership, 'Whole-of-Society Approaches to Inclusive Stakeholder Engagement: Best Practice Brief' (NDC Partnership, March 2024) <https://ndcpartnership.org/sites/default/files/2024-03/whole-society-approaches-inclusive-stakeholder-engagement-best-practice-brief.pdf> accessed 17 August 2025.

UNFCCC process and GCAA initiatives. Additionally, the GCAA should utilise its prominent position to reveal and oppose negative corporate lobbying, promoting transparency including making evidence available on how some actors may hinder the climate objectives they otherwise publicly endorse.

Similarly, the GCAA should serve as a mechanism for translating the high-level outcomes of the GST into tangible, on-the-ground action at national and sectoral levels, thereby supporting the full and ambitious implementation of NDCs and NAPs. The [Marrakech Partnership's sectoral pathways](#), covering areas such as Energy, Transport, and Land Use, are the key instruments for achieving this coherence. However, for this to be effective, the GCAA must ensure these pathways are not treated only as purely technical roadmaps for decarbonization but are explicitly designed and implemented through a justice lens.

For example, when engaging in the energy sector, the GCAA must not only support the adoption of renewable energy technologies but also actively promote discussions on establishing new global governance frameworks for critical minerals essential to these technologies. These frameworks should prioritise local value addition, prevent human rights violations within supply chains, and ensure fair sharing of benefits, especially with Indigenous Peoples and local communities in the Global South. Likewise, in respect of agriculture and land use, engagement should be closely aligned with national NAP processes and explicitly aim to empower smallholder farmers and Indigenous communities, whose traditional knowledge is a crucial yet often overlooked resource for adaptation and resilience.<sup>10</sup>

### **How can the GCAA promote an inclusive and equitable engagement, in particular from underrepresented groups and regions?**

To achieve truly inclusive and equitable engagement, the GCAA must actively promote the systematic incorporation of human rights principles and safeguards into every climate action and financing mechanism it endorses.<sup>11</sup> This should not be seen as an optional extra but as an essential, non-negotiable standard, recognising that climate change fundamentally represents a human rights issue.<sup>12</sup> This involves ensuring that all initiatives endorsed by the GCAA, and the projects supported by major climate funds meet rigorous standards for public participation, transparency, and access to remedies. This will require, inter alia, safeguarding the right of Indigenous Peoples to Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC), guaranteeing they are not just consulted but are genuinely empowered as decision-makers regarding their lands, resources, and cultural heritage.<sup>13</sup>

The GCAA should promote inclusivity by using its influential political position to support, fund, and emphasise the work of existing UNFCCC platforms focused on equity, instead of creating new structures. A primary goal should be actively promoting the [Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform](#) (LCIPP), which facilitates knowledge sharing, capacity building, and the

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<sup>10</sup> See for example FAO and UNDP, *Integrating Agriculture in National Adaptation Plans: Uruguay Case Study* (FAO 2017).

<sup>11</sup> South Centre, 2025, op. Cit.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

incorporation of Indigenous and local knowledge into policy. The High-Level Champions could ensure that outcomes from LCIPP discussions, such as those on integrating Indigenous knowledge into NDCs, are directly reflected in the GCAA's sectoral workstreams and high-level events.

Similarly, the GCAA must advocate for the strong implementation and sufficient resourcing of the upcoming 10-year [Gender Action Plan \(GAP\)](#), planned for development in 2025. This involves ensuring GCAA initiatives are gender-responsive, actively encouraging women's leadership in climate decision-making, and supporting the collection of sex-disaggregated data—crucial for designing just transition policies that address gender-specific impacts. True inclusivity, however, requires more than merely supporting these platforms; it calls for the GCAA to adopt and promote an intersectional approach. Climate change disproportionately affects the developing world, and within these nations, certain groups face layered vulnerabilities stemming from overlapping modes of discrimination.

**What improvements can be made to ensure better transparency, reporting and follow up of the GCAA, including in existing tools such as the Global Climate Action Portal (a.k.a NAZCA) and the Yearbook of Global Climate Action?**

Improvements in transparency and reporting must start with a revision of the GCAA's current tools. Currently, the [Global Climate Action Portal](#) (formerly NAZCA) and the Yearbook of Global Climate Action mainly serve as platforms for voluntary commitments. Certain limitations weaken their role as accountability tools, including significant data gaps, particularly from the Global South, varying metrics that hinder comparisons, the risk of double-counting actions, and almost no independent verification of pledges.<sup>14</sup>

The GCAA should lead the development of these tools from mere showcases into comprehensive accountability mechanisms, including the metrics previously mentioned. The Portal should provide an accurate overview of contributions while exposing policy inconsistencies, such as corporate lobbying efforts opposing climate action, and identifying companies that, despite making net-zero commitments, pursue multi-billion-dollar ISDS claims against governments over climate policies.<sup>15</sup> The Yearbook should also evaluate whether corporate and subnational pledges align with the 1.5°C target and human rights principles, while also highlighting accountability deficiencies and greenwashing practices.

The GCAA's mandate to mobilise "stronger and more ambitious climate action" from NPS and Parties is directly and systemically undermined by the international investment regime.<sup>16</sup> The ISDS system creates, as noted above, a "regulatory chill" that actively deters governments from enacting

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<sup>14</sup> Laura Mai and Joshua Philipp Elsässer, 'Orchestrating Global Climate Governance Through Data: The UNFCCC Secretariat and the Global Climate Action Platform' (2022) 22 *Global Environmental Politics* 151.

<sup>15</sup> South Centre, 2025.

<sup>16</sup> South Centre, 'Statement at the Expert Conversation on Human Rights in the Life Cycle of Renewable Energy and Critical Minerals', 21 May 2025 in [https://www.southcentre.int/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/SC-Statement\\_Expert-Conversation-on-HRs-in-Renewable-Energy-and-Critical-Minerals\\_21-May-2025.pdf](https://www.southcentre.int/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/SC-Statement_Expert-Conversation-on-HRs-in-Renewable-Energy-and-Critical-Minerals_21-May-2025.pdf) accessed 17 August 2025.

the very ambitious climate policies the GCAA seeks to promote.<sup>17</sup> Evidence shows that governments have been forced to weaken or delay climate policies due to the threat of billion-dollar lawsuits from fossil fuel corporations.<sup>18</sup>

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

To meet the post-Global Stocktake goal of accelerating implementation, the Global Climate Action Agenda (GCAA) needs to realign its framework. Its current focus on voluntary action no longer matches the shifting international legal environment, where climate measures are increasingly becoming binding under human rights law, for example. For the GCAA to remain effective, it must evolve from a platform that highlights commitments into an active tool for systemic change. This transformation should aim to dismantle structural obstacles, such as punitive investment policies, insufficient funding, and power disparities, that hinder a fair global transition.

This strategic shift calls for a clear policy agenda that redefines what success means, promotes fair participation, guarantees true inclusivity, and boosts accountability. A key step is to rethink success not just as collecting voluntary commitments but as assessing their fairness and developmental impact, especially for the Global South. This involves incorporating justice-centred metrics into reporting tools like the Yearbook of Global Climate Action to evaluate financial fairness, resource management, and policy influence.

Such a new approach must include stakeholder participation in a manner that it actively tackles power differences by elevating voices from the Global South and resisting harmful corporate lobbying. Additionally, the GCAA should require the systematic inclusion of human rights principles such as Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC), and strengthen existing platforms like the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform (LCIPP) and the Gender Action Plan (GAP). To make these reforms meaningful, the GCAA must enhance transparency and accountability by transforming its reporting from mere displays into effective mechanisms that reveal policy inconsistencies and greenwashing, and that independently verify commitments against the 1.5°C goal and human rights standards.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> International Institute for Sustainable Development, Center for International Environmental Law and ClientEarth, 'Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) Mechanisms and the Right to a Clean, Healthy, and Sustainable Environment' (Joint Submission to the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment, June 2023) <https://www.iisd.org/publications/brief/iisd-ciel-clientearth-isds-sustainable-environment-submission-2023> accessed 17 August 2025.