

Domesticating International Environmental Negotiations

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"For the most part, we have analyzed, debated, discussed, and negotiated these issues endlessly. My generation is a generation, I fear, of great talkers, overly fond of conferences. On action however, we have fallen far short." —James Gustave Speth

Introduction

International environmental negotiations have proved largely ineffective in recent times, as demonstrated most acutely but not exclusively by the poor record held by the United Nations' annual climate change negotiations. Underfunded, undervalued, and unwieldy, international conference after conference has failed to effectively advance the massive social, economic, and political changes necessary to confront critical environmental problems.

This continual string of failures is due in large part to the inadequate framing of these serious, often complex, but nonetheless manageable issues. Historically, environmental issues have been an afterthought except in times of environmental catastrophe or resource crisis. Environmental concerns that result from widespread, incremental, cumulative actions and sources simply do not garner the "all hands on deck" mentality that catalyzes effective and immediate collective response.

Furthermore, the international geopolitical environment consists of states seeking to advance their domestic agendas, so it is very difficult to create a meaningful, binding, top-down international agreement. Domestic policies and national self-interest frequently trump international efforts—and this pattern is especially prevalent in negotiations involving environmental issues since, in many respects, environmental policy is the last political arena in which countries can take a stand and assert their sovereignty without facing any substantive repercussions other than unpopularity.

Case Study: Climate Change Negotiations

Climate change is the ultimate environmental issue and the ultimate incremental, cumulative problem. Due to its serious implications, states have agreed to meet annually in an attempt to address the issue. However, the myriad consequences of climate change, coupled with innumerable political, economic, and social concerns, have resulted in the negative framing of these negotiations—talks focus primarily on what countries are *not* doing.

East or west, north or south, small island state or world power, no state is immune from attacks on its capacity, its domestic politics, and its negotiating stances. Common arguments against developed countries are that they are noncommittal,

selfish, not making the deep emissions cuts and societal transformations necessary, and are reneging on pledges of financial support and technology transfers to developing nations. Meanwhile, developing nations are portrayed as unwilling to agree to strict carbon caps or low-carbon development paths, or are vilified for failing to adequately address related issues of corruption, human rights, and property rights. These countries are also typically attacked for making unrealistic demands.

The negative focus of climate change negotiations can also be attributed to the fact that current negotiations are designed to enforce consensus (top-down), rather than secure it (bottom-up). Yet, a bottom-up approach is necessary because climate change is inextricably linked not only to the continuation, development, and functionality of societal systems, but to life itself. Carbon dioxide is the ubiquitous, nontoxic by-product of creating energy; that is, life. Treating it solely through a regime of pollution control, as has been attempted, is inadequate and does not fully respect just how dependent human systems are on processes that create carbon dioxide.

The top-down approach to reaching international agreement has also given rise to two popular if unproductive tactics: "appeals" and "name and shame." Neither has proved very useful in achieving collective action. Nations, like individuals, may respond to an appeal with action, but often there is some level of resentment. Actions taken in such circumstances may not be the best, because they are motivated by wanting to stop the appeal—not solve the problem. Under an appeal paradigm, frequently seen at the climate change talks, rhetoric reigns supreme. The shame approach has its own drawback: it brings a negative element into the negotiations much too soon. Pointing fingers at nations without comprehensive climate change policies as "in the wrong" is useless when the true goal is to create a collective international agreement. This tactic also ignores the reality that actions to address climate change can, have, and will take place absent of an international agreement or national-level plans. Simply put, poor framing coupled with poor tactical paradigms do not elicit positive responses from states.

As stated above, environmental policy may be one of the last arenas in which countries can assert their sovereignty and reject negotiations without facing serious political setbacks. The standard mea culpa of "domestic policy" is circular. Nations cannot agree to binding international environmental agreements if: 1) they are not in line with existing domestic laws and policies and/or 2) they require the creation of new domestic legislation. This pro status quo stance highlights how negotiations, especially climate change negotiations, begin with delegates already locked into their respective domestic policy agendas. Delegates do not so much negotiate at these "negotiations," but rather state their agendas, highlight the incompatibility of certain proposals with them, and reiterate their recalcitrance in adopting or agreeing to anything that deviates from their predetermined agendas. The resulting discord at all levels of negotiations on the part of all parties, and the growing

dissatisfaction and disillusionment in global society, necessitates a complete reframing of how to address climate change.

Reframing Environmental Negotiations

Environmental issues, in particular climate change, must be framed not as a top-down, pollution control agreement that hinges solely on negotiations, but rather as a bottom-up, capacity-building forum that relies heavily on determining and promoting actions that are already taking place. Shifting the focus from what needs to be done (negative) to what is actually being done (positive) will promote international inclusiveness in addressing these issues; foster cooperation, communication, and capacity building; and hopefully spur innovation and a healthy form of competitiveness (Zarsky 2004). Transforming the framing and structure of climate change negotiations will transform the interaction among states (Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff 2001) and ultimately among all actors involved in addressing climate issues. This can be achieved by replacing the current, stagnant, contentious negotiation process with a forward-looking, domestically driven, action-oriented, "low-carbon forum" that will directly and comprehensively address the two key elements underlying all current and future environmental and societal issues: sustainable development and climate change.

The Low-Carbon Forum

The Low-Carbon Forum is a distinct process that should supplement the current UN climate change negotiation process (UN Framework Convention on Climate Change 2010). The forum would create a positive, action-oriented environment that would facilitate the reporting and exchange of information, achievements, technologies, and methodologies for promoting the evolution and adoption of low-carbon, sustainable development measures that also address climate change. Solidly coupling sustainable development with climate change will significantly alter the disparate framing of these two issues and shift them into the realm of promoting progress and away from that of mitigating problems. Reframing that highlights the inextricable links between these issues will also go a long way toward bridging the north-south divide (Najam 2005), a divide fixated on the perceived tradeoff between development and the environment.

To report and exchange information at the Low-Carbon Forum, states will need to determine and inventory what measures are currently under way. States will therefore need to carry out an in-country "actionable audit." The auditing process and its effects are described in depth below.

While the auditing process and subsequent reporting of the audit's findings will be beneficial, they will not alone fulfill the goal of the forum, which is to move states toward comprehensive and cohesive action. Using the actionable audits as a foundation, the Low-Carbon Forum would create a space in which states can freely negotiate and bargain, not only on goals, but on specific measures, areas, or projects

that they believe will be beneficial to their domestic and foreign policy agendas. The forum will thus promote the creation of targeted bilateral, multilateral, and regional side agreements to be determined and carried out by the states themselves. It is well known that the majority of negotiations between parties are conducted prior to the actual conference as well as between events and during the social periods of the conference. It is expected that parties will behave in a similar manner during the Low-Carbon Forum, with the added benefit that the forum will provide additional avenues and opportunities for collaboration due to its more open, action-oriented, and progressive design.

One prerequisite is that state delegates in attendance be equals in terms of their power to negotiate and enter into agreements. Creating a process in which diplomatic equals can freely choose to negotiate and form relationships on specific actionable points that they find beneficial and complementary to their domestic agendas will go a very long way toward breaking down the walls that have built up at climate change talks and other environmental negotiations over the years. The Low-Carbon Forum will spur cooperation instead of condemnation, innovation instead of intransigence, and competitiveness instead of conflict.

The Low-Carbon Forum in no way precludes other international agreements, conventions, or regimes—including other agreements and mechanisms focused on sustainable development and climate change, such as: the Cancun Agreements, the Kyoto Protocol, and the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM). Additionally, it does not preclude any other forms of agreements or domestic policy. The main goal of the forum is to reframe issues of climate change and development through a lens that is realistic, manageable, actionable, and focused on the present and near future.

Coupling Low-Carbon Sustainable Development with Climate Change

Coupling low-carbon sustainable development with climate change adaptation and mitigation measures and focusing on what efforts are currently under way to address these issues will break the impasse as well as reverse the backward trajectory of current international climate change negotiations. At this time, the overwhelming majority of states view measures to combat climate change (particularly reductions in greenhouse gas emissions) as counterproductive to economic growth, which is still viewed and practiced as dependent upon fossil fuel consumption. Again, by reframing the environmental issues as factors that stimulate rather than impede progress, and through the empirical evidence of successful projects highlighted in the actionable audits, the forum will enable states to move the discussion forward in a productive and results-centered manner.

By reinforcing the linkages between these truly inextricably linked issues, the forum will also ensure that all countries pursue sustainable development as highlighted in Article 2 of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) which

critically places sustainable development goals on all nations¹ (UNFCCC 1992). All too often, sustainable development is only equated with the development path of developing nations (Najam 2005). Yet, the key changes needed to address climate change—low-carbon “initial” development in developing nations and low-carbon “redevelopment” in developed nations—are basically the same. Both north and south must evolve their societies beyond antiquated, status quo, environmentally destructive, heavily carbon-intensive development patterns and practices.

Actionable Audits

In order to participate in the Low-Carbon Forum, each state will have to conduct an internal “actionable audit” designed to assess what actions are currently taking place within that state’s borders that advance clean development, reduce carbon emissions and reliance upon fossil fuels, and make existing infrastructure sustainable—that is, actions that are able to provide for societal needs and economic productivity while simultaneously protecting the natural systems that life depends upon. The collection and identification of these actions will also show areas where efforts are taking place, can be advanced further, or are needed. Thus, through the primary goal of showcasing accomplishments, audits will secondarily highlight areas where action can occur and/or continue.

It is important to emphasize that the achievements in the actionable audit are by no means only those that are carried out by the national government. Adequate assessment will involve all levels and sectors of society. This way, key actors will be identified regardless of what sector they belong to. A successful project is a successful project whether it is crafted and carried out by a nongovernmental organization (NGO), a small business, a university, a corporation, a community group, a municipality, or a sub-national branch of government. It is imperative that comprehensive stakeholder involvement occurs throughout the auditing process.

Initially, states themselves will determine the content and focus of the actionable audits. Since many countries already track greenhouse gas emissions reductions (UNFCCC “National Reports” 2010), it is expected that these reductions and the activities associated with achieving them will be almost universally included in the audits. However, the Low-Carbon Forum will function at a much higher level if countries truly attempt to go further. The goal of the forum is to promote and share actions that are currently under way or are “in the pipeline,” advancing the evolution of current societal systems into those that are sustainable, have no or low-carbon intensity, and take steps toward better aligning and integrating human-

¹ Article 2. *Objective*. “The ultimate objective of this Convention and any related legal instruments that the Conference of the Parties may adopt is to achieve, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Convention, stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system. Such a level should be achieved within a time frame sufficient to allow ecosystems to adapt naturally to climate change, to ensure that food production is not threatened and to enable economic development to proceed in a sustainable manner.” (UNFCCC 1992)

created systems with natural ones. The symbiotic nature of sustainable development and climate change actions must be reflected in the audit. Ultimately, this will benefit states in a number of ways, since many more actions fall under this dual focus. No doubt, the state may feel a sense of pressure to identify as many projects as possible in an attempt to gain some unspoken political clout that its own collective domestic policy is leading the world. This competitive desire will also encourage states to begin exploring the linkages between different environmental issues, actors, policies, and projects. A very positive result of such actions would be a more comprehensive actionable audit and the beginnings of a more holistic socio-political outlook.

Locating key actors and effective projects and programs will have a holistic and "horizontalizing" effect, in that it will show where progress is being made at all levels and sectors of society. "State efforts" will include efforts made by state and non-state actors. As long as these efforts occur within its territory, a state can and should be able to share domestic achievements and actions regardless of who carries them out. For example, a successful emissions reduction program developed and carried out by a city will have the same clout as a similar program carried out by a corporation. It is hoped that this process will help identify areas in which "siloeing" has resulted in loopholes, missed opportunities, inefficiency, and/or redundancy and will drive efforts to promote greater awareness, communication, and cooperation between actors and sectors.

In addition, actionable audits will increase general public awareness about what is being done to combat climate change and advance sustainable development—ultimately creating a healthier, more "livable" society, and one that is more closely aligned with natural systems. Reframing issues will shift the current discourse from one that is still disputing the existence of anthropogenic climate change and is fearful that any change will be detrimental to a nation's economy, to one that acknowledges the positive impacts of efforts currently under way. This changes the momentum and emphasizes policy choices that support and build upon success, broadening the acceptance of such changes.

Concern Over Gaming the Actionable Audits

Since states will be conducting and self-reporting these internal actionable audits, they could theoretically game the system. They could appear at the conference with false claims, adjusted data, or fabricated projects that would cast them in a politically more positive light. However, there are a number of built-in checks to this prospect.

First, no single state has a monopoly in sustainable development and climate change projects. In all societies, NGOs, citizen groups, the private sector, and other non-state actors play a role in addressing these issues. Environmental NGOs and citizen groups in particular are already serving as watchdogs. Therefore, the first opportunity to check the accuracy of the audit will arise before the forum even

occurs. If the state were to fabricate information, it would most likely show up in draft reports where watchdog groups in nations with public information and transparency laws could find and expose false claims. In addition, one of the goals for the audit is to foster better relations between sectors and break down silos. A state attempting to game the system will only hurt itself in the international and domestic arena.

Second, the information sharing portion of the forum will be transparent. A state's claims will be publicly available immediately. It will therefore be possible to identify any discrepancies in the audit instantly, bringing about a self-created "name-and-shame." With so many eyes watching, it simply will not make sense to fabricate domestic actions.

Third, as shall be discussed later as well, the forum will openly accept that some states simply do not have the capacity at this time to carry out the auditing process. This inability to perform sufficient and reliable international monitoring, reporting, and verification (MRV) is something that is expected to be addressed at initial forums—again as a challenge to be met positively, through fostering better, more open, complementary relations among states at different development levels.

The Role of Non-Governmental Actors

Under this new action-oriented, positive reinforcement paradigm, non-governmental actors play a fundamental role from the very beginning. Though negotiations and information will be shared at the state level, states will be advancing the most successful, revolutionary, and effective low-carbon, sustainable development projects, emissions reduction mechanisms, climate change adaptation and mitigation measures, and scientific advancements that are currently taking place within their borders. Therefore, though the forum is designed for state-level delegates, the work and results carried out and achieved by the public and private sector will be revealed, promoted, and accurately attributed. Again, both the actionable auditing process and the Low-Carbon Forum itself are intended to enable the continuation of successful projects and the development of new ones.

Framing these often distinct actions as a collective national response may have an endowment effect, increasing the value of these actions and actors since they now form the status quo of national policy and are a source of pride, achievement, and progress (Chollet and Goldgeier 2002). This endowment effect will serve to stimulate investment, interest, and momentum in addressing environmental issues and further boost recognition and appreciation for the actors already involved. A change in the status quo is greatly needed: achieving true sustainable development goals and combating climate change requires nothing less than a near total evolution in how society functions.

Domesticating International Policy, Internationalizing Domestic Policy

By focusing on the sustainable development–climate change actions occurring within a country cumulatively and collectively, the Low-Carbon Forum will essentially “create” a more comprehensive, multi-sector, holistic national policy. In this sense it will “internationalize” domestic policy; more local actions will come to the forefront internationally. In addition, the nature of the forum and its processes—the actionable audits; transparent and open reporting; encouragement of both unilateral and side agreements on adopting successful and implementable methods, technologies, and programs—will thoughtfully and deliberately aggregate *all* 192 countries’ domestic policies. This in turn “domesticates” international policy. Figure 1 illustrates this continual positive feedback mechanism between the two policy realms. This freer, noncommittal, nonbinding, self-interest-centric, action-oriented, results-based reframing creates space for countries to promote their own evolving domestic agendas and focus on what aspects of other state’s audits or policies would directly complement theirs. Carrying out the forum in this way ensures that no one nation’s domestic policy becomes global policy. Rather, international sustainable development and climate change policy will become an adaptable, comprehensive, and evolving amalgamation of all state policies, encompassing all aspects and sectors of society. Resulting international policy will therefore be simultaneously overarching and bottom-up. The forum is thus both reductionist and expansionist in terms of actionable policies and actors, with the states fulfilling the key role of mediator.

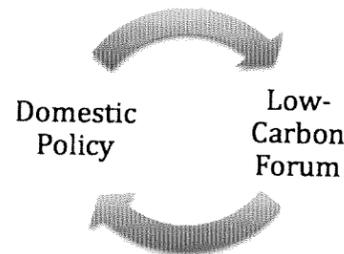


Figure 1. The Low-Carbon Forum will create a feedback loop both domesticating international policy and internationalizing domestic policy.

The forum will be an open, inclusive, international effort to share successful strategies, technologies, and achievements. By nature the forum is designed to be flexible and adaptive enough to shift and focus on the most recent actions and pressing problems in the field of sustainable development and climate change. Therefore, as international norms evolve, so too will the forum. The forum will also hopefully exert its own influence on the creation of international environmental norms and standards. As countries share information, resources, technology, achievements, and regulatory mechanisms, it will become easier to recognize shared norms and similar goals. Through cooperation and competition, all countries and societies stand to benefit. In addition, side agreements, capacity-building efforts, technology transfers, and “horizontalizing” key actors and sectors will establish a foundation that brings the norms, values, and goals of the international community closer together. This could eventually result in an internationally binding greenhouse gas emissions reduction regime, since domestic policies and positions

would become more and more similar globally. Again, the forum will not preclude such an international effort, since its very intent is to foster one.

Common Responsibility, Collective Action

In shifting the focus to what is actually being done by all 192 countries, the Low-Carbon Forum will create an environment of inclusiveness and a sense of collective action—something previous climate change negotiations have failed to do. In a way, this redefines the principle of “common, but differentiated responsibility.”

The forum’s focus on present and near-future actions within all countries puts a fine point on “common responsibility.” The innumerable actions being carried out by different levels of government, NGOs, the private sector, and citizens would not be taking place if those involved did not feel a sense of responsibility to address climate change and promote progressive sustainable development initiatives. Therefore, classic contentious arguments over a state’s lack of official domestic policy, the battles between the north and south over what exactly “differentiated” entails (Najam 2004), and ultimately how this principle applies to sustainable development and climate change will be avoided.

This is not to say that “differentiated” has been taken out of the equation. On the contrary, though the forum will focus heavily on action, it is assumed that different countries of different capacities will have a “differentiated” response. Again the goal of the forum and the actionable audits is to reframe the international process of dealing with sustainable development and climate change through recognizing the collective, positive actions that are currently under way globally as opposed to what separates countries and what other states think ought to be done.

It is important to note is that the while focusing primarily on “common responsibility,” the forum does not make light of the “differentiated” status of the 192 states. It is expected that at initial forums, capacity-building and administrative infrastructure development will be a major issue. Therefore, it is recommended that the forum take on an additional goal—the creation of international monitoring, reporting, and verification (MRV) standards. The MRV aspect of the Low-Carbon Forum and benefits attributable to developing MRV will be discussed in subsequent sections.

The Positive Results of the Low-Carbon Forum and Audits

As asserted throughout this proposal, the forum process and the task of carrying out the actionable audit will generate positive results. These results can be categorized as internal and external, with internal results representing domestic feedback and external results representing feedback at the international level generally or at the forum level specifically. Tables 1 and 2 list a number of possible positive internal and external results. Many of these results are detailed in previous sections. The following sections will elaborate on the remaining results.

Table 1. Internal Results**Positive Internal Results of the Low-Carbon Forum and Audits**

- Mainstreams outliers.
- Pinpoints areas of success and areas in need of improvement.
- Identifies key actors and sectors through stakeholder involvement.
- "Horizontalizes" actors and projects.
- Domesticates international policy.
- Creates an inventory of domestic efforts. Serves as a starting point for future efforts and policies. Strengthens current actions.
- Promotes public awareness, discourse, and action. Builds momentum.
- Places the holistic nature of society and the environment at the forefront. States use it as criteria to determine what projects are a priority (the most successful, useful, and implementable).

Mainstreaming the Outliers²

More often than not, non-governmental actors are leading efforts to address climate change and promote sustainable development (Hill 2010). For example, cities across the country joined those around the world in pledging to reduce carbon emissions (Malkin 2010), California passed landmark legislation and incorporated climate change components into existing regulations (California Natural Resources Agency 2009), and a block of Northeastern states has seen success with a regional cap and trade scheme (RGGI, 2010). At the federal agency level, sustainable development initiatives are being rolled into policies and projects at the Environmental Protection Agency (Anastas, 2010) and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (Sims, 2010). This is not to mention the enormous efforts under way by individuals, community groups, NGOs, and private industries, to transform our current fossil fuel-addicted society into one that supports and promotes healthier, more prosperous lives and a healthier, more robust environment (Hill, 2010). Yet, more often than not, these efforts fail to be recognized, especially at international-level negotiations that focus solely on national domestic policy efforts. In some cases, this oversight has led to real frustration on the part of subnational actors.

However, the failure of states to either create comprehensive national policy or reach consensus on an international agreement should not be justified as some form of perverse incentive to do nothing since sub-nationals, NGOs, and the private sector have so far taken up the slack. Actionable audits are designed to end the systematic overlooking of more "micro-scale" achievements and provide a full accounting of who the actors are and where they are working so that achievements and deficits can be identified. Perhaps some of these deficits exist because of a lack of a national

² What I've termed "Mainstreaming the Outliers," which is essentially recognizing and accounting for all efforts across all sectors to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, promote holistic environmental management, and initiate the transformation of, in this case American society, to one that is sustainable, innovative, and values a healthy environment and populace. This idea was heavily tracked at the December 3, 2010, conference, The EPA at 40: Protecting the Environment and Our Communities. For example, law professor Jody Freeman put forth the idea that, "If everything the federal agencies can do is added to state measures, then there is a significant amount of emissions reductions, perhaps reaching Waxman-Markey levels." (*Paraphrased from personal notes*) (Freeman 2010).

or international policy on sustainable development and climate change. Efforts put forth by these sectors will be further strengthened if they are recognized by nations they reside in, the international community, and by the global society. To conclude, the requisite auditing process for the Low-Carbon Forum can begin rectifying this problem of recognition and exclusion while creating momentum for project continuation, development, and innovation on the part of all actors.

Table 2. External Results**Positive External Results of the Low-Carbon Forum and Audits**

- Global inventory of actions currently under way.
- Transparency of forum encourages government accountability.
- Auditing sharing promotes cooperation, spurs innovation, encourages competition.
- Encourages a race to the top rather than a race to the bottom.
- Increases public awareness, promotes public participation and full stakeholder involvement.
- Internationalizes domestic policy.
- Highlights where effort is needed in terms of action; where capacity building is needed in terms of auditing (MRV).
- Development of international MRV standards.
- Fosters targeted MRV capacity building and infrastructure development.
- Results in bilateral, multilateral, and regional agreements (actions and MRV).

International MRV Standards

The development and adoption of internationally acceptable MRV standards will be an important component of initial Low-Carbon Forums. Currently there is a large disparity among states in their capacity to perform MRV activities in regards to development projects, accounting for carbon emissions produced, and determining carbon sinks, among others.

Discrepancies between countries in their capacity for carrying out MRV of carbon dioxide emissions have been a sticking point in climate change negotiations and related agreements such as the CDM and the proposed REDD+ regime (Herold, 2010). Using the forum as a way to develop an international set of MRV standards would go a long way toward improving and enhancing the effectiveness of existing programs and negotiating new ones. Internationally accepted MRV standards would in large part eliminate the distrust that exists between states in how to report and calculate actual emissions reductions. For instance, at Copenhagen, negotiations between China and the United States stalled over precisely this point, with neither country satisfied with the capability, transparency, or accuracy of the other's internal MRV processes and agencies (Wara, 2010; Hsu, 2009).

There will of course be countries that do not have the capacity to carry out accurate MRV of their in-country projects, do not have many projects to report due to limited capacity, or both. This should not dissuade these countries from attending the forum, attempting an actionable audit, or requesting MRV capacity-building assistance. It is these countries that are in fact poised to benefit the most, since the forum is designed to promote "common responsibilities" with the inherent understanding that "differentiated" is a pre-existing condition. The forum should

thus be used to facilitate aid and support MRV capacity development, build administrative infrastructure, and back and underwrite low-carbon initiatives. Because the forum will serve to highlight the actions being carried out within all sectors, the developing nations may have more opportunities and actors to work with. For instance, a country requiring intense MRV development and assistance may find a better partner in the private sector or with an NGO who is at the forefront of MRV technology and training, than with a state.

Widespread Applicability of MRV Standards

Establishing international MRV standards will have a positive effect on a nation's overall administrative capacity and its implementation of other multilateral environmental agreements and international agreements. Uniform international standards for MRV and expanded capacity will vastly improve the effectiveness of CDM and, as detailed previously, will make REDD+ achievable. Improving the effectiveness of north-south environmental and sustainable development mechanisms will greatly help to bridge the north-south divide. For instance, the proposed REDD+ is a north-south regime heavily reliant upon MRV data that is both comprehensive and accurate. Without accurate MRV data, such a large-scale inherently risky global investment makes developed countries nervous, slowing the flow of funds to developing nations for safeguarding forests, reducing national and global carbon emissions, and staying on a sustainable development path. Without clear and accurate MRV standards, REDD+ agreements and projects have the potential to be easily gamed and corrupted (Greenpeace 2010).

Improvements in MRV will have a spillover effect³ in other societal realms as well. Increased capacity, enforcement capability, and public involvement will improve the functionality of government and could lead to policies and practices that address corruption, land rights, education, and human rights to name a few.

Conclusion

The Low-Carbon Forum is a realistic and hopeful prescription. By completely reframing sustainable development, climate change, and the negotiation process, the forum breaks the impasse between the past and the future. This reframing is critical as it more accurately reflects reality and moves policy at all levels from one that is top-down and rhetorically charged to one that is driven from the bottom-up, action-oriented, and self-reinforcing. The top-down forms of international environmental negotiations have reached a point in which the power and influence

³ The conceptual definition of a "spillover effect" can be attributed to Ernst Haas and is prevalent in the work of other Neofunctionalists (Pfaltzgraff 2010, Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff 2001). Ideas on the "spillover effect" presented in this paper also tracked heavily at The EPA at 40: Protecting the Environment and Our Communities. Comments by panelists Paul Anastas (EPA), Jody Freeman (Harvard Law School), and Bob Perciasepe (EPA) either directly mentioned the "spillover effect," or referred more generally to integration and systems theory. (Anastas 2010, Freeman 2010, Perciasepe 2010).

of domestic policies not only dominate the negotiations, but trump them to the point of rendering them useless. Therefore, a process that domesticates international policy and internationalizes domestic policy through a feedback mechanism is imperative. Reframing and reprioritizing through a series of innovations—a positive, forward-looking Low-Carbon Forum; a domestic-based actionable auditing process that serves to highlight the holistic nature of environmental and development issues and actions, "horizontalize" key actors, and aggregate those that are at the forefront into a form of domestic policy; and the adoption and application of international MRV standards that allows nations to collectively move forward in ultimately eliminating the "differentiated" aspect of their "common responsibility"—will all contribute to evolving our society and addressing the fundamental threat to our lives and environment. The defining task of our time requires real actions and real solutions. The Low-Carbon Forum and its accompanying mechanisms is such a solution.

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