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Policy Brief

Achieving High Integrity Cooperative Climate Initiatives

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Achieving High Integrity Cooperative Climate Initiatives (CCIs)

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Summary

Cooperative Climate Initiatives (CCIs) play a critical role in achieving the Paris climate goals, and their numbers have steadily increased in recent years. However, significant integrity concerns remain. Our assessment of 267 CCIs launched at the past three COPs and recognized by the UNFCCC highlights three main issues. First, while CCIs make numerous commitments, implementation often falls short. Second, accountability and transparency gaps persist, with many initiatives lacking monitoring frameworks and sufficient transparency for accountability. Third, CCIs primarily benefit Global North countries, underscoring the need to engage local stakeholders and create tangible benefits in underrepresented regions such as the Central and West Asia region (including Azerbaijan) and developing nations. In response, this policy brief offers recommendations, particularly for the COP 29 and 30 presidencies, but also climate action orchestrators, and CCIs to promote higher integrity:

- Stakeholders and orchestrators, including UN-affiliated campaigns, should enhance transparency, accountability, and inclusiveness in CCIs.
- The COP presidency should encourage greater participation from local businesses, investors, and cities, particularly in the Central and West Asia region (including Azerbaijan), also beyond COP29.
- CCIs should address broader environmental and social issues, including biodiversity loss, desertification, and environmental justice

Importance of Cooperative Climate Initiatives (CCIs)

CCIs play a critical role in climate action by bringing together non-state or subnational actors-such as companies, investors, civil society organisations, or city and regional governments – and engaging them in climate change mitigation and adaptation^{[1][2]}. The estimated mitigation potential of CCIs is substantial, while they are also considered crucial for innovation and learning, the mobilisation of additional actors and resources for climate action, and achieving co-benefits in other areas of sustainability^{[3][4][5]}.

The number of CCIs has surged following the Paris Agreement^[2], many of which are launched during the annual Conference of Parties (COP) and other high-level summits. However, this potential can only be achieved in practice if integrity concerns are addressed such as accountability and transparency, effectiveness, and justice and equity concerns.

We discuss a few dimensions of integrity by assessing 267 CCIs that are recognised by the UNFCCC¹. Based on the insights on the integrity of these initiatives, this policy brief provides policy recommendations to ensure higher integrity in new and current initiatives.

¹ This data is part of a project to assess the integrity of voluntary climate action, which includes analyses on the role and potential contributions of CCIs. The ACHIEVE project has developed the Climate Cooperative Initiatives Database (C-CID)^[6] to investigate governance arrangements, participatory patterns, and implementation indicators of CCIs, and to assess their integrity (e.g., accountability, effectiveness, sustainability, ecological integrity, justice, equity, and inclusiveness).

Integrity concerns of CCIs

A broader understanding of integrity should not only look at net zero commitments^[7], but also consider CCIs' effectiveness, accountability and transparency, justice and equity, and trade-offs and co-benefits.

A. Effectiveness and performance

The first concern is about how well CCIs are producing outputs that match their intended purposes. Such output effectiveness is essential for achieving successful outcomes and impacts. We find a declining trend in output effectiveness since 2017 (Figure 1), raising concerns that initiatives might not be performing as well as they should.

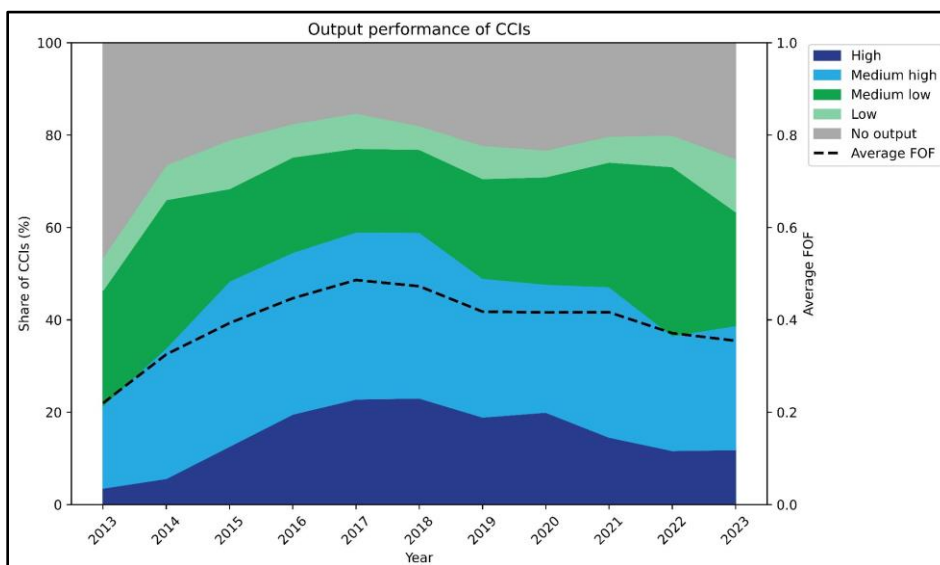


Figure 1: Distribution of CCIs by annual Function-Output-Fit (FOF) score values (left y-axis) and the average annual FOF score (right y-axis), 2013 to 2023. FOF gauges whether initiatives create outputs that match their purposes, such as setting standards, or implementing projects. FOF scores range between 0 (no relevant outputs) and 1 (outputs for all relevant purposes).

B. Accountability and transparency

Many CCIs lack effective monitoring and accountability mechanisms, with transparency posing a particular challenge. Fewer than half (42%) of CCIs have monitoring arrangements, and newer initiatives are less likely to include them (Figure 2). Financial transparency also falls short: only 19% of CCIs disclose operating budgets. Measurable goals are often missing, with nearly one-third of initiatives lacking quantified targets. This issue is especially prominent in mitigation efforts—only 40% have emissions reduction targets, and just 25% aim for net-zero. Without strong accountability and transparency, assessing these initiatives' effectiveness remains difficult, which can erode trust and progress in climate action.

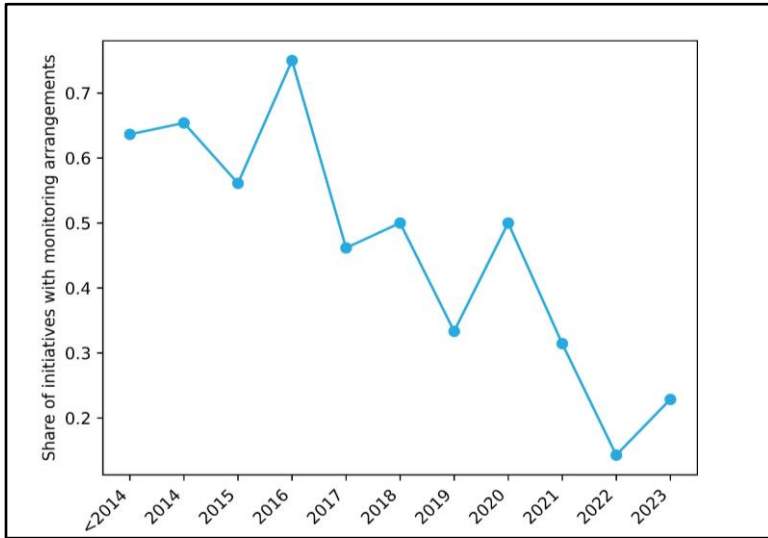


Figure 2: The share of CCI with monitoring arrangements by launch year.

Our understanding of the integrity and transparency of CCIs heavily relies on the information they disclose, such as their outputs, governance structures, and participating members. While CCIs are not bound by formal monitoring, reporting, and verification (MRV) processes, poor self-reporting among initiatives should be discouraged, as it further exacerbates concerns about their credibility and contributions^{[8][9][10]}.

C. Implementation and participation

Patterns of implementation raise questions about whether initiatives significantly benefit developing countries. Although low-income countries tend to be more vulnerable to climate change impacts, and often lack the capacity to adapt to climate change and mitigate greenhouse gas emissions^{[11][12]}, less than 10% of outputs are produced in low-income countries, while a growing share of outputs are produced in high-income countries (Figure 3).

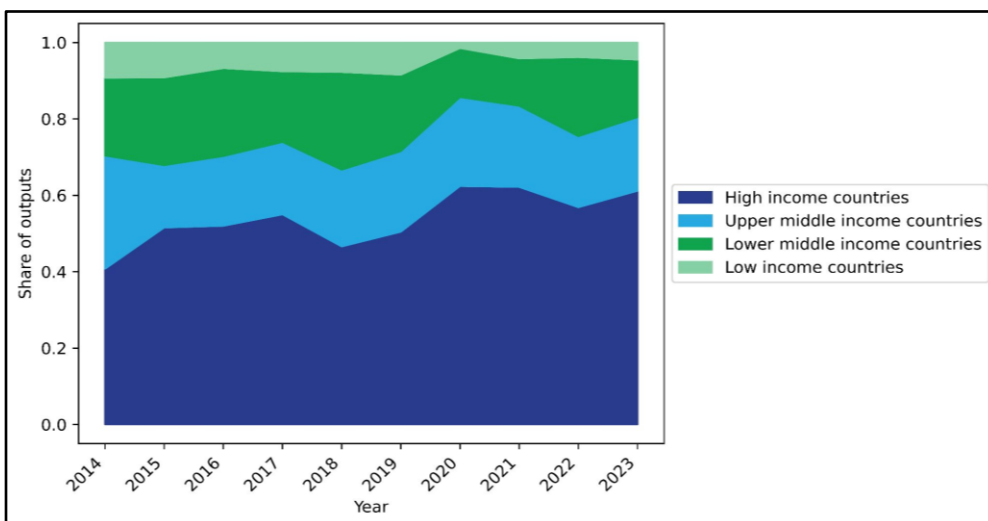


Figure 3: Implementation of outputs by income level over the last decade.

Participation in CCIs is geographically imbalanced, with European actions dominating. Actors from Central and Western Asia, including Azerbaijan, represent only 2% of all participation (1,448) in CCIs, with particularly low representation from businesses, investors, and NGOs. Similarly, only 2% of leaders and 1% of funders originate from the Central and Western Asia region. Around 10% of analysed initiatives (27) are planning or implementing activities in Azerbaijan, yet Azerbaijani actors account for only 34 instances (0.05% of all registered participations). In most cases (60%), Azerbaijan’s participation is led by its national government, followed by 26% from local government commitments under the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy. Notably, there is only one instance of participation by a local business and three by Azerbaijani financial institutions.

D. Financial flows

CCIs are often led and funded by international organisations, national governments, and international not-for-profits and NGOs from Europe and Northern America. The highest proportion of instances of implementation take place in Europe (31%), followed by Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean (respectively 23%, 20% and 16%). A higher percentage of mitigation initiatives are funded by, and implemented in, high-income countries, while more adaptation initiatives are implemented in developing countries (Figure 4). These trends are in line with, for example, expectations vis-a-vis historical responsibilities. These results might also indicate relevant climate finance flows from the Global North to the Global South through CCIs, although more data on actual financial flows is needed to assess this.

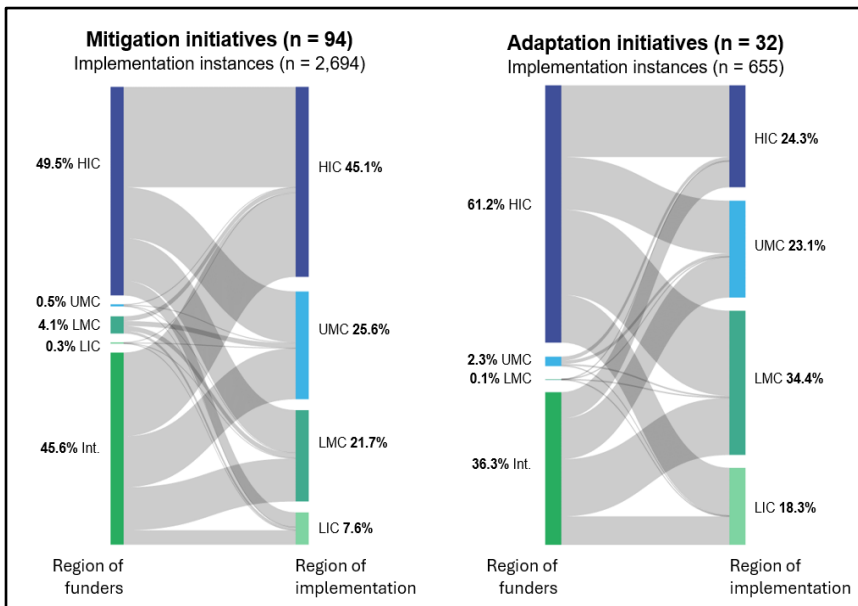


Figure 4. Implementation instances (the number of CCIs implementing in each country) by region of origin of funders and region of implementation (by income level) for mitigation and adaptation initiatives.

Note: Based on the World Bank’s country classifications by income level: HIC = High-income countries, UMC = Upper-middle income countries, LMC = Lower-middle income countries, LIC = Low-income countries; Int. = funders with an international character.

E. Environmental co-benefits and trade-offs

Environmental issues are often interconnected and focusing on a single issue can cause trade-offs. Particularly, climate change and biodiversity can have many co-benefits and trade-offs. Many CCIs address other environmental and sustainable development issues simultaneously. On average CCIs explicitly link to over 5 different Sustainable Development Goals, most often Partnerships for the Goals, Affordable and Clean Energy,



and Sustainable Cities and Communities. However, many of the goals are not often addressed. For example, Life on Land and Life Below Water are addressed less often (by 15% and 8% of CCIs, respectively), meaning that more attention to biodiversity could benefit the integrity of CCIs.

Opportunities for achieving higher integrity CCIs

Given the above challenges and concerns of cooperative climate action, we make the following policy recommendations for achieving higher integrity in CCIs.

1. Address accountability, transparency, and effectiveness in CCIs

The COP29 Presidency should address integrity concerns identified in our analysis, especially for initiatives, pledges, and declarations set to launch at COP29^[13], which are often CCIs (e.g., the Climate Finance Action Fund or the Multisectoral Actions Pathways Declaration for Resilient and Healthy Cities). We encourage the Presidency and other orchestrators of CCIs to enhance transparency and reporting in these initiatives to strengthen integrity and enable future assessments.

A promising step is the Baku Global Climate Transparency Platform (BTP), which supports developing countries through collaboration, knowledge sharing, and capacity-building resources for Biennial Transparency Reports^[13]. By better linking national efforts with cooperative climate action, Parties (including Azerbaijan) could use the BTP to improve reporting on CCI outcomes and include CCI contributions in updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)^[14]. Additionally, initiatives like the Baku Initiative for Climate Finance, Investment and Trade (BICFIT) could further enhance integrity by ensuring transparency on targets and outputs, such as funds raised or mobilised.

The COP29 and COP30 Presidencies, as well as other stakeholders involved in new or current CCIs, can address integrity challenges, such as declining initiative effectiveness, by ensuring sufficient capacity, funding, and engagement from high-ambition stakeholders. UNFCCC-recognized CCIs should be required to submit strategic plans with specific, measurable targets to strengthen accountability and effectiveness.

2. Increase regional and local participation

Given the uneven geographic distribution of participation and implementation in CCIs, Azerbaijan has a unique opportunity to increase the engagement of local and regional actors within its own territory and across Central and Western Asia. Strengthening this involvement could help address longstanding gaps in regional climate action.

In addition, we urge the COP29 and COP30 Presidencies, as well as other orchestrators of climate action, to prioritise climate action in developing countries, with a particular focus on adaptation efforts that align with sustainable development goals in lower-income, climate-vulnerable regions. Ensuring the inclusion of local stakeholders in these regions is essential to achieving high-integrity action with lasting impacts.

3. Integrate climate action with other sustainability concerns

Finally, we note that CCIs often address broader sustainable development issues. To maximise their impact, initiatives should enhance co-benefits and minimise trade-offs with other sustainability concerns, such as biodiversity loss, air and water pollution, and ongoing economic and social inequalities^[15]. Specifically, the COP29 Presidency should promote synergies with outcomes from other intergovernmental processes, including the 2024 United Nations Biodiversity Conference (COP16 in Cali, Colombia) and the 2024 United Nations Desertification Conference (COP16 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia). The alignment of these three COPs this year offers a unique opportunity to integrate various sustainability goals through cooperative climate action^[16].





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