

How to ensure governments stay on track to meet the 1.5°C target

*The recent “global stocktake” report, discussing where the world stands on climate action, shows conclusively that governments are not on track to meet international temperature goals, while adaptation and finance actions are also lagging. Critics of the stocktake process have been sceptical about its ability to catalyse sufficiently greater ambition – but it may yet produce positive outcomes, even where policy and implementation gaps remain, argue **Daniel Berliner, Ian Higham and Joana Setzer.***

The adoption of the [Paris Agreement](#) on climate change in 2015 divided opinion. For some activists, it represented a beacon of hope. Governments had finally agreed on a common international legal framework for climate action after years of multilateral gridlock, opting for an innovative emphasis on iterative and participatory processes and nationally determined contributions. For others, the ‘[pledge-and-review](#)’ logic of the agreement generated scepticism. Rather than creating binding, enforceable rules, the agreement relies on voluntary commitments as the primary vehicle for delivering climate action, with naming and shaming by civil society as the core enforcement mechanism. Governments can thus decide for themselves which policies to adopt, how far to reduce emissions, and how to ensure implementation.

These voluntary pledges are to be reviewed every fifth year, starting with 2023, in a facilitative process known as the [global stocktake](#) that is meant to catalyse ever greater ambition. The global stocktake proceeds in phases, from an initial collection of information to a technical assessment of findings, and finally consideration of the outputs – in this case, at the international negotiations that will conclude at [COP28](#) this week.

Synthesis report findings

In September, the [UNFCCC](#) Secretariat, which coordinates the stocktake, published a 46-page [report synthesising the findings](#) from the first technical assessment. This synthesis report is based on a review of more than 1,600 documents, which are available on LSE’s [Climate Change Laws of the World](#) platform, along with wide consultations with

governments, businesses, civil society organisations and the scientific community.

The report's conclusions were [unsurprising](#) but are still deeply concerning. The document affirmed that global emissions are not aligned with modelled mitigation pathways consistent with the 1.5°C [temperature goal](#) in the Paris Agreement and called for [essential](#) but contentious global system transformations, including phasing out 'unabated' fossil fuels (those burnt without technology to capture the carbon), [increased adaptation](#) efforts, and [scaled-up climate finance](#). These findings appear to validate concerns that leaving it up to individual states to make voluntary commitments will not result in sufficiently ambitious or robust climate action.

Open Government Partnership

Even if the stocktake process has not yet galvanised countries into acting fast enough, there is still reason to believe the exercise can have important benefits. The [Open Government Partnership](#) is another international initiative with a similar combination of flexible commitments and iterative, participatory procedures and offers a valuable opportunity for learning. This is a transnational multistakeholder initiative founded in 2011 with the [aims](#) of making governments more "transparent, participatory, inclusive and accountable". Today, its membership includes 75 national and many sub-national governments. Members commit to two-year cycles of producing national action plans comprising specific, actionable reform commitments. Those plans and their implementation are assessed by an independent review mechanism.

Much like the Paris Agreement regime, the Open Government Partnership model is almost entirely voluntary, with little enforcement to ensure that members comply with their commitments. In practice, commitments vary widely in their relevance and ambition, and many are not implemented at all. Given this, should observers be pessimistic about the model's potential to achieve governance goals?

We have [argued elsewhere](#) that global governance initiatives like the Open Government Partnership can have important process-driven indirect effects, as well as compliance-driven direct effects. Even though commitments themselves have often been disappointing, the iterative and participatory processes to produce and assess them independently have instigated a series of indirect mechanisms that have contributed to policy reform efforts. When such processes are repeated every few years and

incorporate diverse stakeholders, they can lead to the ongoing creation of new venues for policy interaction, new focal points for policy attention, and a requirement for policymakers to at least take procedural steps, even if actors' intentions are largely 'window dressing'.

These processes can lead to three different types of impacts – even absent strong commitments and compliance: new norms and policy models, empowering reformers inside and outside of government, and new linkages and coalitions.

Hope for the stocktake process?

The dynamics that emerge over time as Open Government Partnership members engage in repeated cycles of a pledge-and-review style of governance offer reason for optimism about the Paris Agreement. But are these process-driven mechanisms plausible to expect from the global stocktake? We expect that the three impacts observed in the Open Government Partnership could also happen in the global stocktake process.

1. New norms and policy models

With each round of pledges offering governments opportunities for experimentation and innovation, there is potential that new norms and policy models will emerge from the global stocktake. For example, if a country introduces an innovative market-based mechanism to incentivise renewable energy in one round of pledges, the success of this approach could encourage other governments to adopt similar strategies in subsequent rounds, gradually establishing a new norm on renewable energy policies.

2. Empowering reformers

If the cyclical nature of deadlines associated with the global stocktake helps empower reformers both within and outside government, we should be able to track the extent to which governments and NGOs use such deadlines to push for stronger emission reductions. The predictable schedule ensures that decision-makers are continually engaged, providing reformers with regular opportunities to influence policy outcomes.

3. New linkages and coalitions

Finally, while the focus of the global stocktake is on iterative processes, participatory institutional design elements are likely to continue to incentivise the formation of new linkages and climate coalitions. By involving a diverse range of stakeholders, including civil society, businesses and local communities, the participatory aspects of the process could contribute to building broader coalitions. For example, most of the expert panels of the stocktake's [first Technical Dialogue](#) (TD1.1) highlighted the necessity for including relevant groups, including women, youth, indigenous peoples and local communities, to ensure efficient transition processes. Coalitions of domestic actors can then influence the integration of such policies both in and beyond national climate commitments.

There are, however, important differences regarding the time frame. The Open Government Partnership has gone through several cycles, making these dynamics more evident. Over time, the global stocktake might similarly provide a clearer picture of countries' ambitions and achievements. Crucially, however, enhanced climate action cannot wait for multiple five-year cycles. The global stocktake may provide benefits, but additional processes are needed to ensure emissions pathways are aligned with the 1.5°C goal.

As talks conclude in Dubai, the world clearly remains off-track in pursuing this goal, pushing humanity dangerously close to a tipping point beyond which adaptation will be even harder and mitigation even costlier. But this is not a reason to disparage entirely the pledge-and-review process. Iterative processes themselves can, over time, drive more indirect changes in thinking and capabilities that will eventually lead to more robust progress towards international goals.

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- *This blog post is based on [The Power of Partnership in Open Government: Reconsidering Multistakeholder Governance Reform](#), by Suzanne J. Piotrowski, Daniel Berliner and Alex Ingrams, (MIT Press, 2022).*
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