

Quasi-Formal Entities and Dialogue Formats in International Climate Governance¹

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Abstract

In recent years, a significant number of international structures have been created as platforms for multilateral policy dialogue on climate change issues outside the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Such structures include, for example, the Major Economies Forum on Energy and Climate Change (MEF), the Petersberg Climate Dialogue, the Clean Energy Ministerial (CEM), and a wide variety of partnerships. There is no common definition for such formats of cooperation, nor a shared conceptual understanding of their place in the international climate governance system. This includes both traditional interstate cooperation mechanisms embodied by the UNFCCC, as well as non-state initiatives, climate finance institutions, and formats that support a constant dialogue between states, business representatives, academia, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) on climate policy issues. This article clarifies the nature of quasi formal climate governance, establishes a typology, and assesses the dynamics of development of quasi formal entities to better understand the processes of their formation and implementation. Three types of quasi formal entities are identified based on the new dataset of quasi formal entities created in 2001–22: intergovernmental forums, UNFCCC party groupings, and hybrid partnerships. The study reveals an increase in the number of political forums and hybrid partnerships amid stabilization or even reduction of negotiating blocs within the UNFCCC. In the complex system of international climate governance, quasi formal entities are playing an increasing role in the accumulation and exchange of knowledge and experience between states on the implementation of the Paris Agreement.

Keywords: global governance, informal governance, climate negotiations, UNFCCC, partnerships

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has focused the attention of researchers on the process of deglobalization, which affects not only international economic relations but also the functioning of all international entities, from intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) to conventions or dialogue formats. On the one hand, we are witnessing another crisis of multilateral diplomacy, which is trying to overcome the strategic mismatch between states on how fundamental problems that

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threaten human well-being and the very existence of life on Earth could and should be resolved. Whether it concerns access to vaccines or mutual support in decarbonization of national economies, any tasks that require collective action within official multilateral formats become challenging. On the other hand, anyone who is familiar with the specifics of multilateral diplomacy understands that cooperation formats such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) were created not to achieve a common goal quickly but to achieve it together in accordance with the principles of the United Nations (UN) Charter. Clearly, we do not need to talk about the full refusal of multilateral climate cooperation. What prevents bridging the gap between already agreed goals of collective action and practical efforts for mitigation and adaptation, and can global cooperation mechanisms help close this gap in mutually acceptable ways?

In academic research we can find different answers to this question. Some authors believe that international policy needs to move from an economy-wide approach in setting greenhouse gas (GHG) emission targets to a sectoral approach because, “at the national level, climate policy is essentially part of energy policy, transport policy, agricultural policy” [Oberghassel et al., 2022, p. 1]. Others emphasize that problem with bridging gap between goals and efforts origin in the failure of states to fulfil their obligations and the weak motivation of the business community to act in accordance with the political signals sent [Kinley et al., 2021]. Among the authors who consider failure in fulfilment of obligations by UNFCCC parties, there are many who believe that the solution will be to move away from multilateralism to minilateralism in the form of creating a climate club (clubs)—associations of states with limited membership, from dialogue platforms to structures—that would coordinate implementation of climate policy of varying degrees of severity [Falkner, Nasiritousi, Reischl, 2022; Gampfer, 2016; Nordhaus, 2020].

In this context, it is correct to differentiate between effectiveness of climate governance in agreeing on common obligations in the form of international norms and in implementing and complying with agreements. After the adoption of the universal Paris Agreement, regularly updated nationally determined contributions (NDCs) and the provision of “climate finance”² came to the fore. By defining a bottom-up approach for states, the Paris Agreement also recognized the importance of the efforts of non-state actors in achieving its goals. Broad interpretations of the Paris Agreement give more freedom to states in choosing partners for collective action and pursuing a coherent climate policy. Thus, multilateralism, based on the principles of the UN Charter, and club-type minilateralism are no longer mutually exclusive concepts.

Eight years have passed since the entry into force of the agreement. The period of intensive negotiations on the development of the rules³ for its implementation has ended, another crisis linked with the U.S. withdrawal from the agreement has been overcome, the COVID-19 pandemic, which has become a serious challenge for multilateral diplomacy, is over, and another round of the hybrid cold war has begun. In that period, there have been enough events to make it possible to assess changes in the institutional framework of international climate governance and to answer the question of whether there is a trend toward greater preference for minilateral formats of cooperation by states in light of the crisis of multilateralism.

There are several prerequisites for changing the configuration of international climate governance. The climate agenda has expanded enormously and has long been separated from the overall environmental framework. An increasing number of both state and non-state actors are

² “Climate finance” is official development assistance to developing countries that meets the criteria of the UNFCCC decisions.

³ The rules of implementation of the Paris Agreement are informally referred to as a set of decisions adopted by the COP from 2018 to 2022 to clarify the meaning of the language of the Paris Agreement regarding nationally determined contributions (NDCs), transparency mechanisms, the stocktaking mechanism, the operationalization of the provisions of Article 6 regarding voluntary cooperation mechanisms.

moving from statements about, to implementation of, climate strategies. Today it is impossible to imagine an international entity that could cover all issues on the climate agenda and coordinate the actions of all significant actors. The climate agenda has long been an area of competition between states for political and technological leadership, and this has affected the institutional basis of international climate governance.

International climate governance is dynamically evolving toward greater complexity. The UNFCCC process, the mechanisms for implementing climate agreements, which include the whole variety of tools available to international development institutions, and corporate self-regulation mechanisms are becoming increasingly complex. Indeed, in the thirty years that have passed since the signing of the UNFCCC, a multilateral and multilevel system of climate cooperation has formed. It includes the traditional interstate cooperation mechanisms embodied by the UNFCCC, the Kyoto Protocol, and the Paris Agreement, tools for the implementation of these agreements, and formats that ensure a constant dialogue between states. The scientific and methodological basis of global climate policy is created and it provides information on global climate change dynamics, how it affects the economy, societies, and nature, and most importantly, science-based goals for mitigation and adaptation.

In recent years there has been an increase in the number of international structures created as platforms for multilateral dialogue on climate change issues outside the framework of the international legally binding mechanisms of the UNFCCC and the UN. Some of these platforms are of an interstate nature, while others unite, in addition to states, heterogeneous actors, from business to non-governmental organizations (NGOs). In the literature on international climate governance, this fact provides much food for thought [Michaelowa, Michaelowa, Bagchi, 2017; Michonski, Levi, 2010]. There are several papers with databases on informal structures in international governance [Roger, Rowan, 2022; Vabulas, Snidal, 2021] and on transnational climate initiatives [Fenhann, 2018]. The understanding of their role in international climate governance is hindered by different conceptualizations of informal structures. The authors use different criteria for classifying these entities and give various arguments for their difference from formal IGOs. C. Roger and S. Rowne [2022] clearly show how the understanding of quasi formal structures can change depending on research goals. Also, a general shortcoming of the theory of quasi formal structures is the lack of their classification on the basis of the actors participating in them, even though this is a very important characteristic of quasi formal governance.

Informal and/or Quasi Formal Entities?

The paradigm shift of the 1970s and 1980s in the study of international relations from interstate diplomacy toward transnational relations was quickly supplemented by numerous studies on the increasing importance of “soft law” [Abbott, Snidal, 2000; Velizhanina, 2007], “soft organizations” [Klabbers, 2001], and the emergence of “informal intergovernmental organizations” [Vabulas, Snidal, 2013] and informal governance within IGOs [Stone, 2013]. Further development of club formats of cooperation in the form of the Group of 7 (G7), the Group of 20 (G20), and the BRICS group (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) was reflected in the appearance of literature on “informalism” in international relations [Cooper, 2017; Slaughter, 2021]. Russian authors have contributed to the recognition of the increasing importance of “informal institutions of the high political level” [Larionova, 2018] and “intergovernmental informal associations” [Karandashov, 2021]; however, there is still not enough done on the conceptualization of quasi formal entities. From the point of view of developing an understanding of the role and functions of such institutions and their impact on world politics and international law, it may be more productive to study quasi formal entities in specific areas of politics.

A consideration of context, relations with formal IGOs, and the ongoing negotiation processes can help to determine the patterns of creation and functioning of quasi formal entities.

The introduction of the term “quasi formal” is prompted by the need to use a single definition to refer to the increasingly common practice of creating international entities that are different from classical international organizations with varying degrees of institutionalization and heterogeneous, hybrid membership. In the English literature on international politics, the term “informal” is closely associated with a concept of governance. Governance refers to processes of policy formulation or implementation that involve both state and non-state actors, leading to non-binding agreements and other types of soft law sources, or those aimed at coordinating the actions of a number of different actors. Governance in this sense takes place at different levels—global, supranational, state, sub national, local—wherever heterogeneous actors interact in politics. So, governance, by definition, can be either informal (outside legally established official procedures), or grant to state authorities, the state, and interstate organizations status as a participant in governance. In some cases, participation in governance is regulated by official rules and procedures, while in other cases participation is not regulated in any way; in still others it is completely prohibited by law. All options for participation are driven either by practical necessity or political considerations.

All these cases of participation are commonly found in international climate governance. Participation in the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the UNFCCC is not limited to states and also includes non-governmental organizations, business associations, and various coalitions of non-state actors accredited as observers. They can contribute to the negotiations of the COP on an equal basis with the delegations, although they cannot participate in decision-making as would violate the fundamental doctrine of international law. The Paris Agreement recognizes the contribution of non-state actors to the achievement of its goals, but it does not regulate exactly how they can contribute. There are several critical considerations indicating that the term “informal” governance, which is widespread in the literature, is inadequate to the institutional practices it reflects.

First, “informal” in the sense of “not official” does not apply to the international entities in question. The CEM is not based on an international treaty, has no rules of procedure, and does not adopt legally binding decisions, while official representatives of states at the ministerial level participate in annual meetings, there is a membership, a secretariat, internal documentation, governing bodies, and a budget. CEM, in a bottom-up approach, operates through member initiatives and campaigns. To establish the initiative, certain criteria should be met, and at least three CEM member states must have joined. Business participation in the initiatives is actively encouraged and supported. The Climate and Clean Air Coalition (CCAC), like the CEM, does not contribute to international law, but the annual ministerial meeting of the coalition determines the strategy and monitors the implementation of initiatives and programmes to reduce emissions of short-lived pollutants into the atmosphere, and it has a governing body (for example annual meeting and the council) that includes not only representatives of states but also non-voting representatives of non-state partners. In this sense, most of the studied international entities are “formally” organized and operate in a formal way.

Second, in Russian, the concept of informal governance implies some non-public interaction between actors that takes place behind closed doors in official organizations and processes. On the contrary, the studied international entities carry out their activities publicly, have their own websites, are represented in social networks, and often organize their side-events during the COPs.

Third, in a practical sense, the formal-informal dichotomy in international politics looks false due to the high incidence of formal-informal interactions and the impossibility of adequate separation of one from the other. The activities of partnerships and networks that bring

together governments, businesses, and international organizations can complement the activities of official IGOs. The agreements of the states reached within the framework of the “informal” Major Economies Forum (MEF) or the Petersberg Climate Dialogue can be embodied in the “formal” decisions of the UNFCCC. The UN secretary-general can initiate a climate action summit with the broad participation of all interested non-state actors. Therefore, for analytical purposes, and for a better understanding of the political processes in the climate agenda, it is necessary to have an approximate set of criteria that will allow focusing on formal-informal interactions.

Given the above, it makes sense to introduce the term “quasi formal governance,” which includes all mechanisms of interaction between state and non-state actors that are not regulated by international law. International entities that provide this interaction outside the official procedures of legally binding treaties can be considered “informal.” This definition better captures the practice of ministerial meetings, forums, networks, and partnerships whose membership is well described by the concept of the “coalition of the willing.”

Method

To better understand the ongoing changes in the organizational basis for cooperation on the implementation of climate agreements, the study will carry out the following tasks. First, based on a literature review, all significant actors of international climate governance will be defined.

Next, the role of quasi formal entities in international climate governance will be demonstrated and a typologization of these entities will be elaborated based on a study of international quasi formal entities created in different periods of climate cooperation. The determination of the status of quasi formal international entities and their typology was carried out through the development of a database and consultations with experienced participants in the COPs. The change in the number of active quasi formal structures was carried out based on information included in the database.

Three types of quasi formal entities were identified: political forums, hybrid partnerships, and informal mechanisms within the UNFCCC. This typology is based on the forms of formal interaction between states outside formal organizations proposed by O. Westerwinter, K.W. Abbott, and T. Biersteker [2021] (Table 1). Such entities can be created as independent associations; some are created “within” the UNFCCC and others “around” the UNFCCC and are associated with the activities of transnational networks, epistemological communities, and transnational public-private partnerships.

To find out whether the proposed typology is accurate, a database of quasi formal entities and dialogue formats involved in international climate governance was compiled. The typology was carried out in accordance with the following criteria:

- a) they have states as members or partners;
- b) the main goal is implementation of the Paris Agreement in different fields, from decarbonization to adaptation to climate change;
- c) the entities are not based on an international treaty;
- d) they involve participation of non-state actors;
- e) they are organized groups to promote common interests in the negotiation process within official international organizations or conventions;
- f) they are public, that is, they openly communicate with stakeholders and the media and make public statements;
- g) they are multilateral structures, that is, they are created for dialogue between more than three states, more than one official intergovernmental organization, and more than one NGO or private company (alliance, etc.).

Information was collected from a content analysis of the archive of publications by the Earth Negotiations Bulletin [IISD, n.d.] Filters were applied to make it possible to find messages related to international climate events in the years of interest. The initial database consisted of a chronologically compiled list of meetings of various quasi formal entities. To find information about the negotiation blocs' activity in certain periods, a content analysis of the final reports of the Environmental Negotiations Bulletin [IISD, 2021] was used. Entities that did not meet the criteria were excluded from the list. To obtain quantitative data on changes in the number of existing entities, the dates of their establishment were considered.

In the database, political forums were coded as interstate entities (IE), informal governance within the UNFCCC as UNFCCC groupings, and hybrid partnerships (HP) remained unchanged. The research materials also included the websites of the analyzed organizations, partnerships, and initiatives.

International Climate Governance: The Main Actors

The idea of international governance as a multilateral, polycentric and multilevel process goes back to the work of Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye on transnational relations [1971]. H. van Asselt and F. Zelly [2012, pp. 141–3] identified several elements of international climate governance (IEG): international organizations (such as the World Bank and international environmental conventions), high-level political forums of clubs (such as the G7, the G20, and MEF), informal dialogue formats (such as the Cartagena Dialogue⁴), multilateral public-private partnerships (such as the Global Methane Initiative and the Carbon Sequestration Leadership Forum), regulated and voluntary markets (such as the European Emissions Trading Scheme and the Voluntary Carbon Standard (VCS) for voluntary offset markets), corporate self-regulation initiatives (such as the Carbon Disclosure Project (CDP) and the Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi)), and finally, sub national initiatives (such as C40 Cities).

M. J. Dorsch and C. Flachslund [2017, pp. 45–6], using the approach of polycentric governance, identified forms of collective action in international multilateralism including the UNFCCC, bilateral and minilateral agreements in the form of the U.S.-China climate agreements and the G7, and sub national entities self-organizing in transnational networks, for example, Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI). States and their governments, according to the authors, are consistently part of collective action because not only are they participants in multilateral and minilateral forums, they also support “a growing number of non-state initiatives of business, civil society groups or individuals” [Ibid., 2017, pp. 46].

This list of actors in international climate governance is found in many papers. While there are no significant discrepancies on classical intergovernmental formats, such as international organizations and conventions, there are differences with other participants. For example, the Carbon Sequestration Leadership Forum is referred to either as a public-private partnership [Betsill, 2015], or as an international informal organization [Vabulas, Snidal, 2021]. Others consider such entities to be practices [Cooper, Pouliot, 2015], clubs [Falkner, 2016], or political dialogue forums [Mourier, 2020]. Thus, the understanding of international climate governance that exists in the scientific literature, which combines the idea of it as multilevel and polycentric, is not sufficiently developed to serve as a basis for quantitative research.

Notwithstanding the ambiguity of terms, we can conclude that there is a consensus among researchers that, while international climate governance is carried out by heterogeneous actors at different levels, the UNFCCC is the main international platform, and also that states play a

⁴ The Cartagena Dialogue is an informal negotiation platform set up ahead of the UNFCCC COP in Cancun in 2010

key role in the development of climate governance. It is necessary to clarify the main actors in international climate governance to determine the place of quasi formal entities.

The first clarification concerns the traditional intergovernmental entities—organizations and conventions. Within this general category, it is necessary to highlight the UNFCCC and multilateral development banks (MDBs) represented by the World Bank Group. The UNFCCC and the World Bank Group perform critical functions in international climate governance related to climate finance. The second clarification concerns quasi formal entities, their place in the system, and their importance for climate governance. Instead of considering them as actors in climate governance, there is reason to consider them as tools that connect their heterogeneous participants. This approach involves considering all those initiatives, mechanisms, and forums that remain in the middle—between individual states, cities, companies, and communities, on the one hand, and the highest political platform, which today represents the COP to the UNFCCC, on the other.

International climate governance can be represented as a triangle, where the sides are the interstate process of the UNFCCC, non-state initiatives, and MSBs. And, just like in geometry, the sides of our triangle connect with each other, forming the inner space of international climate governance.

UNFCCC Process

The organizational structure of multilateral climate negotiations has become much more complicated over the past 30 years, and the process itself has become cumbersome. The climate conference is, in fact, not one conference but five—the COP to the UNFCCC (COP), the COP serving as the meeting of the parties to the Kyoto Protocol, and the COP serving as the meeting of the parties to the Paris Agreement. Each of the conferences is the governing body for the various bodies they have created, and as of 2022 there were about 15 of them. Two subsidiary bodies of the UNFCCC work on their own agenda—the Subsidiary Body on Scientific and Technical Advice and the Subsidiary Body on Implementation.

In addition to formal negotiations, informal consultations are organized. In part, this is the internal logic of the development of multilateral climate diplomacy, associated with the quantitative expansion of participants in UNFCCC conferences and qualitative changes in climate policy. However, “weak” agreements also complicate the structure of the negotiation process, when the parties, instead of forming specific obligations or implementing measures, create new negotiations processes.

The venue for the annual UNFCCC conference is divided into a “blue zone,” where intergovernmental negotiations take place, and a “green zone,” where UN specialized agencies, the business community, youth, civil and indigenous society, academia, artists, industry, and fashion hold their events [COP Presidency, 2022]. On the eve of the COP in Glasgow, the Race to Zero Campaign was launched—“a global campaign that is designed to ensure that enterprises, cities, regions and investors support a healthy, sustainable recovery with zero emissions” [UNFCCC, n.d.].

Non-State Initiatives

Non-profit organizations were the first founders of transnational climate initiatives aimed at disseminating information about the problem (World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and Greenpeace), monitoring the fulfilment of promises by corporations and states (Climate Group and Climate Action Tracker), and involving various groups, from youth to indigenous peoples, in climate policy (Citizens’ Climate Lobby and Fridays for Future). Initiatives of sub national

actors (regions, provinces, cities, and communities), such as C40 Cities and Climate Alliance, have an influence on updating the climate agenda at the local level, even if the national government is not committed to ambitious climate policy.

Notable examples of business initiatives include the CDP, Climate Action 100+, the SBTi, and the Institutional Investor Group on Climate Change (IIGCC). Often, they are “organizations of organizations” and today these initiatives have become networks of experience, knowledge, and practice on issues related to the implementation of the Paris Agreement. Their role in international climate governance is twofold. In addition to aggregating and lobbying the sectoral interests of business, they also contribute to the creation of self-regulation systems and support companies to fulfil their voluntary obligations under the Paris Agreement. Thus, over the past twenty years, a system of international corporate standards for non-financial reporting has been formed regarding GHG emissions management, climate risks, standards for climate projects, guidelines for the goals of corporate climate strategies, and even benchmarks for companies’ climate policy. Since states moved away from agreeing on legally binding emission reduction targets and switched to a “flexible ‘promise and control’ system combining voluntary commitments from both public and private actors, as well as reporting and transparency rules for states” [Aykut, Morena, Foyer, 2023, p. 20], such business initiatives have become an integral part of international climate governance.

Multilateral Development Banks (International Climate Finance Institutions)

The principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities” has been the foundation for international environmental cooperation since the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development. This principle is also incorporated into the UNFCCC. So, in accordance with Article 4 of the convention, parties are divided into three categories. Annex I parties—developed countries and countries with economies in transition—have an obligation to limit their anthropogenic GHG emissions. Annex II parties—developed countries only—should, in addition to efforts to limit emissions, assist developing countries in meeting their obligations under the convention, transfer technology, and financially support efforts to adapt to climate change. Non-annex parties—developing countries—have no obligations to limit GHG emissions or provide financial assistance. The Paris Agreement confirmed the financial commitments of developed countries and encouraged voluntary contributions from non-developed countries.

Multilateral channels of climate finance are funds created under the UNFCCC, the Global Environment Facility, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and other agencies of the UN system implementing country projects. However, climate finance is different. Assistance from the UNFCCC or UNDP funds is in the form of a grant, while climate finance from the World Bank is a loan. Climate finance in FY 2022 accounted for 36% of total World Bank Group funding for developing countries, amounting to almost \$32 billion [World Bank Group, 2022]. For comparison, the Green Climate Fund has mobilized \$11 billion since 2013 [GCF, n.d.].

Climate finance provided by MDBs is a very important part of any intergovernmental agreement—in some cases, a defining one. In addition, MDBs have a huge influence on the policies of states, promoting priorities and approaches to decarbonization at the national level.

Science-Policy Interface Platforms

The UNFCCC process is scientifically and methodologically based on the work of the IPCC. The assessment reports on global climate change that the IPCC prepares every five or

six years have a significant impact on the progress of the negotiation process. Thus, the IPCC's methodological guidelines for accounting for emissions and removals of GHGs, intended for the state inventories, in terms of GHG emission factors from different types of fuel are also used to calculate the carbon footprint of companies and their products. Functions similar to those of the IPCC are performed by the UNFCCC Subsidiary Body on Scientific and Technological Advice. Looking at the science-policy interaction more broadly, this category of participants includes the International Energy Agency (IEA) and the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA).

In total, these actors form international legal norms for climate cooperation between states and maintain a dialogue between states and key non-state actors (the UNFCCC process). They also disseminate information about the problem, monitor the implementation of the public statements of large corporations and states, involve various social groups in climate policy, aggregate and lobby industry-specific business interests, and contribute to the creation of corporate self-regulation systems (non-state initiatives). Additionally, they provide funding for activities on mitigation and adaptation and develop a methodological basis for climate strategies (international development institutions, science-policy interface platforms). This list of activities is far from complete; however, it shows that to achieve the goals of collective action, a high level of trust between different actors is required, as are, consequently, many mechanisms to create and support it.

Quasi Formal International Entities in the International Climate Governance Triangle

Quasi formal entities differ in their degree of formalization; usually, they are not based on an international treaty and have no system of official documentation. At the same time, they regularly organize meetings at which their participants discuss different issues of the climate agenda (Table 1).

Table 1. Quasi Formal Entities

Quasi Formal International Entities	Type	Year of Foundation
Climate and Clean Air Coalition (CCAC)	HP	2012
Major Economies Forum on Energy and Climate (MEF)	QFE	2009
Clean Energy Ministerial (CEM)	HP	2009
The Global Methane Initiative (GMI)	QFE	2004
The Petersberg Climate Dialogue	QFE	2010
Vienna Energy Forum (VEF)	QFE	2008
Mission Innovation (MI)	QFE	2015
UN Climate Summit	QFE	2014
Adaptation Action Coalition	QFE	2021
Global Methane Pledge	QFE	2021
Ministerial on climate action (MOCA)	QFE	2017
Agriculture Innovation Mission for Climate	QFE	2021

Quasi Formal International Entities	Type	Year of Foundation
European Union (EU)	UNFCCC	2014–15
Group 77+ China	UNFCCC	2014–15
Like-Minded Group of Developing Countries (LMDCs)	UNFCCC	2014–15
Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS)	UNFCCC	2014–15
Association of Latin America and the Caribbean (AILAC)	UNFCCC	2014–15
Arab Group	UNFCCC	2014–15
Least developed countries (LDCs)	UNFCCC	2014–15
Environmental Integrity Group (EIG)	UNFCCC	2014–15
Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of our America (ALBA)	UNFCCC	2014–15
Brazil, South Africa, India, China (BASIC)	UNFCCC	2014–15
African Group	UNFCCC	2014–15
Caribbean Community (CARICOM)	UNFCCC	2014–15
Pre-COPs (2009)	UNFCCC	2014–15
Cartagena Dialogue	UNFCCC	2014–15
Sustainable Energy for All	HP	2011
We Mean Business Coalition	HP	2014
The Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi)	HP	2015
Global Alliance for Climate-Smart Agriculture	HP	2014
The Partnership for Action on Green Economy	HP	2013
The Carbon Pricing Leadership Coalition	HP	2015
Carbon Sequestration Leadership Forum	HP	2003
C40 Cities	HP	2005
Institutional Investors Group for Climate Change	HP	2012
The Gold Standard	HP without states	2003
Climate Action 100+	HP without states	2017
One Planet Summit	HP	2017
The Glasgow Financial Alliance for Net Zero	HP	2021
P4G	HP	2017
The Net Zero Asset Managers initiative	HP without states	2020
The Energy Storage Partnership	HP	2019
G7 Climate Club	IIE	2022
Inclusive Forum on Carbon Mitigation Approaches	QFE	2022
The Transport Decarbonisation Alliance (TDA)	HP	2017

Source: Compiled by the author.

Quasi formal political forums include entities made up by states and discuss political issues of climate cooperation. Hybrid partnerships include many quasi formal entities and are aimed at solving specific problems, uniting states with non-state actors (Table 2).

Table 2. Two Types of Quasi Formal Entities and Their Characteristic Features

	Quasi Formal Political Forums	UNFCCC Groupings	Hybrid Partnerships
<i>Examples</i>	Major Economies Forum, Petersberg Climate Dialogue, G7 Climate Club	Group of 77, Small Island Developing States (SIDS,) Pre-COP	Carbon Pricing Leaders Coalition (CPLC), Climate and Clean Air Coalition (CCAC), CEM
<i>Specific Features</i>	30–40 state-participants, with one state as initiator of the forum. Organized as a club for discussion of the political issues of the climate agenda. Around some forums (MEF, One Planet Summit) an ecosystem of hybrid partnerships and new non-governmental initiatives is being built	Exclusively interstate entities. They allow aggregating the interests of different groups of states, thereby increasing their political weight in negotiations	Include several non-state actors taking voluntary action, and may also include states and jurisdictions. As usual they facilitate dialogue and exchange of experience on the technical aspects of the climate agenda, as well as the implementation of the Paris Agreement

Source: Compiled by the author.

The analysis of quasi formal institutions makes it possible to draw several conclusions about their role in international climate governance. Quasi formal political forums are usually created by powerful states that “choose informality when their preferences diverge” [Roger, 2022, p.13]. In this way, they support a multilateral approach to addressing climate change. Thus, after the U.S. refused to ratify the Kyoto Protocol, President George W. Bush initiated, together with Australia, the Asia Pacific Partnership on Clean Development and Climate in 2005. During the period of active negotiations on a future agreement that would later replace the Kyoto Protocol at the initiative of the United States, the MEF began to be convened, bringing together 17 major state emitters of GHGs. The forum met regularly until the adoption of the Paris Agreement and resumed its work under the Biden administration. After Trump’s decision to withdraw from the Paris Agreement, the EU and China initiated the Ministerial on Climate Action, an annual event that brought together ministers and senior officials from more than 30 states, including G20 ministers and negotiating group chairs.

Regular high-level meetings between politicians ensure communication, broaden the range of negotiations, and create the basis for compromise precisely because they are not bound by overly formal procedures or protocols [Vabulas, Snidal, 2013, p. 199]. In fulfilling this role, quasi formal policy forums complement, but do not duplicate, the UNFCCC process, as they always take place in the run-up to the COPs. Thus, decisions are not made at MEF meetings, and therefore no consensus is required, but the very fact of the exchange of views serves as a building block, including for building consensus within the framework of the UNFCCC. The work of political forums intensified during periods of extensive negotiation within the framework of the UNFCCC due to the need to adopt, for example, the Paris Agreement or the rules for Article 6. During one of these periods, in 2010, Angela Merkel initiated the first Petersburg

Climate Dialogue, and since then it has been held annually, facilitating open discussion in small groups on key issues of international climate policy.

Often, at the meetings of political forums, the creation of another type of informal institution—hybrid partnerships—is announced. For example, the establishment of the CEM and the Global Methane Commitment was first announced by the United States at MEF. Similarly, CEM and the World Bank together established the Energy Storage Partnership, bringing together the World Bank Group and 29 organizations that jointly develop energy storage solutions to meet the needs of developing countries, including financial support for such projects.

Partnerships are not always created by powerful states. The Climate and Clean Air Coalition (CCAC) was created following a ministerial meeting in Stockholm in 2012 by the governments of Sweden, the United States, Canada, Bangladesh, Ghana, Mexico, and the United Nations Energy Programme (UNEP). Today CCAC is a partnership of 73 states, 19 IGOs, 59 civil society organizations, and 181 other participants to reduce the impact of short-lived factors (methane, hydrofluorocarbons) on climate and air quality. The UN Environment Office in Paris serves as the secretariat of the CCAC.

In an increasingly complex system of managing anthropogenic pressures on climate, hybrid partnerships are ““soft-coordinating” to guide voluntary national targets for GHG emissions, technology development through sectoral public-private partnerships, and technology diffusion through trade” [McGee, Taplin, 2009, p. 213]. The Carbon Pricing Leaders Coalition (CPLC) was established on the opening day of the 21st COP to the UNFCCC in 2015. The CPLC brings together governments, businesses, civil society organizations, and academia to support carbon pricing, share experiences, and improve global, regional, national and sub national understandings of carbon pricing mechanisms. The CPLC Secretariat is administered by the World Bank Group. As of early 2023, the coalition includes 28 national and sub national governments, 176 private sector organizations from various regions and sectors, and 102 partners representing NGOs, business organizations, and universities.

Hybrid partnerships facilitate dialogue and exchange of experience between governments, business representatives, and think tanks on any specific issues on the climate agenda, such as the promotion of low-carbon technologies, the application of incentive measures, or the development of benchmarks for corporate climate strategies, through the collection and analysis of data and the development of recommendations. Participation in some hybrid partnerships involves making voluntary commitments—a kind of evidence of commitment to action (“commitment to commit”). It can be assumed that there is a dense network of links between policy forums, partnerships, non-state initiatives, and international climate finance institutions.

Quasi formal policy forums and hybrid partnerships encourage the exchange of knowledge and experience on the regulatory and technical aspects of decarbonization among all participants. Whereas formal intergovernmental institutions tend to separate the political and technical aspects of dialogue, quasi formal forums and partnerships often provide mechanisms to encourage spillover effects. For example, under CEM campaigns, critical technical issues can be raised to the political level of discussion. Without being associated with the need to find consensus and ratify agreements, forums and partnerships ensure the *depoliticization* of climate action, which ultimately stimulates the involvement of significant actors in these formats.

Finally, the third type is informal management mechanisms within the UNFCCC. These include negotiating blocs of states (such as the Group of 77+China and the Arab Group) and informal negotiating meetings leading up to the COPs (the “Pre-COP” and the Cartagena Dialogue). Negotiating blocs are relatively stable groups that bring together states with common goals and interests in the context of climate negotiations. The negotiating blocs vary in size and formality. Some of them are active outside the UNFCCC (such as the Group of 77+China, the EU, and SIDS), and some were created and operate exclusively within the framework of

the UNFCCC (such as the Environmental Integrity Group and the Umbrella Group). An interesting observation is that the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries have never created a single negotiating bloc in the UNFCCC. Informal meetings (Pre-COP) are similar in terms of functionality and composition of participants to political forums in the proposed typology, while still part of the official negotiations of the UNFCCC. The series of such meetings is usually initiated by the presidency of the forthcoming COP. Unlike policy forums or partnerships, UNFCCC informal mechanisms are purely interstate, so they can be used as a reference group to understand the dynamics of quasi formal entities in international climate governance.

Pilot Study of the Development Dynamics of Quasi Formal Entities in International Climate Governance

To understand the dynamics of development, three stages were chosen that were especially important for climate cooperation: 2008–11 (development of a new agreement after the Kyoto Protocol), 2014–15 (completion of negotiations on the Paris Agreement) and 2020–21 (finalization of negotiations on the rules for the implementation of the Paris Agreement). A total of 46 quasi formal entities were studied.

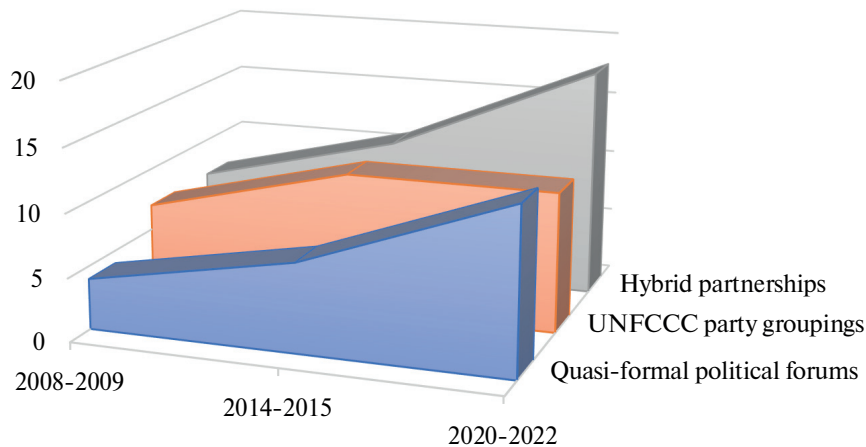


Fig. 1. Dynamics of Changes in the Number of Quasi Formal Entities in International Climate Governance

Source: Compiled by the author based on the database.

Figure 1 shows that in the last five years there has been a significant increase in hybrid partnerships that bring together governments and businesses, development institutions, and the expert community. The desire of states to use quasi formal models of international climate governance, such as MEF in general, is increasing. Thus, if informal meetings of the UNFCCC negotiating blocs are a common diplomatic practice and do not attract the attention of the public, the results of the meetings of the Petersberg Climate Dialogue or ministerial meetings are covered like any other high level political event.

The increase in the number of political forums and hybrid partnerships is taking place against the backdrop of a stabilization or even a decrease in the number of informal governance formats within the UNFCCC. That is, states seem to have stopped establishing new negotiating blocs and have switched to interaction within the framework of quasi formal entities outside the UNFCCC.

In 2022, the list of quasi formal entities was supplemented by two organizations that are still difficult to classify. The G7's statement on the creation of the Climate Club after the G7 summit stated that the priority of the club would be to strengthen actions to reduce GHG emissions, and to decarbonize industry and energy. At first glance, the Climate Club is intended to be an intergovernmental political forum; the statement says a lot about the exchange of information on international conditions for the decarbonization of industry, in order to accelerate work on joint standards, methodologies, and strategies for major industrial sectors, which implies close work with business alliances. In addition, it is still unclear whether the new intergovernmental forum will become another platform for discussing technical issues of cooperation in the field of decarbonization or whether it will be an association promoting a climate policy option based on the political ideas of western states.

Another interesting case is the establishment within the OECD of the Inclusive Forum on Approaches to Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions (IFCMA), which was announced at the G20 in Indonesia [OECD, 2022]. This forum is intended to bring together non-OECD countries to evaluate the climate policy of IFCMA member countries and make recommendations to improve its effectiveness. The uncertainty with the typology of this new forum is due to the fact that it is being created within the structure of the OECD and, on this basis, can be attributed to the informal methods of management within the OECD (like the negotiating blocks of the UNFCCC); however, the intention to involve states that are not members of the OECD turns it into political forum. Although the report of the OECD's secretary-general states that the IFCMA is intended to complement the multistakeholder process of the UNFCCC, it is not yet very clear how it will differ from the Paris Agreement's global stocktaking process. Interestingly, the OECD will serve as the interim secretariat for both the G7 Climate Club and the IFCMA.

Research Perspectives for the Study of Quasi Formal Entities

The typology proposed in the article is limited by the small sample of entities studied. For example, further clarification of the differences between political forums and informal governance within the UNFCCC is needed. Better coverage of quasi formal meetings initiated by states after or leading up to the UNFCCC COPs will help achieve this goal. Hybrid partnerships and business initiatives are becoming increasingly important in the implementation of the Paris Agreement, and it is necessary not only to replenish the database but also to conduct a specific study.

The database used can include a set of data on membership and financial assistance to create graphs, for example, to find out which countries most often become members of partnerships, what share they have in the capital of the World Bank, or how much assistance they receive. Visualization of such complex relations will shed light on the motives of states for joining quasi formal entities.

The change in the balance of active quasi formal entities in favour of hybrid partnerships indicates a trend to use platforms outside the UNFCCC to build coalitions on politically controversial issues such as pricing carbon through carbon taxes or emissions trading systems or agreeing on protectionist measures for the goods of those countries that do not pursue an "ambitious" climate policy.

Conclusion

The Paris Agreement realized a bottom-up approach to climate cooperation, and the achievement of agreed goals must be supported by a set of self-determined efforts by states, considering “common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capacities.” In addition, at the interstate level of governance (UNFCCC regime), only general principles of interaction between the parties are outlined. This study shows that quasi formal entities are connecting points in the triangle of international climate governance, representing politically flexible mechanisms for coordinating the actions of states and other key actors in climate policy.

Although this study did not aim to identify the specific functions of quasi formal entities or compare them with traditional IGOs, the results make it possible to distinguish between what is known about them and what is still in question. An important function of traditional IGOs is the development of international norms and their enforcement. With regard to quasi formal entities, it cannot be said that they create legally binding norms. Political forums contribute to building consensus on complex negotiation issues on the official agenda of the UNFCCC, but it is difficult to say how important the agreements reached.

It is well known that quasi formal entities support and develop a multilateral approach to solving the problem of climate change, albeit not on a universal, inclusive basis. Traditional IGOs contribute to the implementation of agreements, decisions, and strategies and, based on this study, this is also one of the key functions of hybrid partnerships, albeit with two differences—partnerships strive to implement already adopted international climate agreements or fill the gaps in international legal regulation in the field of climate mitigation (as does the CCAC or CPLC). Some quasi formal entities monitor the fulfilment by states and non-state actors of their obligations under the Paris Agreement (for example, Climate Action 100+) but it is unknown if this affects the behaviour of the state or company.

This research shows that quasi formal entities aggregate knowledge and exchange experience, but in order to understand what the specific results of these activities are, another study is needed. The participation of states in hybrid partnerships and policy forums such as traditional IGOs is voluntary. They are useful for states as networks for the exchange of views, knowledge, and experience in the field of low-carbon development. In a world where no one country has reached zero GHG emissions, such entities are a valuable home of international expertise on climate policy.

The increase in the number of quasi formal interactions between representatives of states outside the formal intergovernmental process empirically confirms that states prefer to use quasi formal and informal formats for cooperation on climate policy issues. It is unlikely that a single, satisfying approach to their typology will ever be developed in academic research. Despite the differences in terminology, many authors have concluded that quasi formal entities have not yet replaced the traditional structures of collective action embodied by the UNFCCC; however, further development of climate policy in the context of current geopolitical tensions is likely to strengthen the observed trend, and quasi formal entities will play an increasing role in international climate governance.

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