

Global Governance 2.0: The Collective Choreography of Cooperation

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Executive Summary

Multi-stakeholder partnerships among states and non-state actors have become increasingly prevalent models for the delivery of global public goods, and a variety of international organizations—particularly the United Nations entities—are pouring resources into large-scale efforts such as conferences and summits to promote partnerships. But are such efforts effective? If so, what is the causal mechanism at work?

This working paper presents the following insights, policy recommendations and directions for future research arising from an analysis of all major efforts by international organizations to promote partnerships on climate change during 2000-2015:

- Contrary to conventional wisdom, very few intergovernmental conferences and summits designed to promote climate change partnerships have been successful, but those few successful efforts caused the biggest known surges in the growth of partnership.
- Artful organization was necessary for success, in effect, nudging economic actors by capitalizing on their existing motivations and lowering barriers to cooperation.
- Such organization—best described as the *collective choreography of cooperation*—centers around leadership and centralized decision-making combined with the principle of subsidiarity whereby those actors who are most influential in the sectors are empowered to lead partnership efforts in the context of the conference or summit, and is supported by strategic timing, leaders-level participation, sectoral orientation of stakeholders and a credible vetting process that emphasizes ambitious, cooperative commitments.
- Realizing a *collective choreography of cooperation* requires a high degree of convening power and autonomy on the part of the organizer.
- Among international organizations, the requisite convening power and autonomy for collective choreography are currently only available to the office of the UN Secretary-General — reflecting a development in international affairs best described as the expansion of the UN good offices function, with a domain that now includes climate change and a range that now includes non-state actors in addition to states.
- For climate action and the delivery of the Paris Agreement goals, particularly in the race to 2030, large-scale efforts taken by the Secretary-General in the next eight years could therefore prove determinant. This paper proposes a choreography cycle for climate action led by the UN Secretary-General coinciding with the five-year Global Stocktake of the Paris Agreement.
- The case of climate change opens a door for future research on the potential for collective choreography as a means to deliver global public goods. The selection of other goods to study in this light might be guided by a consideration of the features of the climate problem that have made it a suitable candidate for collective choreography.
- Four features of the climate problem have made it conducive to collective choreography: (1) distributed control over establishing the changes necessary for the solution; (2) potential for economic benefits to actors with control over delivering the solution; (3) high barriers to

cooperation among these actors; and (4) frustration among political leaders with the lack of progress in the intergovernmental arena, sufficient to convince them to welcome a mediation effort and/or alternative routes to solution.

- In a world characterized by increasing nationalism and retreat from multilateral institutions, collective choreography presents a potential pathway to accelerate the achievement of global goals while re-establishing the relevance and value of the international organizations.

1 Introduction

1.1 The Growing Importance of Partnerships for Global Public Goods

Global public goods (GPGs) have become a staple fixture in the national agendas of both developed and developing countries. Such goods, which by definition transcend political boundaries, are policy priorities in a range of issue areas, from peace and security to the environment, and from global health to economic growth. For example, a stable climate with global temperature no more than 2°C above pre-industrial times, which is necessary to avoid globally catastrophic loss of life, is a global public good. Likewise, nuclear security—that is, the reductions of risks and prevention of malicious acts (intentional or otherwise) related to nuclear material—is a GPG that benefits the whole world, as radioactive fallout does not respect national borders. Detection and containment of communicable diseases such as Covid-19 or Ebola also benefit people and economies of all countries in an interconnected world.

The conventional response for the delivery of global public goods has been the negotiation and implementation of legally binding agreements among national governments that are members of international organizations (IOs) such as the United Nations. Some such agreements have been highly effective. The Vienna Convention and its Montreal Protocol are seen as models of multilateral cooperation for their success in closing the hole in the ozone layer.¹ Others have had mixed success. The Treaty on Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) has helped to keep the number of countries with nuclear weapons small, and to confirm the purely peaceful nature of most civilian nuclear programs. But, a few countries who are not signatories to the NPT have nevertheless developed nuclear weapons outside the NPT's constraints, and the slow rate of progress on disarmament among the five countries with nuclear weapons under the NPT has angered many members that pledged not to acquire nuclear weapons. Some efforts to negotiate GPG agreements have failed completely. In the early 1990s, when the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was being negotiated, efforts were also underway to reach agreement on a convention on forests. Following a two-year negotiation, however, UN member states were not able to achieve sufficient agreement on this contentious and challenging issue, yielding the infamous “Non-Legally Binding Authoritative Statement of Principles for a Global Consensus on the Management, Conservation and Sustainable Development of all Types of Forests” instead of a convention. This issue has since been relegated to ongoing dialogue in the UN Forum on Forests and as a topic in other conventions, such as the UNFCCC.

¹ Benedick, *Ozone Diplomacy*; ‘Why the Montreal Protocol Is the Most Successful Climate Agreement Ever’.

Dissatisfaction with what has been achieved through traditional multilateral agreement has helped spur an exponential rise in multi-stakeholder partnerships over the past thirty years.² These are instances of *voluntary cooperation* that transcend traditional multilateral governance by convening coalitions of countries, cities, companies, and civil society to deliver global public goods. This trend also has had variable performance; some partnerships have been lauded for their success, but many have failed to deliver on their promise.³ Nevertheless, enthusiasm for this modality has soared, particularly for climate change. Over 250 climate partnerships were launched between 2000 and 2015, and recent estimates suggest that the most ambitious partnerships on climate change have the potential to put the world on a 2°C pathway, in line with intergovernmental goals.⁴

In turn, the significance of voluntary cooperation has been recognised in the multilateral arena, and “partnership” has become a preferred operating mode in the global governance of development and climate change. The Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Climate Agreement both prioritize partnerships, including multi-stakeholder partnerships, as a way forward for their effective implementation.⁵

1.2 *International Organizations and Partnerships*

States and non-state actors, as the protagonists of partnerships, have been the primary subject of research and practitioner focus on voluntary cooperation. Recently, studies have highlighted the importance of other types of actors as members of partnerships, notably IOs.⁶ But IOs have also been engaged in the growth of voluntary cooperation in another way: by promoting them via large-scale conferences, summits and related processes, without necessarily taking part in partnerships themselves. Indeed, large numbers of partnerships have been launched in association with intergovernmental summits or conferences.⁷

Analysis of partnerships launched at international conferences has focused on their quality and subsequent effectiveness.⁸ There has been less focus on whether such conferences or summits have actually *caused* the growth of voluntary cooperation. Descriptive studies have suggested that IOs have “orchestrated” the growth in partnerships.⁹ Such studies attribute purposive behavior to IOs, but have not compared approaches taken in various efforts, nor traced the conditions under which such efforts may succeed. Thus, we don’t know which, if any, large-scale conferences and summits of IOs have *caused* the growth in quality and quantity of partnerships. Nor do we know under what conditions they have succeeded.

Despite this lacuna in knowledge, large amounts of resources are being poured into such efforts by IOs, based on the assumption that large-scale efforts are successful in promoting the growth of

² Pattberg et al., *Public-Private Partnerships for Sustainable Development*.

³ UN DESA, ‘Voluntary Commitments and Partnerships for Sustainable Development’.

⁴ NewClimate Institute et al., ‘Global Climate Action from Cities, Regions and Businesses’.

⁵ UNFCCC, ‘Paris Agreement’; United Nations, ‘Future We Want - Outcome Document’.

⁶ Andonova, *Governance Entrepreneurs*.

⁷ ‘PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVES ANNOUNCED AT SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT SUMMIT IN JOHANNESBURG | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases’.

⁸ Michaelowa and Michaelowa, ‘Transnational Climate Governance Initiatives’; Pattberg and Widerberg, ‘Transnational Multistakeholder Partnerships for Sustainable Development’.

⁹ Jordan et al., *Governing Climate Change*.

partnership that can help solve global public goods problems. In other words, evidence has lagged behind practice.

1.3 *The Research Question and Definitions*

If partnerships are valuable, and sometimes even essential, for delivering global goals, are large-scale efforts by IOs an effective way to cultivate and accelerate their growth? If so, are all such efforts equally effective? Our assessment must be informed by an examination of the various large-scale efforts by IOs in the past, and their differentiated effects on the phenomenon. This study represents the first such attempt to capture the systemic effects of large-scale efforts by IOs on the growth of partnerships.

Two parameters defined the scope of a larger study from which these findings are drawn.¹⁰

First, a focus on partnerships to mitigate climate change. The evolution of partnerships on climate change has significantly outpaced that of partnerships in other issue areas. Indeed, the value of partnerships has been formally recognized and encouraged in the multilateral Paris Agreement, while consensus among governments on the need to partner with non-state actors has not been achieved in other issue areas such as nuclear security or pandemic response. This presents a rich case for analysis to begin to fill the knowledge gap. This study therefore focused on climate change to understand whether there has been a causal connection between large-scale IO efforts and the growth of partnerships on climate change.

Second, a focus on partnerships and large-scale efforts in the years 2000-2015. This was the period with the greatest growth in climate partnerships and also one that saw the highest number of international efforts to promote them. Fifteen years provides a significant enough time period to trace causation effects, while keeping a study manageable.

With these parameters, this study sought to answer the following question: **During 2000-2015, did large-scale efforts by international organizations to promote partnerships on climate change *cause* the growth of such partnerships? If so, how?** For clarity and precision, the following definitions of the terms *growth*, *partnerships* and *international organizations* were used in this study.

Growth in voluntary cooperation was defined along two dimensions: an increase in the quantity of partnerships, and an increase in the quality of partnerships. Assessing the number of partnerships is a straight-forward counting exercise. There are many ways to measure quality, not least the achievement of goals. However, success is not always a binary condition, and since climate partnerships are usually long-term, we often lack the *ex-post* data necessary to determine goal achievement. In lieu of this information, we can use proxy indicators of the quality of a partnership.

Lessons learned and best practices have emerged from numerous partnerships over decades, and suggest several generally applicable conditions of success of partnerships, which this study used

¹⁰ Sapatnekar, 'Do Intergovernmental Organizations Drive the Growth of Voluntary Cooperation on Climate Change?'

as proxies for quality.¹¹ They include: ensuring the right partners at the table; articulating specific and ambitious goals; putting in place professional and dedicated staff; securing adequate funding; being responsive to the context in which the partnership's activities are implemented; and designing a good fit with the structure of the problem.

International organizations were understood as those established by and among national governments, who remain the organization's only full members. This study distinguished between efforts led by the member states or by the bureaucracies of IOs, with their differentiated autonomy and convening power therefore being pertinent.¹²

Partnerships on climate change can be between single or multiple types of actors (e.g. just businesses, or businesses, civil society and governments together) and were defined using five additional criteria, adapted from the literature.¹³ Such partnerships are: (a) voluntary; (b) horizontal (without authority relationships between members, such as due to contractual obligations); (c) participatory (with governance structures that enable influence by all members); (d) in pursuit of large-scale systemic change; and (e) significantly focused on climate change.

2 Large-Scale IO Efforts: What Worked, What Didn't, and Why?

During the period 2000 to 2015, as the number of partnerships on climate change was rising exponentially, a series of large-scale efforts by IOs sought to promote voluntary cooperation (Fig. 1). Some of these efforts focused exclusively on climate change (e.g. workstream 2 of the negotiations for the Paris Agreement), while others were more general, focusing on sustainable development including climate change (e.g. the Rio+20 conference). Some efforts were led by member states of IOs (e.g. Rio+20 and the Johannesburg Conference) and others by the IO bureaucracies (e.g. the 2007 Climate Summit hosted by the Secretary-General and the UNFCCC Secretariat's Groundswell Agenda). At least one featured mixed leadership (the Lima-Paris Action Agenda, led by the Government of France together with the Government of Peru, the office of the UN Secretary-General and the UNFCCC Secretariat).

Interviews and archives indicate that actors prominently engaged in climate change partnerships were motivated by various reasons. One common reason is that they wanted to overcome intergovernmental gridlock in the 'formal' arena of the climate negotiations. For example, the United Kingdom deliberately pursued the development of partnerships while holding influential roles, such as when chairing the G8.¹⁴ Other countries such as Germany, France, Japan, and Norway, were following a similar logic in their pursuit of partnerships. Other actor types, such as subnational authorities or businesses, were also motivated by this logic.

Another reason, diametrically opposed the first, is that actors were promoting more narrow national interests rather than seeking a constructive way to work around the multilateral gridlock. This was particularly visible in the actions taken by the US government under the Bush Administration, when factors such as an ideological preference for private sector-led solutions, an

¹¹ Pattberg and Widerberg, 'Transnational Multistakeholder Partnerships for Sustainable Development'.

¹² Barnett and Finnemore, 'The Politics, Power, and Pathologies of International Organizations'; Chasek, Wagner, and Wagner, 'Singing the Unsung'.

¹³ Kaul and Conceição, *The New Public Finance*.

¹⁴ Group of Eight, 'Gleneagles Plan of Action'.

aversion to multilateralism, and a desire to repair the US international reputation following the non-ratification of the Kyoto Protocol combined to make partnerships an attractive modality.¹⁵

A third reason was a desire to reap reputational rewards and maintain competitiveness. In particular, consumer goods companies were facing intense scrutiny by media and the public on practices such as deforestation and formed partnerships with their competitors to shift practices—often coordinated by organizations such as the World Economic Forum and the World Business Council for Sustainable Development.¹⁶

Given these motivations for launching partnerships, what effect did large-scale intergovernmental efforts have on the formation of successful partnerships during these years?

2.1 *The Variable Success Rate of Large-Scale Efforts to Promote Partnerships*

Conventional wisdom and descriptive scholarship attribute the rise in climate change partnerships during this period to the large-scale conferences and summits meant to foster their growth. However, an examination of the archives and interviews with the variety of actors influential in the growth of partnerships during this time indicates otherwise. Despite appearances, very few of these large-scale efforts successfully influenced the actors engaged in partnerships in these years to yield new and/or improved partnerships (Fig. 1).

For instance, the 2002 World Conference on Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg, touted ‘Type II partnerships’ as an official outcome, but many were in fact existing bilateral aid programs or ‘empty’ partnerships that did not get funded. The few multi-stakeholder partnerships that formed in the context of the conference were due to processes outside of, and even despite, the official proceedings. This disconnect between the summit and ongoing partnerships activity was reflected in the press release by Business Action for Sustainable Development (BASD) at the time: *“Thousands of practical on-the-ground partnerships already exist. Some new initiatives will end up as Type 2, UN approved, but, whether they do or not, business is determined to extend the partnership concept as its way of contributing to the Johannesburg and the Millennium goals.”*¹⁷

These parallel tracks continued for the next decade, with partnerships being launched in response to the existing motivations of the actors involved, but with no discernible causal connection with the large-scale efforts by IOs. A senior official from the US Government during these years underlines this disconnect between the partnerships and the large-scale efforts: *“there was no cross pollination whatsoever”*.¹⁸ A senior executive at the World Economic Forum concurs: *“At the time, there was no post box for us in the international public process. In the meantime, we had been using our spaces and meetings in Davos to develop these models.”*¹⁹

¹⁵ Hale, ‘Managing the Disaggregation of Development: How the Johannesburg “Type II” Partnerships Can Be Made Effective’.

¹⁶ Stigson, ‘A Business Perspective on Partnerships’.

¹⁷ Stigson.

¹⁸ Senior official of the United States Government, in discussion with author, 28 May 2019.

¹⁹ Senior executive of the World Economic Forum, in discussion with author, 23 September 2018.

Likewise, the Rio+20 conference in 2012 was lauded as a major milestone in partnerships for sustainable development.²⁰ Yet, the vast majority of voluntary announcements made were individual, not in partnership, and resulted primarily from side events and associated processes, rather than the official conference proceedings, causing one senior executive to remark, “*At Rio+20 it became clear that the real action was in the side events. Suddenly, the official UN proceedings did not matter anymore.*”²¹

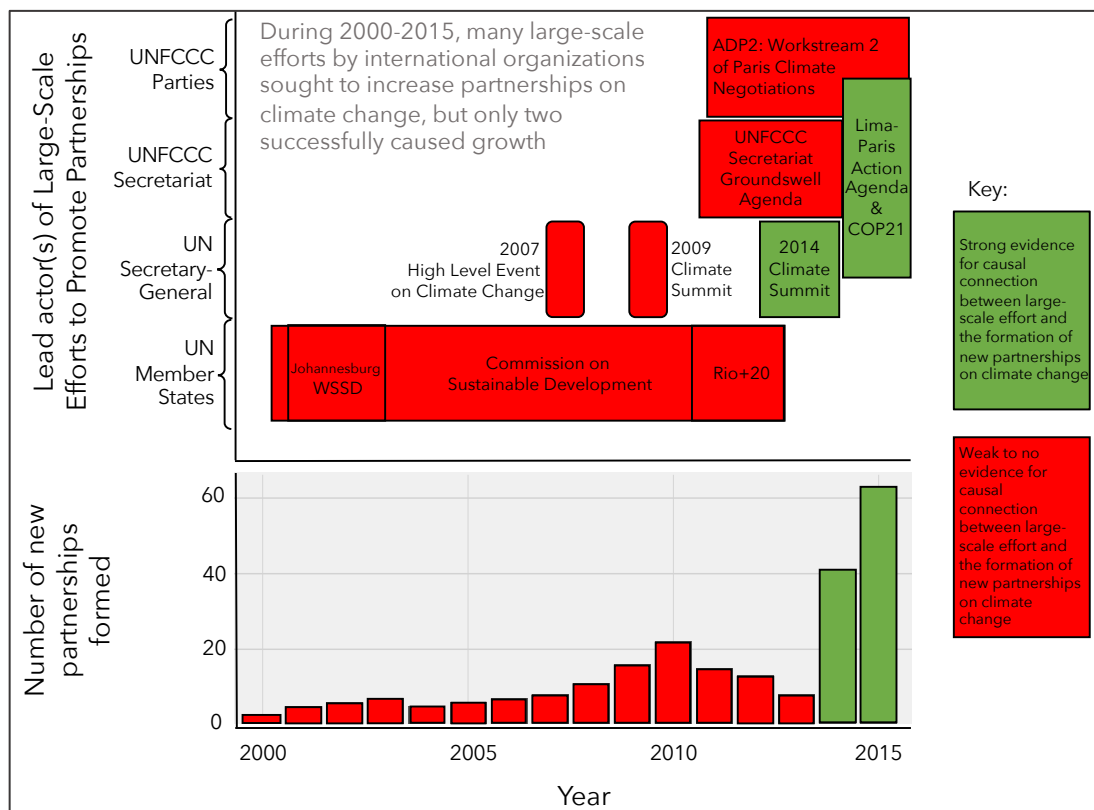


Figure 1

However, some of these large-scale efforts, namely the 2014 Climate Summit and the Lima-Paris Action Agenda (LPAA) culminating in the 21st Conference of the Parties (COP21), were directly successful, not only in spurring many new partnerships (in fact, causing the greatest surges in partnership seen during this fifteen-year period), but also in causing an improvement in the quality of partnerships, particularly with regard to the mix of partners and the ambition levels of their goals. As one member of a business partnership launched at COP21 observes, “*The summits make us collaborate. Consider ‘We Mean Business’. The fact that we had fifteen companies cooperating, that would normally compete, is significant. The [LPAA leads] told us exactly what was needed in the run-up to Paris.*”²² Likewise, a senior executive of a leading business organization notes, “*If the Secretary-General hadn't done the summit, none of this would have happened.*”²³

²⁰ Ramstein, ‘Rio+20 Voluntary Commitments: Delivering Promises on Sustainable Development?’

²¹ Senior executive of the World Economic Forum, in discussion with author, 23 September 2018.

²² Senior executive at the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, in discussion with author, 4 October 2019.

²³ Senior executive of a Fortune Global 500 company, in discussion with author, 10 May 2019.

In short, archives and interviews both revealed high consensus among actors involved in climate partnerships over the past twenty years that some large-scale efforts caused the growth in quantity and quality of partnerships, but not others. Notably, the two large-scale efforts that interviewees and archival sources credited with success also coincided with the largest surge in the quantity of partnerships seen during this period (Fig. 1).

2.2 *Conditions for Success: Convening power, Autonomy and Artful Organization*

Why were some efforts so successful but not others? This question was investigated using an exploratory and discursive combination of semi-structured interviews and archival research, complemented by existing analyses and syntheses of these events. Over 70 interviews were conducted with senior government officials, private sector executives, UN officials and civil society actors that have been engaged in each of the major summits and conferences during this period. A snowball technique, whereby interviewees recommended others for further insights was used, until saturation was achieved – that is, until new interviewees did not provide much additional information. In-depth examination of government and UN archives related to these events, including correspondence, official records, code cables, memos, and meeting notes provided insights into the factors that contributed to or detracted from success at each of these events. Conditions of success identified in a given event (through their presence or absence) were specifically investigated for other events via the interviews and archives. In this way, common themes and general conditions of success across the events were identified.

The answer lies in the organizational approach taken, and the ability of the organizer to ensure such a productive approach (Figure 2). Successful efforts had six critical attributes in common, while unsuccessful ones lacked many of them.

		Large-Scale IO Effort to Promote Partnerships								
		Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development 2002	Commission on Sustainable Development 2000-2012	High-Level Event on Climate Change 2007	2009 Climate Summit 2009	World Conference on Sustainable Development 2012	Work stream two of the negotiations for the Paris Agreement 2011-2015	UNFCCC Secretariat Groundswell Agenda 2011-2014	2014 Climate Summit 2014	Lima-Paris Action Agenda and COP21 2014-2015
Organizational Attribute of Partnership-Promoting Effort	Strategic Timing	Yellow	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
	Leaders' Level Convening	Green	Red	Green	Green	Green	Red	Red	Green	Green
	Sectoral Orientation	Red	Yellow	Red	Yellow	Red	Green	Yellow	Green	Green
	Emphasis on Ambitious Cooperative Commitments ("Audition" process)	Green	Yellow	Red	Red	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Green
	Subsidiarity	Yellow	Green	Red	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
	Leadership with Centralized Decision-Making	Red	Red	Green	Green	Red	Red	Red	Green	Green
Attribute of Host/ Lead	High Convening Power	Green	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green	Red	Green	Green
	High Autonomy	Red	Red	Green	Green	Red	Red	Yellow	Green	Green

Figure 2 *The organizational and host attributes of large-scale efforts by IOs to promote multi-stakeholder partnerships on climate change, 2000-2015*

2.2.1 *Six Organizational Attributes for Collective Choreography*

Artful organization can create a potent incentive structure for all types of actors to make cooperative commitments; in effect *nudging* them into a pipeline for cooperation. In particular, six organizational attributes were found to enable the mechanism of collective choreography to work.

1. **Strategic timing** goes a long way. If the event occurs when actors are getting increasingly motivated to make voluntary commitments, such as the run-up to an intergovernmental milestone, it capitalizes on momentum and enthusiasm for cooperation. This generates a resonance effect rather than needing to work against the grain. Adequate time to enable actors to do the legwork needed to forge new commitments is also necessary. A good example is the one-year preparatory period of the Lima-Paris Action Agenda culminating in the highly anticipated COP21.
2. When an event has **leaders-level participation**, it generates high visibility and is inherently attractive to all stakeholders who are looking to get credit for their commitments and enhance their reputations. This creates an attractive ‘carrot’, spurring stakeholders to participate. The leaders-level emphasis of the 2014 Climate Summit is a good example of this approach.
3. The ‘stick’ is an **emphasis on ambitious, cooperative commitments**, such as through a vetting process and by maintaining tight control over who gets to be ‘seen’ and featured. This, in effect, acts as an audition process, creating a competition among actors vying to get the reputational benefit that comes with the high visibility. The result is an increase in the quality of the commitments through improved goals as well as a more optimal mix of partners. For example, a robust winnowing process was conducted by the organizers of the Lima-Paris Action Agenda to finalize the partnerships that would be featured at COP21.
4. With the carrot and stick established, the task is to corral the actors in a way that generates cooperation in the various sectors that comprise the solution to the climate problem, even as they are competing to improve their ambitions (“competitive cooperation”). This requires **sectoral orientation**. Rather than organizing actors traditionally, by their constituency or type (for example, governments, NGOs or businesses), different actor types pertinent to a given GHG sector are grouped together. This nudges normally adversarial or tangential actors toward cooperating around a common problem in their sector of influence, since they all have an interest in reaping the reputational gains. Thus, the sector-themed sessions of the 2014 Climate Summit served to corral different types of stakeholders together to prepare multi-stakeholder partnerships.
5. With actors motivated and organized within their sectors, the whole process is injected with a driving force by the principle of **subsidiarity**, whereby actors who have emerged as leaders within their sector networks are empowered to lead the process of commitment-making for the event. Thus, influential actors within a sector demonstrate subsidiarity by working with willing, less-influential actors to forge commitments on behalf of their sector at large-scale

convenings. This efficiently builds on the existing network and relationships of trust. For example, the UN Secretary-General relied on the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), an influential entity among developing countries in the renewable energy sector, to organize and lead efforts among stakeholders to form ambitious, new partnerships for the 2014 Climate Summit.

6. Finally, balancing the subsidiarity, the organizing entity provides **leadership with centralized decision-making**, making it possible to make difficult or innovative decisions as needed without resorting to a lengthy debate or consultation. Rather than permitting a business-as-usual process of consensus-based decision making, the UN Secretary-General maintained close hold on decision-making for this 2014 Climate Summit to shape the parameters of the summit in the most strategic ways.

This mechanism of surging the growth of cooperation via large-scale efforts organized in line with these six attributes can be aptly named: the *collective choreography of cooperation*. The essence of this choreography is perhaps best captured by a senior executive of a Fortune 500 company, who observed, “*It takes two to tango—for forty different types of actors. There is an emerging leadership community which includes different types of actors, which is starting to understand how this choreography works. You don’t need to explain it to everyone. You can drive most companies by capitalizing on their fear of missing out, rather than making them think more deeply on governance.*”²⁴

As Figure 2 illustrates, of the many efforts by various IOs to strengthen climate partnerships, most lacked several of the six organizational attributes. For example, in the Johannesburg conference, the constituency-oriented convening of Major Groups entrenched distrust in attempts to build multi-stakeholder partnerships, with the G77 seeing donors as shirking their responsibilities, and environmental groups seeing the private sector as persona non grata in sustainable development. Further, the consensus-based decision-making among UN member states undermined any central leadership that could make difficult or bold decisions in light of this distrust.

The CSD likewise had organizational shortcomings that prevented the formation and development of partnerships with non-state actors—consensus decision-making; low profile (not leaders-level convening); and constituency orientation. At Rio+20, since the conference organizers did not prioritize partnerships above individual commitments, nor was there a particular requirement for ambition, there was an abundance of individual commitments with low ambition, but relatively few cooperative commitments. The low level of autonomy available to UN DESA significantly constrained their ability to organize the process and event differently.

Only the two successful efforts had all six attributes (the 2014 Climate Summit and the Lima-Paris Action Agenda culminating in COP21). What made this possible?

2.2.2 Convening Power and Autonomy: The Necessary Enablers

Critically, the actors organizing these processes need sufficient **convening power** and **autonomy** to put in place all six of these organizational attributes. Without the mandate or ability to convene political leaders, CEOs and civil society leaders alike, an organizing actor cannot attract the

²⁴ Senior executive of a Fortune Global 500 company, in discussion with author, 10 May 2019.

decision-making stakeholders needed to ensure high visibility, nor can they demand ambitious commitments if the stakeholders do not have the requisite decision-making power. At the same time, innovative organizational elements such as sectoral orientation, reserving the right to make central decisions, and choosing which organizations to empower through subsidiarity all require autonomy. This is more available to secretariats or technical agencies than to forums such as the UN General Assembly.

3 Neither Secretary nor General: The UN Chief as a Choreographer

The need for high convening power and autonomy to accelerate growth in voluntary cooperation means that resources expended for this purpose should empower those entities that possess both. This raises the question: who has sufficient convening power and autonomy?

As Figure 2 illustrates, the only multilateral actors with the autonomy and convening power to successfully choreograph large-scale surges in multi-stakeholder partnership were the UN Secretary-General in 2014 and the President of COP21 (the Government of France), in 2015. Unsurprisingly, efforts led by UN member states or Parties to the climate convention were not autonomous, because by definition, decisions in these bodies are made by consensus or by voting. In addition to the expected small amount of autonomy informally sanctioned to presidents of the climate negotiations, the then-president of the climate negotiations, the Government of France, enjoyed additional autonomy in the organization of the COP as a permanent member of the UN Security Council. But the level of autonomy enjoyed by the Secretary-General in hosting the 2014 climate summit went far beyond the norm associated with international bureaucracies. And notably, even with the autonomy and convening power, the 2007 and 2009 summits of the Secretary-General did not have the six organizational attributes necessary for collective choreography.

How did the UN Secretary-General acquire the autonomy to convene climate summits of his own accord? Why didn't this autonomy yield the six organizational attributes for choreography in all his climate summits? To understand this, we need to trace the evolutionary path of the role of the Secretary-General and consider the organizational attributes of the SG's summits within their specific contexts.

Doing so reveals that two extensions of the UN Secretary-General's role characterize this office's engagement in collective choreography: an expansion of the domain of his good offices from traditional peace and security concerns to climate change; and the expansion of the range of his good offices from governments to all stakeholders pertinent to the problem at hand. Sequencing was key, however. Autonomy had to be earned (i.e. the domain of good offices was expanded) before the mechanism of collective choreography could be attempted (i.e. the range of good offices was expanded).

3.1 From Hammaraskjold to Annan: The Emergence of the Secretary-General as an Autonomous Political Actor

The historical record indicates that the Secretary-General's autonomy on climate change has increased over time and built on decades of efforts in other issue areas by secretaries-general past, in two specific veins.

First, pioneered by Dag Hammarskjöld in the 1950s, the Secretary-General's function as a neutral, third party mediator among member states on issues of international security, to defuse tensions and de-escalate conflict, has come to be both accepted and expected over the decades.²⁵ Commonly known as 'good offices', this function has become synonymous with the office of the Secretary-General. From defusing the acute Cuban Missile Crisis to long-term mediation in Myanmar, the Secretary-General's good offices on matters of peace and security between member states has contributed to the maintenance of peace since the 1960s. In the late twentieth century, secretaries-general began to use this political role to wield influence in other issue areas, and beyond just member states. For instance, Secretary-General Kofi Annan convened pharmaceutical companies in the context of the HIV/AIDS crisis to broker agreement on provision of low-cost anti-retroviral medication in Africa.

Second, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, in response to the tendency of mega summits to yield results of the lowest common denominator, Kofi Annan established the precedent of the Secretary-General engaging in "conference activism" — by proactively proposing summits, their agendas, and their conclusions to the General Assembly.²⁶ This was a marked departure from prevailing practice, whereby UN Member States would identify the need for a summit, develop its agenda, and lead the preparations, with the Secretariat playing a passive and facilitative role. Under Secretary-General Annan, the Secretariat took on a more active role – for the first time proposing the need for summits, putting pen to paper in suggesting the agenda and potential outcomes, and engaging in shuttle diplomacy among member states to steer towards specific outcomes, all the while preserving the formality of Member States as the decision-makers in these summits. The millennium summit and its MDGs, as well as its 2005 follow-up summit with the adoption of the Responsibility to Protect principle are prime examples of this approach.

3.2 *Ban: 'Good Offices' and Conference Activism for climate change*

When Ban Ki-moon issued invitations to all leaders of the UN member states to attend a climate summit in 2007, he was building on both these forms of autonomous action. First, he was offering mediation on climate change — an issue mired in gridlock within the intergovernmental negotiations, and one that many governments at the time felt needed to be elevated from negotiators to the leaders' level. By acting as a neutral third party among not two or three governments, as had become the established norm for security issues, but among groupings of governments together comprising almost the totality of the UN membership, the Secretary-General took what was seen as a natural next step for his good offices function, extending it from the realm of peace and security to the existential issue of climate change.

Second, he was engaging in conference activism by proposing the summit as a way to solve a specific problem. He went one step further than his predecessor by 'skipping' the request for a resolution by the General Assembly to hold the conference, and issuing the invitations himself — a first in the history of the United Nations, on any issue. Without a General Assembly resolution, the member states had no legal basis to instruct the Secretary-General on how he should run the summit. He was not beholden to them on its organization. The 2007 High Level Event on Climate Change, a day-long summit of heads of State and Government, together with leaders of private

²⁵ Ramcharan, *Preventive Diplomacy at the UN*.

²⁶ Andonova, *Governance Entrepreneurs*.

sector and civil society, marked an innovative extension of the good offices function from peace and security to climate change, and a solidification of the Secretary-General's agenda-setting role in UN conferences.

While governments on the whole welcomed this initiative, the prospect of losing their usual decision-making authority in summitry in this bargain caused some ruffled feathers that required some efforts during the preparatory process to smooth. Furthermore, the Secretary-General was treading on the mandate of the UNFCCC, with encroachment not only questioned, but also resisted by climate negotiators in particular. Building on the goodwill that had been built by his predecessors, Ban and his team therefore remained transparent via multiple briefings, bilateral engagements and written communications on the expectations and scope of the summit. They focused on a mediation role between governments and earning their trust.

The need to address these concerns meant that while the summit saw the participation of non-state actors in keeping with the fashion of the day, Ban limited their contribution to dialogue highlighting their roles. He refrained from centralizing the potential for non-state actors to be solution-providers in the climate equation that had been defined as a problem for states to solve. In short, Ban expanded the domain of his good offices to include climate change, and the breadth of his efforts to include interactions between all member states (rather than the two to three governments that are traditionally supported via good offices) but did not proactively expand the range of actors targeted beyond member states.

The frank dialogue enabled in this summit as well as the trust it engendered among leaders translated to more productive instructions to negotiators in the UNFCCC process. This positive impact, combined with a constructive role played by the Secretary-General in securing the 2007 Bali Action Plan, opened the door to another autonomous summit in 2009, just a few months ahead of the ill-fated COP15 in Copenhagen. Although it did not lead to a successful outcome in the intergovernmental negotiations at COP15 that year, the Secretary-General's 2009 summit was seized by many of the then-heads of state and government as a means to elevate the issue to the leaders' level and facilitate dialogue among them.²⁷

The necessarily conservative focus of the Secretary-General's 2007 and 2009 summits on mediation between governments explains why they did not have the six organizational attributes. Despite rhetoric about partnerships, the events were not organized with subsidiarity or sectoral orientation in mind – indeed, the political constraints at the time prevented the possibility of such an innovation, even as partnerships were fast becoming mainstream. They therefore did not yield any significant partnerships. Rather, their value was in establishing the precedent of the Secretary-General's autonomy to operate in this space, by hosting his own summits, and as a response to the existing intergovernmental gridlock. Consequently, following the failure of COP15 and the subsequent intergovernmental decision to redress this at COP21 in 2015, the Secretary-General was uniquely well-positioned to play a constructive role during this period as an autonomous summit host with unparalleled convening power and a climate leaders' mediator.

²⁷ United Nations, “‘Opportunity to Avoid Catastrophic Climate Change Is in Your Hands,’ Secretary-General Tells World Leaders at Climate Summit’.

3.3 Dancing Together for COP21

Secretary-General Ban hosted the 2014 Climate Summit with the intent to “catalyze action” ahead of COP21. Continuing the envelope-pushing tradition of interpreting the Secretary-General’s functions, this summit saw the range of the Secretary-General’s good offices decidedly extended to cover non-state actors as well as member states, to advance partnerships on the range of sectors and sub-issues that comprise the solution to climate mitigation.

For the first time in a UN summit, CEOs, mayors, governors and heads of NGOs were defined as leaders alongside Heads of State and Government as part of the official proceedings. The day-long event saw national announcements by political leaders in the morning, with the afternoon dedicated to the announcements of cooperative commitments by coalitions of state and non-state actors for each of the major GHG sectors – with speaking time only given to leaders who made the most ambitious commitments. This meant many government ministers were denied the opportunity to speak in the General Assembly Hall, and were relegated to lesser rooms to speak in parallel, in favor of non-state actors making ambitious commitments. A dedicated team of the Secretary-General worked hand in glove with leaders in each sector for over one year to co-create ambitious commitments.

The radical integration of non-state actors in the 2014 Climate Summit depended to a significant degree on a mindset shift that had occurred after COP15. The perceived failure of COP15 had resulted in a movement by non-state actors to both make voluntary commitments themselves and to increasingly engage in intergovernmental processes to influence governments to be more ambitious in their negotiations and commitments. This movement had manifested most visibly at Rio+20 – a global UN conference on sustainable development mandated by the UN General Assembly and held in 2012 – in which UN Member States encouraged and lauded the unprecedented participation and commitments by multinational companies, civil society, and subnational authorities to action to promote sustainable development (including climate mitigation and adaptation).

Though the majority of commitments made at Rio+20 were individual and not cooperative, and the participation of non-state actors was primarily in the margins of the conference in “side events,” Rio+20 nevertheless marked a clear shift in collective recognition by governments on the necessity of engaging non-state actors on this agenda. This mindset shift, combined with over a decade of learning from large-scale efforts to promote partnerships (from Johannesburg to Rio +20), proved instrumental in the success of the 2014 Climate Summit.

It would be wrong to think of this success and the summit organization as inevitable. To the contrary, ensuring the organizational attributes was not a smooth process. Similar to the 2007 and 2009 summits of the Secretary-General, frequent communication, transparency and shuttle diplomacy were necessary to reassure member states. Some decisions such as inviting CEOs to share the General Assembly stage with Heads of State and Government – displacing ministers and ambassadors – required Ban to spend political capital he had built up over the years by playing a relatively conservative role as a mediator among states. Yet, it was these bold decisions, together with all the necessary organizational attributes, that yielded the sharp growth of multi-stakeholder partnership and demonstrated the potency of playing the choreographer of a collective dance among countries, companies, civil society, and cities in response to climate change.

The Government of France explicitly identified the success of the 2014 Summit as the precedent to be followed. It adopted this multi-stakeholder modality for COP21 by designing the “Fourth Pillar” of the COP to attract and showcase action by coalitions of states and non-state actors. Designating dedicated days for each sector and conducting a similar vetting process and co-development of initiatives in concert with leaders in each sector, COP21 in effect delivered the second performance of collective choreography.

4 Collective Choreography for Global Goals

The Sustainable Development Goals adopted by all UN member states in 2015 aim for the achievement of a transformative set of global public goods by 2030. These interlinked seventeen goals range from food security for all people to universal quality education, and from management of global health risks to strong institutions for peaceful and just societies. Complementing these goals, the Paris Agreement of 2015 sets the ambitious goals of achieving global carbon neutrality during the second half of this century, and limiting global temperature rise to less than 2°C and ideally 1.5°C to avoid the most catastrophic effects of climate change. As COP26 and the latest IPCC reports have made clear, the hope of achieving the 1.5°C goal is now hanging by a thread, and collective action by 2030 will determine our ability to reach this goal. For the SDGs and for the Paris Agreement, then, the race to 2030 is on.

Against the long-term goal of carbon neutrality this century as well as urgency of action on climate and development before 2030, the insights yielded by this study have two immediate implications – one for policy on climate governance and one for research on the applicability of collective choreography to achieve other global public goods under the agenda for sustainable development.

4.1 Harnessing Collective Choreography to Deliver Global Climate Goals

Since 2015, there has been increasing recognition among governments, the private sector, civil society, and the UN system that summitry has the potential to galvanize and accelerate their motivations. This has led to a profusion of summits hosted by various actors.

President Macron of France has convened four One Planet Summits from 2017 to 2021 designed to advance voluntary cooperation among all stakeholders on climate finance. Governor Jerry Brown of California and Michael Bloomberg convened the Global Climate Action Summit in 2018 to improve partnerships among subnational actors and businesses in particular. Antonio Guterres, UN Secretary-General, hosted the Climate Action Summit in 2019 with the expressed purpose to galvanize greater voluntary cooperation among the ecosystem of stakeholders on climate action in a variety of greenhouse gas-emitting sectors. The UK Government, as President of COP26 held in Glasgow during November 2021, designed a two-week program for showcasing climate action in all the broad categories of GHG emissions.

Yet, these summits have not yielded the quantum leaps in strength and ambition of partnerships associated with the 2014 Climate Summit and COP21. That none of them built on the organizational best practices for collective choreography learned during 2014 and 2015 is germane. For instance, in 2019, despite having built up a precedence for centralized decision-making in summitry, the Secretary-General distributed decision-making on the sectoral coalition-building among national governments, rather than retaining it under his authority. A very short

preparatory period also provided actors with little time to engage in dialogue and trust-building required to developing ambitious and cooperative commitments. In addition, there is widespread “summit fatigue” among states and non-state actors alike, who are inundated with a crowded and relentless calendar of summitry, with little opportunity to prepare adequately for each one and increasing demands to deliver more and more ambitious announcements.

Looking ahead, two policy recommendations may be considered by summit organizers in the race to 2030.

- **Align future large-scale partnership promotion efforts with the six organizational attributes necessary to surge growth in cooperation**

The six organizational attributes necessary for success in large-scale efforts must be prioritized as a checklist by entities undertaking such efforts in the future. These attributes include: (1) strategic timing; (2) leaders’ level convening; (3) emphasis on ambitious, cooperative commitments; (4) sectoral orientation; (5) subsidiarity; and (6) leadership with centralized decision-making. Donors and supporters of such efforts should promote the adherence to such organization in order to maximise effectiveness and to avoid wasting valuable opportunities going forward.

- **Institutionalize a five-year choreography cycle to ratchet-up the strength of multi-stakeholder partnership, with coordinated annual efforts culminating in a single event at the end of each cycle**

If multi-stakeholder partnerships are to contribute to significant greenhouse gas emissions reductions this century, a long-term strategy for their cultivation that ensures continuity is necessary. The ratchet-up cycle of the Paris Agreement and its Global Stocktake mechanism offers a long-term framework with five-year increments, which could be followed for the growth of the partnership network.

Under this ratchet-up cycle, Parties to the Paris Agreement are expected to update and enhance their Nationally Determined Contributions at the Conference of the Parties every five years (the next one is due in 2025). Two years before each successive NDC ratchet-up, the Global Stocktake of the Paris Agreement is expected to take place, in which the progress made by Parties against their NDCs is collectively assessed. The Global Stocktake is intended to inject momentum into preparations for more ambitious NDCs in each cycle.

Thus, rather than ad-hoc summits and conferences to promote partnerships, a 30-year timetable with summits held once every five years and coinciding with the Global Stocktake (indeed, as an important component of the Stocktake), and with full institutional follow-up support to partnerships in the periods between the summits can serve to inject predictability, focus efforts, and strengthen the partnership networks at the level commensurate with the need. By aligning the timing with the Global Stocktake, this also allows the ecosystems of partnership to influence the level of ambition of the Parties two years later, thus creating a virtuous loop of greater ambition and action.

Secretary-General Guterres has announced a Summit of the Future in 2023, coinciding with the first Global Stocktake. This is an ideal opportunity to establish the 30-year choreography timetable.

5 Exploring Collective Choreography for other Global Public Goods

Given that collective choreography spurred the greatest growth of partnership on climate change in the past two decades, could it be usefully applied to advance the achievement of other global public goods that require collective action among different types of stakeholders? This question opens a new research agenda for scholars of partnerships and/or global public goods.

Collective choreography, as an act of effective nudging, uses existing motivations among a variety of actors to propel them towards cooperating more than they otherwise would have. To determine whether and which other problems may be well-suited to this approach, initial steps in this research agenda might be to identify the features of the climate governance problem that have made it conducive to benefitting from collective choreography. If similar such features—whether structural, political, or substantive—can be found in other issue areas, then this may point to potential for collective choreography as a way to advance pragmatic collective action on the issue.

5.1 *What Makes a GPG Conducive to Collective Choreography?*

Considering the case of climate change, four features of this problem seem to have made it conducive to collective choreography.

First, control over many levers of action for reducing greenhouse gases is distributed among many actors, both state and non-state. The sources of greenhouse gases, which are the drivers of human-induced climate change, are in a large variety of economic sectors and activity upon which modern human life depend (e.g. the oil and gas industry, agriculture, transport, and so on). This makes an industry pathway in each sector a valuable one for the delivery of the climate GPG, and in particular requires cooperation among various actors rather than simply individual actions.²⁸ For instance, reducing emissions from deforestation and land degradation is an important part of the climate mitigation solution. Consumer goods companies involved in deforestation (e.g. Unilever and Nestlé), governors of provinces or states with large areas of forests, environmental NGOs, media, consumers, and national governments all hold influence over this problem and therefore its solution.

Second, economic and social benefits to non-state actors for engaging in voluntary cooperation on climate change already exist or can be created. The primary motivations for businesses seeking to engage in GPG partnerships are to secure reputational and monetary rewards. Pressure from civil society and media are a major motivation for large companies that see risks to their positions in the market, and are an indicator for an emerging consumer demand. In addition, the aggressive development of alternative technologies and reduction of their costs has made the business case for changing operations in ways that reduce carbon emissions.

²⁸ Collective action among all pertinent stakeholders is not the only pathway to solving the climate crisis. An alternative approach might be the invention, by a single research institution, of a geoengineering solution that would counteract the effects of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Such a *single best shot* solution is the aim of prominent philanthropists such as Bill Gates. Given the urgency of climate change and the low likelihood of the availability of such a silver bullet, such single best shot efforts should not diminish collective action in the global response to climate change (although they may end up providing solutions upon which the world depends).

Third, despite these motivations, barriers to cooperation exist in the form of high transaction costs, risks and limited trust. These barriers need to be proactively lowered if voluntary cooperation is to grow. This includes: trust-building among actors, whether of the same type (e.g. businesses that may be competitors to each other) or among various types (e.g. indigenous peoples' organizations and businesses together); provision of intermediary and coordination services to lower transaction costs; and de-risking through the onboarding of additional partners and/or provision of incentives to accept risks.

Fourth, the limited progress in the intergovernmental arena since the UNFCCC was signed in 1992 as well as continued challenges posed by climate change, caused governmental leaders to welcome a mediation role by the Secretary-General on this issue. This opened the door for the Secretary-General to develop some autonomy on this issue vis-à-vis UN member states over time, thereby laying the foundation for the Secretary-General to become the choreographer among all relevant actors and put in place the six organizational attributes for an effective summit. Thus, a frustration with the intergovernmental process, and a consequent willingness among leaders to the UN Secretary-General taking an active role in the issue area is a prerequisite to collective choreography.

In a generalized form, the four features of a global problem that might make it a suitable candidate for collective choreography are: (1) distributed control over establishing the changes necessary for the solution; (2) potential for economic benefits to actors with control over delivering the solution; (3) high barriers to cooperation among these actors; and (4) frustration among political leaders with the lack of progress in the intergovernmental arena, sufficient to convince them to welcome a mediation effort and/or alternative routes to solution.

5.2 A Research Agenda for Collective Choreography and Global Public Goods

The Sustainable Development Goals comprise many different global public goods. Identifying a few such goods and studying their potential for delivery via collective choreography is a new research agenda opened by this study.

For example, infectious disease has long been a global challenge. A global public good on this issue could be defined in several ways. For instance, the aim of disease eradication (such as in the case of small pox or polio) defines the GPG as the complete absence of the disease. By contrast, the aim of containment of disease (such as in the case of measles, the seasonal influenza and potentially Covid-19) defines the GPG as significantly reduced threat to humanity. Whether eradication or containment is the aim, responding effectively to infectious disease requires multiple discrete collective action efforts: information-sharing among countries on the incidence of disease; compliance with the various requirements of treaties; the development of an effective vaccine; the global rollout of the vaccine; responsible and fact-based public communications; and so on.

Does infectious disease control display the four features of the problem structure to make it conducive to collective choreography? If so, what do the histories of intergovernmental governance and multi-stakeholder partnerships on this issue tell us about the role that the UN Secretary-General has played and the potential for Good Offices to spur growth in partnerships on

infectious disease? How can the existing multilateral processes on infectious disease be harnessed in the context of the collective choreography mechanism to spur improved collective action?

Research on this and other global public goods could be valuable inputs to policy-making in the race to 2030.

6 Conclusion

This study sought to understand whether and how large-scale efforts by IOs (such as summits and conferences) have caused the growth of partnerships on climate change. It found that, contrary to conventional wisdom, among international organizations, only the efforts led by the UN Secretary-General have been successful in driving the growth of climate partnerships. Six organizational attributes were identified as conditions of success for these efforts, in effect enabling a mechanism this study labels the collective choreography of cooperation: (1) strategic timing; (2) leaders' level convening; (3) emphasis on ambitious, cooperative commitments; (4) sectoral orientation; (5) subsidiarity; and (6) leadership with centralized decision-making. This study further found that for an actor to be able to organize an effort in this way, it would require high level of convening power and autonomy. The UN secretary-General gained autonomy on climate change over several decades, and among IOs, this office stands unique in its ability to act as choreographer in such an effort.

This paper then identified four generalizable features of the climate problem that made it conducive to collective choreography: (1) there is dispersed control over causes of the problem and over possible solutions; (2) economic and social benefits to non-state actors for engaging in voluntary cooperation on climate change exist or can be made to exist; (3) barriers to cooperation exist in the form of high transaction costs, risks and limited trust; and (4) the problem must be mature enough that multilateral solutions have been attempted but without success thus far. As such, this paper provides a basis for further investigation into the potential to apply collective choreography to other global public goods.

As instruments in service of “We the peoples”, IOs are most true to their founding ideals when engaging in the collective choreography this study described. If the value of collective choreography can be demonstrated in other areas that demand cooperation, and if this mode of working is adequately nurtured, then the transformative value of IOs for the peoples of the world may begin to be realized. In a zeitgeist marked by rapidly rising nationalism and retreat from international cooperation, such a role seems not an elective, but a necessity, if we are to achieve our collective aim of “better standards of life in larger freedom.”²⁹

²⁹ United Nations, ‘Charter of the United Nations’.

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